

Destination Switzerland

What giddy romance and glamour Zermatt, St Moritz, Davos and other glitterati-encrusted names evoke: from the intoxicated chink of multimillionaires in Verbier hobnobbing over Champagne cocktails poured in ice-carved flutes to the comforting jangle of the cows coming home to sgraffito-blazoned farmsteads in the Engadine, seduction is head-over-heels complete. Ride a little red train between peak and pine, soak in mountain spa water, snowshoe to your igloo, fall madly in love with painted bridges in Lucerne and know life in this snug, smug, truly ravishing enclave in Europe is good.

This is after all *Sonderfall Schweiz* (literally 'special case Switzerland') – a rare and refined breed, a privileged neutral country set apart from others, borne out by its 1874 constitution (p29) and confirmed by the country's neutrality during both world wars (p30). Despite moves towards greater international cooperation (such as finally ditching border controls for Schengen countries in December 2008) coupled with the gargantuan presence of global institutions in Geneva, much about modern-day Switzerland is idiosyncratic, insular, parochial and unique. Few countries promote 'direct democracy' through referenda and practise 'armed neutrality' with a trained militia that will never find itself face to face with an enemy (given its neutrality).

No paradise is invincible. The world financial crisis in late 2008 took victims in Switzerland in the shape of the country's largest bank which would have gone belly up without state bailout (p33). Then there was the rumpus in August 2008 over the bid by the far-right Swiss People's Party (SVP) to ban building new minarets for Muslim calls of prayer. The same far-right political party published anti-immigrant posters featuring three white sheep kicking one black sheep off that striking white cross of the Swiss flag (p38 and p256), and tried – and failed – to make it even harder for noncitizens to get a Swiss passport (p37). A violation of human rights and the Swiss constitution according to the government, the minaret matter, in true Swiss style, will be decided in a national referendum that is likely to take years to happen.

Reinventing the Alps is the hot topic at higher altitudes. With great success world-class architects are respectfully weaving futuristic apartments clad in larch-wood tiles (Sir Norman Foster in St Moritz) and spiralling hotel towers of ecological dimensions (Herzog & de Meuron in Davos) into Switzerland's quintessential Heidi-postcard landscape of traditional wooden chalets and timeless church spires. But most pressing is not so much how to be green, how to be ecological, how to burn clean energy – Swiss eco-angels have that sorted (p235). Rather, it is what must be done to keep ski resorts sustainable as the globe warms: experts say forget sure-thing snow below 1500m by 2050.

The answer for Andermatt (p262) in central Switzerland lies in a mammoth Sfr1.08 billion investment by Egyptian billionaire Samih Sawiris set to turn the sleepy village of 1350 inhabitants into a luxury megaresort of appeal year-round with its tropical pool, sandy beach and 18-hole golf course alongside traditional high-altitude skiing. A burning question is how much one of its 700-odd apartments will cost when it opens in 2014. As James Blunt, Sir Richard Branson and a rash of other celebrities, entrepreneurs and nouveaux-riches Russians already snap up the best properties on the market, Alpine real-estate prices are rocketing through the roof – and out of the reach of less glam pockets.

Bollywood tourists tottering up Titlis premonsoon (p184), Geneva scientists playing God with big-bang experiments (p41): this small, smart, secretive country is as eclectic as the extraordinary linguistic and cultural diversity on which it rests.

FAST FACTS

Population:	7.59 million
Non-Swiss nationals:	20.7% of total population
Area:	41,285 sq km
GDP:	Sfr480 billion (2007)
GDP per capita:	Sfr65,830 (2007)
GDP growth:	1.9%
Inflation:	2%
Unemployment rate:	2.4% (2007)
Average life expectancy:	77.9 (men), 83.7 (women)
Highest point:	Dufour-spitze (4634m)

Getting Started

Most know Switzerland as one of those historical, tried-and-tested luxury destinations that requires planning months in advance to snag a room (yes, any room) in one of its mythical grande-dame establishments. Less know that Swiss style can also say hell to opulence, fly by the seat of its pants in some circles and be up for grabs with very little or, depending on the season, no advance planning or booking to speak of.

