Dear Friends of Meredith Travel,

I think that most of you know how we feel about Italy—ALL of Italy! So, it is no surprise that Italy is once again included in our Meredith Travel plans. However, its neighbor to the north, Switzerland, also has undeniable but very different charms—snowcapped Alps, for example, and wild flowers and cows with bells!

The tour will begin on Friday, June 15, 2018, with an overnight flight to Zurich. Since we firmly believe that the best way to adjust to a major time zone change is to do something so interesting that you forget you're tired, we will have a cruise on Lake Zurich. After relaxing onboard as our ship glides past scenic villages, mountain vineyards and craggy, snow-capped peaks, we disembark for a leisurely visit to two prominent Zurich landmarks—the Fraumunster and the Grossmunster. These contrasting churches have interesting architecture and history, which you'll learn on our guided tours through Switzerland’s immaculate and beautiful financial center. A welcome dinner completes our day.

On Sunday you may choose to start the morning gently with a late breakfast and/or a visit the museum of your choice—perhaps the Landesmuseum for cultural history or the Kunsthhaus, which houses an amazing collection of modern art. And there is always the pleasure of strolling down the Bahnhofstrasse! Following lunch, the group will depart for Lucerne in our private motor coach. Our drives through the beautiful Swiss countryside are a quite special part of this trip. The day ends with a folkloric dinner party that includes traditional alpenhorn and accordion music, folk dances, fondue, and toasting!

A Monday morning walking tour through the picturesque streets of Lucerne will include stops at the Lion Monument, dedicated to the Swiss Guards who died during the French Revolution while protecting the French Royal Family, and the picturesque Old Town. We will cross the Reuss River on the Kapellbrucke, a covered bridge that angles from one riverbank to the other—an art work itself. After lunch in one of Lucerne’s characterful restaurants, you might choose to venture up to the top of Mt Pilatus or browse among the interesting Old Town shops, or walk the medieval wall that encircles the city.

Tuesday will begin a bit earlier so that we can visit Bern, the city for which North Carolina’s New Bern was named when it was founded in the 18th century. After exploring Old Town Bern, with its giant animated clock and historic Bear Park, we leave the city behind for an excursion to the Levaux Vineyards Terrace region, a UNESCO World Heritage site, where we will have a wine tasting overlooking Lake Geneva. The night will be spent in Montreux, a resort city famous for its Belle Epoque buildings, Mediterranean micro-climate, and statue of Freddie Mercury. (Yes, THAT Freddie Mercury of Bohemian Rhapsody and Queen!) We should all feel like jet-setters at our group dinner Monday night.

Wednesday may be the most diverse day yet as we begin with a short cruise on Lake Geneva to a tiny islet to tour Chillon Castle, inspiration for Byron’s famed poem about a prisoner held there. While it may look like something from a fairy tale, it was actually constructed as a 9th century fortress built to guard the overland trade route to Italy. After cruising back to land, our motor coach will take us to a mountain train so that we can reach our destination for the night. Up the steep slopes we’ll go to the chalets of Zermatt, where the Matterhorn towers above us.
On Thursday we’ll travel further south to the border of Switzerland and Italy. After a stop for lunch in classy Lugano—(How many watch shops and banks can a Swiss city have? Here’s your chance to do some research!)—we cross into Italy and the Lake Como region. The best way to get to our destination for the night, Varenna, is by ferry, passing the stunning villas that are scattered lakeside. Varenna is a pastel beauty of a village. We believe you will find it and our hotel as charming as did John Rose’s grandparents when they left chilly England behind to summer here in sunny Italy in the 19th century.

Friday will bring the opportunity to take a closer look at the tantalizing villas and villages of Lake Como as we spend the day cruising from Varenna to the villages Bellagio and Menaggio, with special stops to view elaborate gardens at villas along the way.

While we may be somewhat sad to leave on Saturday morning, that feeling will quickly be replaced by excitement as we take the Bernina Express through the Alps to St. Moritz. “Spectacular” is the only adjective for this train ride. From St. Moritz our coach driver will collect us to drive on to Samedan, where we will spend two nights. Samedan also has pastel buildings, but these are traditional Swiss architecture, very different from the Mediterranean villas of Lake Como. However, what will remain a constant is that there will be more “spectacular” mountain scenery as a backdrop to this ski village that is something of a best kept European secret.

One couldn’t just pass through St. Moritz without seeing more of it, so on Sunday we’ll take a short excursion back to this site of two Winter Olympic Games, and for over a century a winter resort destination for European royalty. After a morning spent at leisure exploring the town, it’s on to the Roseg Valley for a horse-drawn carriage ride through pristine Alpine forests, complete with a glacier in the distance.

We will make the most of Monday, our last day of touring, by taking a slight detour from Switzerland across the border into the tiny Principality of Liechtenstein. Liechtenstein’s boundaries contain only 62 square miles, or about 40% of the area within the city limits of Raleigh! After a short travel break in the capital city, Vaduz, we continue our beautiful journey. The city of Zurich is the destination for our final night and farewell dinner—and a last chance for fondue.

Following breakfast—and a sad farewell to Bircher muesli!*—a group transfer will take our travel friends to the airport for departure to the U.S. (*Join us on the tour to try it!)

As always, Denise Parker (919-760-8051, dpparker@meredith.edu) will be happy to add you to the list of people who are interested in going or to take your deposit if you are already certain you would like to join the tour.

Our best wishes to all of you for safe travels—wherever you choose to go.

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