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Short vacation in the Lower Engadine at Switzerland's smallest five star hotel



Stay & dine in style at In Lain Hotel Cadonau in Brail

After several stays in the Upper Engadine in Switzerland's eastern Alps it called my husband and me to the Lower Engadine. While it is often just seen as an extension of the much better known Upper Engadine with St. Moritz's luxury culture, this remote valley certainly has its (rugged) charm. And since a couple of years, you find here also a luxury retreat, the boutique In Lain Hotel Cadonau. Here you can stay and dine in style. That is because there is also a one-star Michelin restaurant on site.

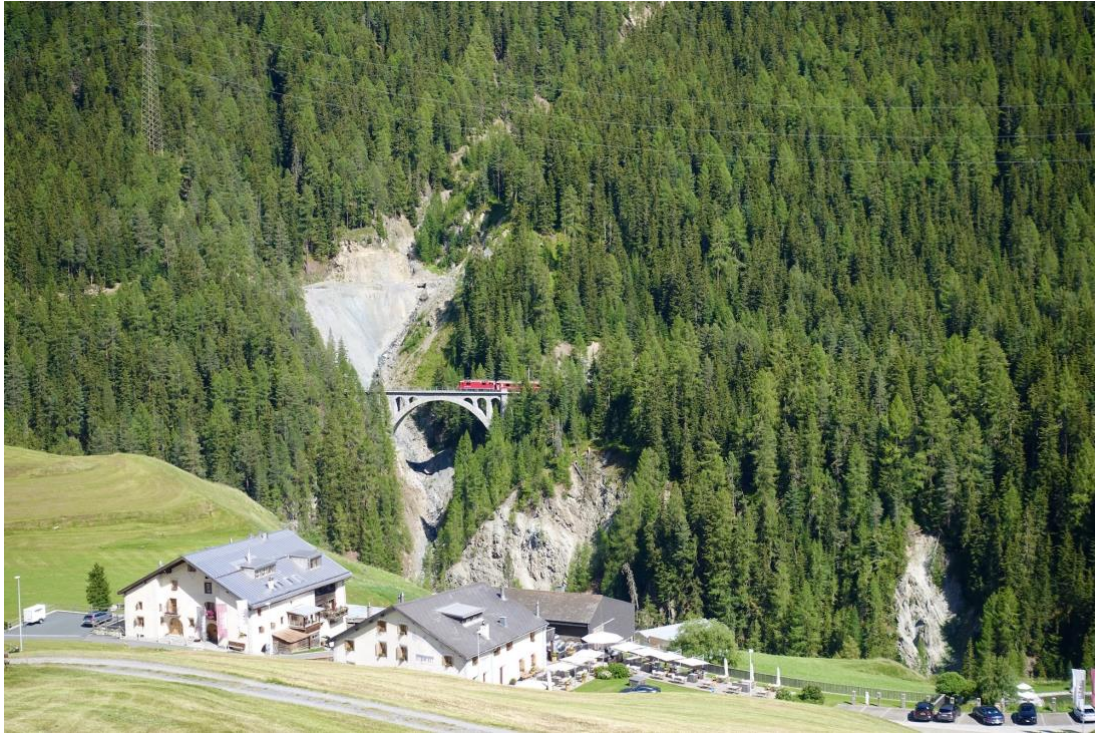
Staying at In Lain Hotel Cadonau

As mentioned, it is a 5 star hotel, and this the smallest in Switzerland, with 14 rooms only. It is a very boutique accommodation indeed.

Location

As you have already learnt, the hotel is located in Brail, in the Lower Engadine in the eastern Swiss Alps. It is a tiny village, a hamlet of Zernez, with 100 inhabitants and at

an elevation of 1,635 m/5,364 ft. You can reach it from Zurich city in a two and half hour drive. By train, you need about a quarter of an hour longer.



In Lain Hotel Cadonau is directly situated on the busy road that comes from St. Moritz and leads all the way to Scuol. From the area's capital is not that far to the Austrian border. Despite its not really remote location, you are not at all disturbed by the road. At least if you opt for a room in the hotel's suite wing - which I strongly advise to do - with views of mountains of the nearby Swiss National Park.

Facilities

I will tell you all about dining in the separate paragraph. Here only so much about this topic: it is a treat for food lovers!

The hotel is comprised of two buildings, a historic one and a modern annexe. The former is more than 400 years old and a wonderful example of a typical Engadine house with sgraffito designs.



It is home of the traditional restaurant Stuevetta complete with a sun terrace, the reception, the kitchen, the bar and 3 guest rooms. In the annexe, opened end of 2011, there is the gourmet restaurant Vivanda and 11 suites.