While you won't get by on tuppence, travelling in Switzerland doesn't have to mean investing a small fortune. And the return – smooth, straightforward, famously reliable travel, generally well organised and free of bad surprises – is huge.

WHEN TO GO

Summer, meaning June to September, offers the most pleasant climate for outdoor activities (p229), obviously with the exception of exclusively winter sports. Indeed, some extreme pursuits such as canyoning are only offered at this time. Peak months are July and August when prices soar, accommodation gets fully booked and most sights are rammed with tourists. Predictably, you'll find better deals and less people in summer's shoulder months: April, May and October.

Bar the busy Easter break, spring is a beautiful time to explore the countryside. In Ticino, flowers blossom as early as March. Hikers planning to walk at high altitudes should be equipped for snow and ice well into June (and, in some tricky spots, all year). Mid-August to late October generally has fairly settled weather, and is a good period for hiking trips. For more on when to walk, see p58.

In Alpine resorts the busy winter season kicks off mid-December and moves into full swing from Christmas onwards, closing down again when the snows start to melt around mid-April. Between the summer and winter seasons, Alpine resorts close down (except where year-round glacier skiing is on offer) or, at best, go into frustrating snooze mode.

Then, of course, there is Switzerland's fabulous fiesta of festivals around which to plan a trip: it parties year-round, although Switzerland's renowned international music festivals happen in summer, as do some of those lesser-known, decidedly eclectic local festivals that best express the country's deep-rooted Alpine culture (p34). See p21 for more.

COSTS & MONEY

No denying it: Switzerland is pricey – Geneva and Zürich were rated the world's seventh and eighth most expensive cities in 2008. Compared to other European countries, travellers from North America and Australia will feel it particularly keenly, and even those from the UK and Scandinavia will notice the difference, despite it lessening in recent years. One very good piece of news is that petrol in Switzerland is cheaper than in neighbouring countries Austria, France, Germany and Italy.

Your biggest expenses while in Switzerland are likely to be long-distance public transport, accommodation and eating out. In the most modest hotels, expect to pay at least Sfr80/120 per single/double. A full meal with 500ml of house wine for two can easily cost Sfr50 or more per person.

But there are ways to keep costs down. Travel passes (p367) immediately yield substantial savings on trains, boats and buses; while camping, and kipping in barns (p353) or hostels translate as cheap(er) sleeps. Self-catering,

For climatic considerations and climate charts see p351.

HOW MUCH?

See also Lonely Planet Index, inside front cover.

Local newspaper Sfr2.50

Public-transport ticket Sfr2

10-minute taxi ride Sfr15

One-/six-day ski pass Sfr60/300

Half-/full-day bicycle hire Sfr25/35

100g Toblerone chocolate bar Sfr2.50

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Valid travel insurance (p354)
- Your ID card or passport and visa, if required (p358)
- Driving licence, car documents and car insurance (p364)
- Sunglasses and hat in both summer and winter – all that snow makes for sharp glare!
- If mountain bound, a head for heights and a sturdy set of hiking boots
- A sweet tooth and cheesy sense of taste (p42)
- Your party spirit and a thirst for something different (p21 & p34)

picnic lunches and skipping the alcohol with meals when dining out will keep your food budget under control. Likewise staying put in one place and taking the time to get beneath its skin means lower day-to-day living costs than if you flit fast, visiting lots of different places including big cities and major ski resorts. Other cent savers include restricting sightseeing to inexpensive sights (museum and gallery admission prices range from Sfr5 to Sfr10), and hiking if possible instead of taking cable cars: rarely covered by travel passes, count Sfr15 to Sfr30 for a short to medium ascent and Sfr80 to Sfr100 for a return trip up and down Mt Titlis or Schilthorn.

If budget travellers stick to all the above, they can expect to scrape by on about Sfr100 a day. Add at least another Sfr40 per day to stay in a budget hotel, and a further Sfr40 for a wider choice of restaurants and sightseeing options. Always allow extra cash for emergencies. Students, come armed with a discount-yielding student card (p353).

