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Swiss Alps with kids

Being a mountain girl myself I could not wait to lace up my hiking boots and wander upwards! Only problem was I had a three and a half year old at the time...

Turns out that hiking with kids in Switzerland is a 'must do' and a lot of villages have created special kids hiking trails, which are great fun for the whole family. Everywhere in Switzerland are hiking trails - all are well marked with yellow "Wanderweg" signs.

Our little Sascha was besotted with his "Schellenursli" book and since I had never been to the Engadin I thought this was the perfect opportunity to go hiking in Graubünden. High in the Alps, set amongst the fairy-tale landscape of the Lower Engadin, is Guarda - the village setting of the "Schellenursli" story. Each year, to this day, they celebrate Chalandamarz - an ancient tradition where cowbells are rung to drive away the winter snows.

I didn't expect to find such an amazing and picturesque village when we travelled to Guarda - it fascinates visitors with its unique and stunning 'sgraffito'-decorated houses and narrow streets.



The kids trail starts at 1653m above sea level, is 6km long and takes between 2-4 hours. You walk from one activity to the next, all based on the individual pages of the book. So for example when Ursli had to fetch water, you need to do the same: Scoop water out of a small lake and carry it across your shoulders - not as easy as it looks without spilling it - and definitely an interesting experience! There are bells along the way you can ring and you need to find the right key to open the lock at the hut. My boys were so entertained they loved the hike and wanted to go up more and more mountains - especially once they discovered cable cars and funiculars, which we don't have here in New Zealand!

Heidi - a world-renowned star in Maienfeld

On the way to Graubünden we stopped over in Maienfeld to do the "Heidi Trail". The best loved story in Switzerland: Little Heidi comes to the mountains to live with her grandfather. She runs through alpine meadows with the goats, helps her friend Klara to walk again and brings joy and love to her grandfather.

Since Heidi was sleeping on straw, we thought we would do the same! "Schlafen-auf-Stroh" (sleeping on hay) is a very popular thing to do anywhere in Switzerland and a really cool experience to have with your kids! You will stay on a farm -



which in itself is exciting for littlies - and you will sleep in a barn on actual "stroh" or hay (with a sheet and sleeping bag if you wish). The barns are of course fitted out accordingly with facilities. For more information look up: www.agrotourismus.ch or www.schlaf-im-stroh.ch

The Heidi trail will lead you through the idyllic landscape of Maienfeld, past loads of goat herds, the Johanna Spyri Museum and then finally up the mountain to grandfather's hut. The hike is called 'Heidi's Adventure Trail' leading up to Heidi's alp with 12 stands along the way that tell the story of the internationally famous Swiss book. There's no electricity at the hut but in summer they run a small restaurant there where you can buy a refreshing drink that is cooled in the water fountain next to the hut. Overall, our little adventure in Maienfeld showed my kids another angle of the 'Heidiworld' and they are still talking about it now!

Kien Zappel Rundweg

Even my little village Kiental in the Bernese Oberland has a kids hiking trail! Like most kids' hiking trails, this one is also based on an actual children's book „Dr Zouberwicht Kien Zappu“ written



by Barbara Burren and the trail has especially been created for pre-school kids.

Take the chair lift up to Ramslauenen and get a form at the restaurant for the kids to stamp along the way. It is only about 1 hour of hiking with lots of information boards along the way where kids stamp their form. Along this trail you will discover all sorts of interesting facts about the life and habits of the "Gugger" (cuckoo) and other species of birds, about the purpose of the no-hunting area and insights into the animals who live in these forests.

Once you're finished with the walk you can return the completed card and every child gets a gift. My kids each received a small crystal that they could choose themselves and needless to say, they were absolutely thrilled with their new treasure!

Sgraffiti belongs to the Engadin just like "Schellenursli"

While the building structure itself is highly distinctive, the most unusual and noteworthy element of the Engadin style is sgraffito. This is a kind of decoration of the exterior walls of a building; it consists of carving through a newly applied layer of exterior white plaster to reveal the grey plaster underneath, making designs.

Sgraffito on walls has been used in Europe since classical times. In combination with ornamental decoration these techniques formed an alternative to the prevailing painting of walls. Of late there has been an unmistakable growing interest in this old technique. The technical procedure is relatively simple, and the procedures are similar to the painting of frescoes.

Sgraffito played a significant role during the years of the Renaissance in Italy, with two of Raphael's workshop artists, Polidoro da Caravaggio and his partner Maturino da Firenze, among the leading specialists, painting palace facades in Rome and other cities. Most of their work has now weathered away. During the 16th century the technique was brought to Germany by the master builders of the Renaissance and taken up with enthusiasm. In Germany the technique is most predominant in Bavaria.

Another use of sgraffito is seen in its simplified painting technique. One coat of paint is left to dry on a canvas or sheet of paper. Another coat of a different colour is painted on top of the first layer. The artist then uses a palette knife or oil stick to scratch out a design, leaving behind an image in the colour of the first coat of paint. This can also be achieved by using oil pastels for the first layer and black ink for the top layer.

Tanja Latham-Zurbrugg



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