It is a luxury hotel, albeit a small one, so do not expect to find all the amenities of a bigger resort of this class, such as a comprehensive wellness and fitness opportunities. However, there are some unusual features on offer here. On the extensive grounds in front of the suite extension hotel guests can make use of a

lovely swimming pond with water from the hotel's own natural spring. Be prepared, it is not big in size and the water is freezing. When we were here at the beginning of July it was about 16 degrees Celsius/60 degrees Fahrenheit.



Furthermore, there is a bathing tub, heated to 38 degrees Celsius/100 degrees Fahrenheit with stone pine wood. This is supposed to have an energetic and relaxing effect. A few steps away, there is a sauna hut, completely made of pine wood, and maybe you benefit from the wood's distinctive scent while sweating in here. Be advised that you have to book well in advance for both.

Here I have to make a short digression. Maybe you noticed that I mentioned stone pine wood twice in the last lines. This not without reason. This kind of wood is omnipresent in the In Lain Hotel and this because of the fact that the owner's brother is in the carpentry business. The hotel is used as a showpiece of his work. And as the stone pine is said to be "the Queen of the Alps", most of it is made with this wood. Not without reason the hotel is called "In Lain" which means "Out of Wood" in Romansh, the local language.

Rooms/Pricing

While the original house has 3 rooms (2 family rooms and one Engadine junior suite), the new wing is home to 11 suites. From which one is a spa suite, 5 are terrace suites and 5 garden suites.

My husband and I opted for a garden suite, which - as the name says - has direct access to the hotel grounds with the swimming pond, the bathing tub and the garden sauna. For me it is the best choice on site as these rooms are - in addition to the

garden access - larger than the terrace suites. The latter are located a floor higher, yet also recommended to book.

It goes without saying that the garden suite is full of pine stone, from the furniture to the box with Kleenex tissues. It provides ample space (65 sqm) with a nice living room, a separated bedroom, a spacious walk-in closet, a large bathroom clad in a mix of stone and wood, and all this in a minimalistic design. And there is a generous terrace with a table and two sunloungers.



My husband and I were really happy with our accommodation! Prices seem okay for Swiss standards. It is a luxury (five star) hotel, and this comes with corresponding rates (including breakfast). The least expensive room (Family Room) costs at least 410 SFR/US\$ per night. The top room (Spa Suite) amounts to a minimum of 910 SFR/US\$ for an overnight stay. The rate for our Garden Suite was 710 SFR/US\$ which I found adequate in view of the value we got out of it (65 sqm, separate coffee and tea machine, daily petit-fours etc.).

Ambiance/staff

You feel here like being in the Swiss mountains, but there is not a trace of Alpine kitsch, to my great relief! Especially the premises in the new wing are in a straightforward design including the gourmet restaurant and the bar. The only space which is a bit playful is the traditional restaurant in the original Engadine house. Yet it genuinely fits here.

There is a relaxed, personal ambiance at In Lain Hotel. It is a family business, and you notice it well. The owners, Dario and Tamara Cadonau, are very present, always super friendly and extremely accommodative. And the same is true for the rest of the staff. Every morning when we entered the reception area, the staff member who was in charge accompanied us to the breakfast room, a nice touch!

After all the information about staying at the In Lain Hotel Cadonau, now to one of the main reasons we ended up here, the culinary aspect.

Dining at In Lain Hotel Cadonau

Despite being a small hotel, Inn Lain Hotel has three different restaurants plus a bar! A drawback might be that it is not possible to book a half board arrangement, which is quite common in Switzerland.

The chef at the kitchen is the owner himself, Dario Cadonau. He has trained under famous chefs just as Philip Rochat in Crissier in Switzerland's west or Harald Wohlfahrt in Tonbach in Germany's south, both awarded three stars Michelin. For his cooking he received one Michelin star and 17 Gault Millau points.

A nice little detail, you can taste the chef's cuisine also in the city of Zurich. Here, his executive chef, Thomas Bissegger, is at work at 1904 DESIGNED BY LAGONDA (awarded one Michelin star and 16 Gault Millau points).

Gourmet restaurant Vivanda

First to the signature restaurant, the one-star Michelin Vivanda.



On our short vacation at the In Lain Hotel Cadonau, we had one dinner here.

The restaurant's setting and interior are lovely. It is a contemporary dream of Alpine stone pine wood complete with a view of the mountains at the Swiss National Park. My husband and I had a great table at the window and marveled the beautiful decor. However, the tables do not allow much space for your legs, which is a bit inconvenient because we spent four and half hours here!

We had an eight-course surprise dinner. Not that we had any choice, no menu card was offered and no prices were mentioned. When we ordered Champagne with the friendly waiter, she just brought us one without giving us a selection. Of course, it was a good one albeit not exactly inexpensive. When we later explicitly asked about the menu and the number of courses, we were told that the kitchen had planned in eight courses for us. This despite the fact that you can pre-book a number of "fewer course options" when booking online along with your guest room.