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Since our inception in 1973, Lonely Planet has encouraged our readers to tread lightly, travel responsibly and enjoy the magic independent travel affords. International travel is growing at a jaw-dropping rate, and we still firmly believe in the benefits it can bring – but, as always, we encourage you to consider the impact your visit will have on the global environment and local economies, cultures and ecosystems.

Sleeping in bed and breakfasts, farms, haylofts (p353) and eco-places bearing the Steinbock label (p353), opting for entertaining the kids with green nature-driven activities (p351) rather than huge theme parks, spurning domestic flights and the car for the train (p368) and trading in four wheels for two (p363) are immediate ways of minimising your impact and travelling sustainably within Switzerland.

Or trial **SwitzerlandMobility** (www.switzerlandmobility.ch), an innovative and pioneering green travel network that only the Swiss could dream up. Integrating the country's nonmotorised traffic routes, it maps out 22 national routes and 147 regional routes for walkers (6300km), cyclists (8500km), mountain bikers (3300km), rollerbladers/skaters (1000km) and canoeists (250km). Every route is perfectly signposted; sections suitable for families are flagged accordingly; and each comes with a list of relevant hire outlets, accommodation options, public-transport connections, striking landscapes and nature spots en route, digital maps and so on. **Swiss Trails** (☎ 044 450 24 34; www.swisstrails.ch) organises daily luggage transfers on national routes and can also arrange a package for you, be it for two or 10 days.

For a comprehensive list of green restaurants, hotels and other ecological and sustainable-tourism options reviewed in this guide, see p403. Tip-top green days out are listed on p19 and for help in planning that environmentally friendly ski trip, see p235.

TOP PICKS



FAVOURITE SKI RESORTS

- Andermatt (p262)
- Bettmeralp (p168)
- Crans-Montana (p157)
- Klosters and Davos (p309)
- Engelberg (p257)
- Champéry and Les Portes du Soleil (p146)
- Grindelwald, Wengen and Mürren, Bernese Oberland (p178)
- Arosa (p302)
- St Moritz (p317)
- Verbier (p150)
- Zermatt (p161) and Saas Fee (p165)

URBAN DESIGN

Contemporary-art and design buffs eat, sleep, drink and sightsee your heart out! Urban Switzerland positively bristles with striking cutting-edge creations.

- Vitra Design Museum (p269) and Herzog & de Meuron's Schaulager, Basel (p269)
- Renzo Piano's Fondation Beyeler, Basel (p269), and Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern (p203)
- City Lounge, St Gallen (p289)
- Mario Botta's Museum Jean Tinguely, Basel (p269), and his Lugano legacy (p330)
- KKL (p245) and The Hotel (p248), Lucerne
- Freitag, Zürich (p228)
- Therme Vals, Vals (p306)
- Giger Bar, Chur (p301)
- Matterhorn Museum (p162) and Vernissage Bar (p165), Zermatt
- Le Corbusier Pavilion & Heidi Weber Museum, Zürich (p219)
- La Cour des Augustins, Hôtel Auteuil and La Réserve, Geneva (p94)
- Auberge aux 4 Vents, Fribourg (p128)
- Le Corbusier's Maison Blanche, La Chaux-de-Fonds (p138)

GREEN DAYS

Go slow, go green and buzz sustainable with our pick of environmentally sweet travel experiences, each designed to do in a day.

- Lake lounging in Lugano with an overnight stop at Locanda del Giglio (p333).
- The pick of gentle day rambles from Restaurant St Martin, St Martin (p293).
- Village hopping and wine tasting in Klettgau; lunch on *Spätzli* (egg noodles) at Bad Osterfingen, Osterfingen (p283).
- Revelling in the Alpine joys of fresh cheese, buttermilk and sleeping on straw with a hike from Arosa (p302) to Lenzerheide via the Parpaner Rothorn (p78).
- Chilling in Engelberg (p257) with cheese-making, biking, feasting on Stephan Oberli's organic gastronomy at Hess and flopping in a fabulous milky whey bath.
- Overcoming vertigo at Devil's Bridge near Andermatt (p262), with dinner afterwards at The River House Boutique Hotel (p263).
- Taking a St Bernard dog for a walk over the Great St Bernard mountain pass at the Fondation Barry near Martigny (p150).
- Travelling with a llama through the beautiful Engadine valley (p82) or with a horse and cart around the forgotten Jura (p143).
- Gulping in bags of old-fashioned fresh air with local farmers and winemakers near Murten; kipping the night at Owl Farm (p138).
- Taste what Switzerland is all about with a farm feast, alfresco in summer, at Auberge du Mont Cornu (p138) near Neuchâtel.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

