



# Graubünden

POP 193,920 / AREA 7106 SQ KM / LANGUAGES GERMAN, ROMANSCHE, ITALIAN

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## Why Go?

Ask locals what it is that makes their canton special and they'll wax lyrical about how, well, wild it is. In a country blessed with supermodel looks, Graubünden is all about raw natural beauty. Whether it's wind-battered plateaux in Engadine where clouds roll over big-shouldered mountains, the Rhine gouging out knife-edge ravines near Flims, or the brooding Alpine grandeur of the Swiss National Park, this wonderfully remote region begs outdoor escapades.

While you've probably heard about Davos' sensational downhill skiing, St Moritz's glamour and the tales of Heidi (fictionally born here), vast swaths of Graubünden remain little known and ripe for exploring. Strike into the Alps on foot or follow the lonesome passes that corkscrew high into the mountains and chances are you will be alone in exhilarating landscapes, where only the odd marmot or chamois and your own little gasps of wonder break the silence.

## When to Go

- ➔ Graubünden's slopes buzz with skiers from mid-December to Easter. Cross-country pros swish across to Davos for the FIS Cross-Country World Cup in December, while upper-crust St Moritz attracts a discerning crowd at January's Snow Polo World Cup.
- ➔ Summer cranks up the craziness: see men do battle with their beards with the Internationales Alpenbarttreffen in Chur and with their bulk *Schwigen* (Alpine wrestling) with Sertig Schwinget in Davos in August.
- ➔ Many resorts hibernate from May to mid-June and October to November. If you do rock up then, you might bag a good deal and some surprisingly nice weather.

## History

The canton's openness to all comers today is a far cry from its inward-looking, diffident past. Throughout the centuries, the people of this rugged area lived largely in isolated, rural pockets, mistrustful of outsiders and, aided by the near impregnable mountain terrain, able to resist most would-be conquerors.

In medieval times the region was known as Rhaetia, and was loosely bound by an association of three leagues (Drei Bünde). The modern name for the canton derives from the Grauer Bund (Grey League). Graubünden joined the Swiss Confederation in 1803.

However, much more important was the year 1864, when a hotel owner in St Moritz invited summer guests to stay for the winter – for free. In this way, winter tourism in Graubünden, and later all of Switzerland, was launched.

## Information

**Graubünden Ferien** (☎ 081 254 24 24; <http://en.graubuenden.ch>; Alexanderstrasse 24; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri) Chur, the capital, houses the cantonal tourist office, Graubünden Ferien, located in the building marked 'Publicitas', 200m east of the train station.

## Getting There & Around

Three main passes lead from northern and western Graubünden into the southeast Engadine region: Julier (open year-round), Albula (summer only) and Flüela (year-round subject to weather). These approximately correspond to three exit points into Italy: Maloja, Bernina and Fuorn/Ofen (all open year-round). The Oberalp Pass west to Andermatt is closed in winter but, as at Albula, there's the option of taking the car-carrying train instead. In winter, carry snow chains or use winter tyres.

## CHUR

POP 34,087 / ELEV 585M

The Alps rise like an amphitheatre around Chur, Switzerland's oldest city, inhabited since 3000 BC. Linger more than an hour or two and you'll soon warm to the capital of Graubünden. After a stint in the mountains, its gallery showcasing Alberto Giacometti originals, arty boutiques, authentic restaurants and relaxed bars are a refreshing cultural tonic.

When the city was almost destroyed by fire in 1464, German-speaking artisans arrived to rebuild and, in the process, inadvertently suppressed the local lingo. So it was *abunansvair* Romansch and *Guten Tag* German.

## Sights & Activities

### ★ Altstadt

NEIGHBOURHOOD

(Old Town) Near the Plessur River, the **Ober-tor** marks the entrance to Chur's alley-woven Altstadt. Alongside the stout **Maltesertor** (once the munitions tower), and the **Senn-hofturm** (nowadays the city's prison), it's all that remains of the old defensive walls.

### ★ Martinskirche

CHURCH

(St Martin's Church; Kirchgasse 12) The city's most iconic landmark is Martinskirche with its distinctive spire and clock face. The 8th-century church was rebuilt in the late-Gothic style in 1491 and is dramatically lit by a trio of Augusto Giacometti stained-glass windows. St Martin presides over a burbling stone fountain in front of the church.

### Kathedrale St Maria

#### Himmelfahrt

CATHEDRAL

(Hof; ☎ 6am-7pm Mon & Wed-Sat, from 8am Tue, from 7am Sun) Chur's 12th-century cathedral conceals a late-1400s Jakob Russ high altar containing a splendid triptych.

### Rätisches Museum

MUSEUM

([www.raetischesmuseum.gr.ch](http://www.raetischesmuseum.gr.ch); Hofstrasse 1; adult/child Sfr6/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun; ♿) Housed in a baroque patrician residence, this museum spells out the canton's history in artefacts, with Bronze Age jewellery, Roman statuettes, weapons and agricultural tools, alongside displays on religion and power and politics. Children should ask for the museum key to discover the exhibition from a kid-friendly angle.

### Bündner Kunstmuseum

GALLERY

([www.buendner-kunstmuseum.ch](http://www.buendner-kunstmuseum.ch); Postplatz) This gallery in the neoclassical Villa Planta gives an insight into the artistic legacy of Graubünden-born Alberto Giacometti (1877-1947) and his talented contemporaries, including Giovanni Segantini and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. Chur-born Angelika Kaufmann's enigmatic *Self Portrait* (1780) is a standout.

The gallery is closed for renovation, expected to reopen in summer 2016. See the website for updates.

### Brambrüesch

CABLE CAR

(Kasernenstrasse 15; adult/child return Sfr25/5, bike park Sfr39/20; ☎ 8.45am-4.45pm mid-Jun-late Oct & mid-Dec-mid-Mar) This cable car whisks you to Brambrüesch at 1600m, where views reach deep into the surrounding Alps. In summer, the 13km round-trip hike to **Feldis** is superb, leading through wildflower-strewn heights, woods and