Never mind the somewhat confusing start, we enjoyed our dinner at Restaurant Vivanda. After four snacks we got a terrific amuse bouche, it was something creamy with poularde and cauliflower, I do not know it exactly. In fact, we did not get any written food information after the meal as it is quite common in comparable establishments.



The first course was my favorite, goose liver coated with passionfruit and mango jelly, delicious! Then it went on with a take on bouillabaisse. Next was trout fillet with avocado peppermint cream.



The veggie course that followed, was not one of the most appealing ones, at least to me. If I remember correctly, it was a variation of onion accompanied by chive sorbet. But of course this is a matter of taste ... The main course, summer deer with potatoes Anna, was very good, although I found the potatoes a bit bland.

A highlight was the visit to the cheese cellar where they explained all the varieties to us and where we could make our choice. And the cheese was a real treat complete with a "wood tower" full of condiments to accompany the feast!



The desserts were exquisite. A combination of salvia ice cream and white chocolate was first, followed by a variation comprised of mascarpone cream, strawberries and caramelized milk skin. And the petit fours were outstanding indeed!

Service was amiable and informative yet at times not immaculate and a bit slow, especially towards the end. An idea to add to the speed of the whole thing might be to serve the snacks not one after the other. Four and a half hours sitting at the table is way too long!

If you wonder about the costs of our evening at Restaurant Vivanda, we had to dig deep into our pockets. The total amounted to 820 SFR/US\$ for the two of us. The menu was 250 SFR/US\$ per person and we also went for the wine pairing, which was excellent. This is in my opinion price wise a bit over the top. While the cuisine is exceptional and noteworthy, I do not think that a one-star Michelin award justifies such a high price tag. We had dinners at two- and three star Michelin chefs in Switzerland that cost less! Having said that I would eat here again but I would probably book the five-course dinner online along with my guest room (at 190 SFR/US\$).

Traditional yet contemporary La Stuevetta

Second, there is the main restaurant with traditional yet modernized food, Stuevetta. You can either eat in the original Engadine house with its typical interiors



or, weather permitting, on the nice sun terrace. In terms of food, there is a three to five course menu available and an a la carte menu. My husband and I had dinner here on three nights and were delighted by what we got, both in quality and refinement.

One night we opted for four courses of the menu and were raving about the smoked salmon roulade with salad, the asparagus cream soup with a scallop skewer, the Engadine veal steak on potato pea cream and morel pea ragout as well as the dessert of our choice, champagne sabayon on marinated berries and champagne cream sorbet.



Another two nights, we chose three dishes each from the a la carte menu and the culinary experience was just as good, everything was masterly prepared and full of taste, be it the morel ravioli with asparagus, the catch of the day, monk fish with spinach and potato puree, or the dessert, a heavenly yogurt, honey and hazelnut variation.



Service was kind and attentive, the ambiance relaxed and joyful.

As far as the pricing is concerned, the multi-course menu is reasonably calculated and the portion sizes are generous. A bit of a pity is the fact, that the menu remained unchanged for the whole of our stay. And when I checked a month later, it was still the same. When it comes to the a la carte menu, I found that the prices of the starters and the pasta/risotto dishes are a tad on the high side. If you decide on potato gnocchi with spinach, pine nuts and Parmesan chips as a main course, it is going to cost you 48 SFR/US\$!

The breakfast is served in here, as well. You get a table where your personalized newsletter awaits you, nice! They bring you an etagere with breakfast items. In addition, you can order egg dishes and help yourself from a small yet refined buffet.

The only thing I did not like was the fact that the bread was only made in house the first day of our stay. Later on, there was only a fairly mediocre bread selection (not crunchy at all) stemming probably from a local bakery.

Cheese dairy restaurant

And last, you find here also a small rustic eatery with cheese-centric specialties, just as fondue, raclette yet also chinese fondue and a variety of typical Swiss dishes.



In wintertime, there is also a cheese-maker present whom you can witness practicing his craft. When my husband and I stayed here at the beginning of July, it was not possible to have dinner here. So I can unfortunately not comment on how it is to dine here.

Overall

To my knowledge, the In Lain Hotel Cadonau in Brail at the border to the Upper Engadine is the one and only five star lodging in the Lower Engadine. Here, in Switzerland's easternmost corner, you get a true feeling of rustic Alpine charm. Yet in this hotel, you can do it in style, everything is top notch here, be it for the superb rooms in the newer wing or the gastronomy, which is a big deal. It is luxury but not pretentious. There are some imperfections, too. But if you know how to handle possible pitfalls - risk of overspending -, then you as demanding traveler will most probably have a great time here.

Date of stay: July 2020

The post Short vacation in the Lower Engadine at Switzerland's smallest five-star hotel first appeared on www.swisstraveler.net

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