A Perfect Waiter (Alain Claude Sulzer) Set in the Bernese Oberland's legendary, grand 19th-century Hotel Geissbach (p193), this recently published novel by the Basel-born writer is a love story entwined around a hotel waiter and a 1930s affair that broke his heart and returns to torment him.

The Rose of Bern (Paul Dasilva) Bern is the backdrop for this cliffhanging tale of espionage that will have the most avid of spy-thriller fans on the edge of their seats.

Zermatt (Frank Schaeffer) Set in 1966, *Zermatt* is the tale of a couple of Reformed Presbyterian missionaries from Kansas and their three teenage children on holiday in the Swiss Alpine resort. Family life is fundamentalist strict until their 14-year-old becomes aroused by a waitress.

Switzerland: A Village History (Paul Birmingham) Birmingham takes a different look at the balloon town of Château-d'Éx, tracing its history as a rural village, through impoverishment in the wake of the Napoleonic invasions and back to prosperity in the tourist age.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Summaries on Switzerland, links to Switzerland-related sites and traveller stories on the Thorn Tree.

Switzerland Tourism (www.myswitzerland.com) The national Swiss tourist board's website, loaded with just about everything you could possibly need, including particularly fine festivals and events listings.

SBB CFF FFS (www.sbb.ch) Check timetables and buy tickets online with Swiss Federal Railways.

Swiss Info (www.swissinfo.org) Swiss national news, politics, music, culture, podcasts and loads more to inform on this multilingual news site by public broadcaster Swiss Radio International.

Swiss World (www.swissworld.org) People, culture, history, geography, politics, chocolate and other background country info; subscribe to its digital newsletter.

The Swiss Portal (www.ch.ch) Government press releases, elections, portraits of every canton, traffic rules, laws and stacks more detailed information on political, economic and social affairs in contemporary Switzerland.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

GENEVA TO ZÜRICH

Two Weeks/Geneva to Zürich

This is a trip for urbanites keen to mix metropolitan fire with small-town charm, eminently doable by car or public transport. Fly into one airport, out the other, or zip back to your point of arrival by fast train in 2¾ hours. Geneva to Zürich can be done in either direction and plenty of variations suggest themselves en route.

Landing in **Geneva** (p85), explore the most cosmopolitan of Switzerland's big cities. From Geneva, trundle by road along the shore of Europe's largest Alpine lake to bustling **Lausanne** (p103), a hilly lakeside city and seat of the International Olympic Committee. Follow the same glorious route through the Lavaux wine terraces to **Montreux** (p116), from where you head north to the medieval fortress town of **Gruyères** (p132), known for its cheese and cream-smothered meringues. Further north still, you arrive in **Fribourg** (p125), on the French-German language frontier, which you cross to make for Switzerland's pretty national capital, **Bern** (p199). Later, drop down in the depths of Bern's cantons and the lakeside towns around **Interlaken** (p172). Nearby there is plenty of great skiing, hiking and other outdoor options. The route swings north to another bewitching lady of the lake, **Lucerne** (p243), before changing atmosphere completely by rolling onwards via **Zug** (p260) to Switzerland's most happening 'n hip city, **Zürich** (p215).

In order to give a little time to all the destinations on this route you will want at least two weeks, leaving two days apiece for places like Geneva, Lausanne, Bern, Lucerne and Zürich. The changes in scenery and culture on this 385km route are extraordinary.



Of the many remarkable railway trips on offer in Switzerland, this is the most breathtaking. The 272km trip through Alpine country, surrounded by icy peaks, high mountain pastures and pretty towns, winds its way through 91 tunnels and over 291 bridges.

