My First Time in a Live Dream

A travelogue set in Switzerland

There are places you visit, and then there are places that softly steal a part of you without asking — Switzerland was the latter. I had seen it in glossy travel magazines, snow globes, and YouTube videos, but nothing prepared me for the quiet magic that met us the moment we crossed into the Swiss Alps from Germany. It was early January, and the snow still clung stubbornly to the mountaintops, like a child refusing to let go of a warm blanket. The train swerved gently along the curves of the Alps, and I felt like I was entering a living fairytale.

We arrived in Basel, where cobbled streets met quiet riverbanks and every corner looked like it had a story to whisper. Our apartment was cozy and warm, almost suspiciously perfect. After hours of travelling, we crashed for a bit before hunger woke us up with a growl. Our first meal was at a small Italian restaurant tucked into one of Basel's quiet alleys. There, we ate pizza topped with fresh basil leaves, as if the Swiss had secretly borrowed Italy's kitchen and made it their own. We joked that the basil in Basel was destined to taste better, and I stand by it.

Later that evening, we made our way to the Tinguely Museum, dedicated to Jean Tinguely's wild and wonderful kinetic art. Inside, metal parts danced and clanked in beautiful chaos, machines that didn't really *do* anything practical but made us laugh and think. There were levers to pull, wheels to turn, and moving sculptures that seemed to have personalities of their own. It was part science fiction, part childlike fantasy, and all wonderfully weird. My brother and I spent an embarrassing amount of time pressing buttons just to see what moved next. At one point, a machine started sketching on its own and we were convinced it was trying to make a portrait of us. Spoiler alert: it looked more like a confused spaghetti monster.

But the real time travel began the next day at the Basler Papiermühle — a museum dedicated to the ancient art of papermaking. This wasn't just a museum, it was like stepping into a centuries-old printing press with your sleeves rolled up. We made paper with our bare hands, squishing and pressing wet pulp through sieves like medieval apprentices. The air smelled faintly of wood and ink and mystery. We each had our names printed using old printing blocks. The clank of the machine was oddly satisfying, like an echo from the past stamping our names into time.

We dipped quills into ink and tried writing like 16th-century poets though my attempts looked more like confused doodles. Still, we made stamps, sealed imaginary letters, and laughed at how serious we looked doing it all. We dipped paper in vats, stamped wax seals, and even wrote with actual feathers. Yes, quills. Harry Potter-style. Even my brother, the most pretentiously "nonchalant" of us all, got caught up in the charm and tried embossing a letter. He said it was for "archival purposes," which we all know means he was just having fun.

On the next morning, we set out for one of Basel's most iconic sites – the Basler Münster, a towering red sandstone cathedral with twin spires that seemed to touch the clouds. As we climbed the stone steps up to the terrace, the city slowly unfolded below us. Inside, the air was still and sacred. Sunlight filtered through stained glass windows, casting soft rainbows across the ancient floors. I imagined the generations of footsteps that had passed through here, each carrying a prayer, a hope, a heartbreak. My brother tiptoed ahead while my dad pointed out architectural details like he'd been secretly moonlighting as a Gothic historian. I sat on a wooden bench and closed my eyes for a moment, trying to bottle up the peace I felt. The silence wasn't empty rather it was filled with memory.

Then came the shopping. We wandered through the city, browsing souvenir stalls and getting hopelessly distracted at Crush, a shop that seemed to specialize in making soap smell like heaven. For reasons even we don't fully understand, me and my brother spent an obnoxiously long time there sniffing bath bombs, testing hand creams, and arguing over which soap smelled more like strawberries and which one like regret. My mother, the shopping queen, naturally, left with a bag of soaps.

By evening, we were curled up in our apartment watching 'Fukrey', a Hindi comedy movie that felt like home. Pasta bowls in hand, laughter bouncing off the walls. It was simple and silly and somehow, one of my favorite moments.

And then… came the day I had been secretly counting down to – my birthday, the 4th of January.

I woke up to a pile of warm blankets, the morning light lazily creeping through the curtains, and a chorus of chaos. My father and brother were standing beside my bed, singing Happy Birthday in the most outrageously off-key voices you can imagine. My mother joined in too, but only after peppering my face with a dozen kisses. We were all tangled up in hugs and laughter. No perfect vocal harmony could have matched the joy of that moment.

We had a hearty breakfast and then set off for a day that turned out to be my favorite. First stop: the Natural History Museum of Basel, a treasure trove of fossils, dinosaur bones, and rooms filled with creatures I had only read about. There was a massive mammoth skeleton that made my brother and me look like ants. We walked through the halls, wide-eyed and trying not to scream every time a stuffed animal looked too lifelike.

From there, we made our way to the Toy Worlds Museum Basel. Now, don't let the name fool you – this place was *gigantic*. Dollhouses, toy trains, miniature cities, and rows upon rows of carefully preserved toys from every era. My brother and I turned into children again, racing each other to see who could find the oldest toy on display. It was whimsical, slightly eerie, and completely delightful.

Later that afternoon, we went to Claire's, where I picked out my birthday present—a unicorn keychain and a tiny pocket diary that I still have with me, tucked safely away in a

drawer. My brother bought a Swiss pocket knife, because of course he did. He claimed it was "for survival," even though the wildest place we visited was a bath soap shop.

Lunch was an adventure of its own. We chose an Asian restaurant and ordered enough food to feed a small army. My brother and I took it upon ourselves to master the art of eating fried rice with chopsticks. Key word: *tried*. My dad went for sushi and my mom picked dumplings, both of which disappeared quicker than the waiter could blink.

After a late lunch, we strolled along a quiet riverside, the sky painted in shades of gold and pink as the sun slowly dipped behind the hills. My mom gathered more souvenirs, quietly tucking them into her bag like she was collecting little pieces of joy.

We wandered the countryside walking along a river for a while past old stone bridges, graffiti covered walls, and locals walking their dogs or pushing strollers, all of whom smiled at us like we were part of something timeless. At one point, we found a tiny wooden bench overlooking the river, and even though the view wasn't particularly famous or touristy, we sat down like it was the grandest spot in all of Basel.

There were no camera clicks, no rush to capture it. Just shared warmth, silent smiles, and the quiet understanding that this trip had given us more than just a vacation. It was family, stillness, growing up, and holding on.

As the sky deepened into indigo, we slowly made our way back to our apartment. The lights in the city blinked to life one by one, like little stars coming down to earth just for us. As if, blinking to stop the tears that echoed a silent goodbye from this part of the world.

On our final morning, I stood on the balcony of our apartment, looking out at a city that had somehow become a part of us in just four days. There was fog in the air and a kind of heaviness in our silence. None of us said it aloud, but we all felt it — the ache of goodbye.

The Alps shimmered faintly in the distance, the church bells rang somewhere below, and the trams moved steadily like time itself…relentless, gentle, moving on.

And as we boarded our train back, I looked once more at the snow-draped Alps in the distance and whispered a quiet promise - I'll be back. Maybe older, maybe different, but I'll return. Because you never really leave a place like Switzerland.

It stays with you because remember…there are places you visit, and then there are places that softly steal a part of you without asking — and in my story Switzerland was definitely the latter.