

FROM CHATEAU D'OEX TO GSTAAD



The region of Pays-d'Enhaut is one of my favorite areas of Switzerland located in the lower alpine region of the canton of Vaud. The main villages are Rossinière, Chateau d'Oex and Rougemont, with Gstaad just a few kilometers further up the road. The broad valley is bisected by the river Sarine – a fast-flowing shallow river where often Dippers can be spotted¹. It is the Swiss cradle of the pretty paper cut-out pictures depicting domestic scenes. The art is still actively practiced today and sold in local shops for high prices which is not surprising if you understand the pain-staking work that goes into each piece.

The train journey there is spectacular and involves taking one of Switzerland's most scenic trains - the Golden Pass Express that runs between Montreux and Zweisimmen. The train has huge panoramic windows that reveal the lake in all its splendour as you leave Montreux and go up the mountain. It runs through many tunnels and dramatic mountain scenes and finally across lush green meadows with traditional wooden chalets as you get into the Pays d'Enhaut.

The first village in the valley you come to is Rossinière, Here you can find the largest wooden chalet in Switzerland which has 5 floors, 113 windows and numerous painted inscriptions on its facade. The painter Balthus lived there until his death and the chalet is still owned by his family. Sadly it cannot be visited and you might like to travel on to the more interesting villages of Chateau d'Oex or Rougemont.



The principal village of the Pays d'Enhaut, Château-d'Oex, is also the administrative center for the valley. It has a pretty main street with old chalets, several decent restaurants and a museum which shows how people lived in the olden days with some fascinating and beautiful

¹ A Dipper is a fairly rare small black white-breasted bird that lives in clear fast-flowing shallow rivers.

examples of paper cut-out pictures. <http://www.musee-chateau-doex.ch/en/>. The village is most famous for its hot-air balloon festival that draws participants from all over the world. This takes place in late January and is a feast of colour and excitement. If you are not there for the festival, you can nevertheless take sightseeing flights in a hot-air balloon which are available all year and a very fine way to see the valley and the surrounding alps. <http://www.ballonchateaudoex.ch/en.html>



Over the years many famous people kept residences in the Pays d'Enhaut including Roger Moore, Peter Ustinov and Graham Greene. The Dutch painter M.C. Escher lived with his family in Chateau d'Oex for two years. Furthermore the actor David Niven also had a chalet in the village and died there in 1983. He is buried in the local cemetery.

The next village on your route, Rougemont, is the cradle of paper cut-outs. The village, which is authentic with many pretty chalets, has a walking circuit of about an hour with panels depicting the

paper cut-out artist Louis Saugy who lived and worked here. Each panel provides an historical insight into village life and even though the descriptions are in French, the tourist office where the circuit starts, has English translations. The office is open daily (closed from 12 – 14h) and the staff are helpful and informative. <https://www.chateau-doex.ch/en/P10038/tourist-office-of-rougemont?group=516>. There are again several restaurants and when we were there, we had an excellent lunch in the Hotel Valrose just next to the railway station. <https://www.hotelvalrose.ch/en/restaurant>.

Saanen is the next village after Rougemont and then of course there is Gstaad with its chic boutiques, pretty chalets, upmarket hotels and gourmet restaurants. The main street is car free and very pretty to walk down. Do stop at the famous Early Beck Bakery/Tearoom for a hot chocolate or coffee and a cake.

As far as sports are concerned, in winter the ski-slopes are long and wide albeit at lower altitude. Walking paths are everywhere and if you take the train as far as Gstaad, you could walk back to Chateau d'Oex along the River Sarine in about 4 hours and especially in summer it would make a lovely easy shaded walk.