THE GLACIER EXPRESS

7½ Hours/Zermatt to St Moritz

It might not be as long as the Trans-Siberian, but this classic rail journey makes up for length in horizontal travel time with a vertical spectacle of stunning proportions. Switzerland sports several mountain rail trips, one of which is even on the Unesco World Heritage list (p320 and p313), but it is the Glacier Express, which runs from Zermatt northeast to St Moritz, that is the most mythical.

As Switzerland's Alpine resorts became popular with Europe's hoity-toity crowd in the early 20th century, the idea for a train linking Zermatt and St Moritz grew. In 1930, the inaugural steam-train journey between the two Alpine resorts took place and the 7½-hour trip – which can be done year-round – hasn't since lost its appeal. For practical details, see p368.

Starting in **Zermatt** (p161), the train winds slowly north down the valley to **Brig** (p167). From here it swings northeast along the pretty eastern stretch of the Rhône Valley towards the Furka Pass (which it circumvents by tunnel) and descends on **Andermatt** (p262) before again climbing up to the **Oberalp Pass**, the literal high point of the trip at 2033m.

From there it meanders alongside the Vorderrhein River, passing through **Disentis/Mustér** (p307) before arriving in **Chur** (p298). The main train continues to **St Moritz** (p317), with a branch line heading northeast to **Davos** (p311).



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

LOST IN GRAUBÜNDEN & TICINO

Two to Three Weeks/Chur to Vals

With the exception of high-wilderness mountaineering, this is one of the best routes for getting away from it all (with occasional options to jump back into the tourist fray). As a circular route, you can kick off anywhere, but a convenient place to start is the Graubünden capital of **Chur** (p298), from where you head north for a quick detour to pretty **Maienfeld** (p309) and its vineyards. Make east for the skiing centres of **Klosters** (p309) and **Davos** (p311), where you leave the bustle behind to surge east into the lower Engadine Valley, with pretty towns to admire like **Guarda** (p314) and **Scuol** (p314). In the latter, hang about for some great bath treatment. From there the road ribbons east to the Austrian border, which you cross to then head south through a slice of Austria and Italy, before veering back west into Switzerland to contemplate the frescos at **Müstair** (p315). The road continues west and then southwest, passing through picture-postcard **Zuoz** (p316) before reaching chic **St Moritz** (p317). Then follow the Julier Pass mountain road that swings north and west, then drops down the gorges of the **Via Mala** (p307) to the hamlet of **Zillis** (p307), another key art stop.

The road continues south and crosses into Ticino and the medieval castles of **Bellinzona** (p324). From there, steam on past lakeside **Locarno** (p336) and up the enchanting **Valle Maggia** (p339). Backtracking to Bellinzona, the main route takes you along the Valle Leventina, with a stop in **Giornico** (p327) and any high valley hamlets you fancy, before crossing the **St Gotthard Pass** (p262) to **Andermatt** (p262) and then veering back east into Graubünden. Make a quick stop at the monastery of **Disentis/Mustér** (p307) before making one last highly recommended detour to the designer baths of **Vals** (p306), the last stop before Chur.

Get well off the beaten track on this circular road trip, taking in such gems as vivid Romanesque frescos, quaint Engadine towns, remote Ticino villages, medieval castles, high mountain passes and two tempting thermal baths. Give yourself two to three weeks for this 685km trail.



TAILORED TRIPS

WORLD TREASURES

In spite of all its natural wonders and overwhelming man-made beauty, Switzerland boasts only nine Unesco World Heritage Sites. Starting in the north, **St Gallen** (p287) is the seat of a grand abbey and church complex that safeguards one of the world's oldest libraries. On a similar note is the Kloster de St Johann (St John's Monastery) in **Müstair** (p315) in the far east of the country, graced with vivid Carolingian and Romanesque frescos.

Ticino has two heritage sites: the inspiring trio of defensive castles in **Bellinzona** (p324) and pyramid-shaped **Monte San Giorgio** (p335), a wood-covered mountain (1096m) south of Lago di Lugano with an extraordinary fossil record of Triassic marine life.

In southern Switzerland, the Jungfrau-Aletsch-Bietschhorn Alpine area is listed for its (sadly) receding glaciers, including the 23km-long **Aletsch Glacier** (p168). As the threats posed by global warming increase (p54), so does the

Unesco-protected area, which was substantially enlarged in 2007.

In western Switzerland the old city centre of **Bern** (p199) with its enchanting arcaded streets is World Heritage precious. More recently, the steeply terraced vineyards of **Lavaux** (p115), along Lake Geneva's northern shore, became a world treasure; followed in 2008 by the **Sardona tectonic area** (p294) in the heart of the Glarus Alps in northeastern Switzerland, the magnificent **Albula railway** (p313) built in 1903 and the **Bernina mountain railway** (p320) that has crossed the Bernina Pass to link St Moritz with Tirano, Italy, since 1910.



A MOVEABLE FEAST

There's no better city to rev up taste buds than hip, urban **Zürich** (p223), with **Geneva** (p94) and its international cuisine and luxury spas cooking up baths of white chocolate (p94) coming up closely in the rear. If it's good old-fashioned Swiss you're after, flit east to **Gruyères** (p132) to watch Gruyère cheese being made, dip into a fondue and stuff yourself silly with meringues and cream. Serious cheese fiends should also prioritise the **Emmental Region** (p210), **Appenzell** (p291), the **Valais** (p144) for its AOC Raclette, and **Engelberg** (p257), where you can taste and buy creamy cheese in a Benedictine monastery.

Boarding the Chocolate Train in **Montreux** (p116) with a stop at the Nestlé factory in **Broc** (p134) is a sweet-toothed must, as is devouring a slice of *Zuger Kirschtorte* in **Zug** (p260) and eating feather-light meringues in their birthplace, **Meiringen** (p193).

Quench your thirst with beer in **Fribourg** (p125), absinthe aboard a steam train in the **Val de Travers** (p139) and wine from **Mont Vully** (p132). Ride a tractor train in the **Lavaux wine region** (p115) or a funicular in vineyards on the northern shore of **Lake Biel** (p211). Taste riesling and Sylvaner wines at source in **Spiez** (p190) and Pinot noir, Fendant (Chasselas) and dôle wines in **Salgesch** (p157). Then, of course, there are the full-bodied merlots and Italian cuisine of **Ticino** (p322).



The Authors



NICOLA WILLIAMS

Coordinating Author, Geneva, Fribourg, Neuchâtel & Jura, Mittelland

Ever since Nicola moved to a village on the southern side of Lake Geneva, she has never quite been able to shake off the feeling that she is on holiday – waking up to a garden tumbling down the hillside towards the lake and Switzerland's mysterious Jura mountains beyond. Nicola has lived and worked in France since 1997 and when not flitting to Geneva, skiing or dipping into the Swiss countryside, she can be found at her desk writing. Previous Lonely Planet titles include *France; Provence & the Côte d'Azur; Languedoc-Roussillon; Tuscany & Umbria; Milan, Turin & Genoa*; and *Piedmont*.



DAMIEN SIMONIS

Lake Geneva, Zürich, Basel & Aargau, Northeastern Switzerland, Ticino, Liechtenstein

The kaleidoscopic fare on offer in Switzerland would probably have passed Damien by had his other half not decided on moving to Lausanne on Lake Geneva. It might have seemed an obvious place for him to be, speaking as he does French, German (but alas, not Schwyzertütsch!) and Italian (not to mention the unofficial lingua franca, er, English!). The further he explores the place, from Italian eateries in Ticino to the ski runs of Zermatt, the more he fails to understand how he could have failed to cotton on to the place earlier. Better late than never! Nowhere else in Europe has he found such breathtaking natural beauty and cultural variety.



KERRY WALKER

Walking in Switzerland, Valais, Bernese Oberland, Central Switzerland, Graubünden

Born in pancake-flat Essex, Kerry has always been fascinated by mountains and (true to her name) quickly discovered walking boots were more her style than stilettos. In 2000 she arrived penniless at a vegetable farm near Bern. After exerting herself digging up metre-high weeds and carrying courgettes by the kilo, she decided this was a country after her own heart and returned with salopettes for seasonal stints in Arosa and Wengen. Realising post-MA that she was lost in translation, Kerry turned to travel writing and has authored some 15 books and scores of online guides. When not trotting the globe, Kerry lives in the Black Forest, Germany.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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