



Switzerland

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel Bahnhof (p538)
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- » Palace Luzern (p544)

Why Go?

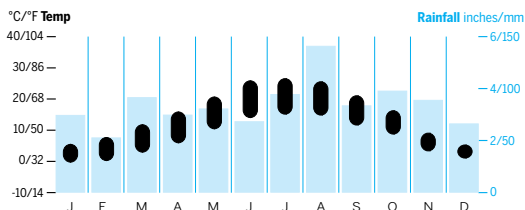
What giddy romance Zermatt, St Moritz and other glitterati-encrusted names evoke. This is *Sonderfall Schweiz* ('special case Switzerland'), a privileged neutral country, proudly idiosyncratic, insular and unique. Blessed with gargantuan cultural diversity, its four official languages alone say it all.

The Swiss don't do half-measures: Zürich, their most gregarious urban centre, has cutting-edge art, legendary nightlife and one of the world's highest living standards. The national passion for sweat, stamina and clingy Lycra takes 65 year olds across 2500m-high mountain passes for Sunday strolls, sees giggly three year olds skiing rings around grown-ups, prompts locals done with 'ordinary' marathons to sprint backwards up mountains – all in the name of good old-fashioned fun.

So don't depend just on your postcard images of Bern's chocolate-box architecture, the majestic Matterhorn or the thundering Rheinfall – Switzerland is a place that's so outrageously beautiful, it simply must be seen to be believed.

When to Go

Geneva



Dec–early Apr
Carve through powder and drink gluhwein at an alpine resort.

May–Sep Hike in the shadow of the Matterhorn and be wowed by its mesmerising stance.

Aug Celebrate Swiss National Day on 1 August and witness Swiss national pride in full force.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Swiss franc (Sfr)
- » **Languages** French, German, Italian, Romansch
- » **Money** ATMs readily available
- » **Visas** Schengen rules apply

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 41,285 sq km
- » **Capital** Bern
- » **Country code** 41
- » **Emergency police** 117; fire 118; ambulance 144

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	Sfr0.99
Canada	C\$1	Sfr0.93
Euro	€1	Sfr1.22
Japan	¥100	Sfr1.01
New Zealand	NZ\$1	Sfr0.79
UK	UK£1	Sfr1.44
USA	US\$1	Sfr0.95

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel** Sfr80-100
- » **Two-course meal** Sfr30
- » **Museum entrance** Sfr15
- » **Beer** Sfr5

Resources

- » **Swiss Info** (www.swissinfo.ch) Swiss news, current affairs.
- » **MySwitzerland** (www.myswitzerland.com) Swiss tourism.

Connections

Landlocked between France, Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein and Italy, Switzerland is well-linked. Geneva city buses run as far as the French border (a couple cross into France, continuing along the southern shore of Lake Geneva). Fast and frequent French TGV trains link Geneva and Lausanne with Paris. In the north, newly completed high-speed lines in France mean that Zürich is only four hours from Paris while Basel is but three. Basel also has fast ICE trains that serve major German cities, while Zürich is well linked to Stuttgart, Munich and Austria. Regular trains serve Milan from Zürich, Lucerne and Lugano.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Starting in vibrant Zürich, shop famous Bahnhofstrasse and find the medieval corners. Next, head to the Jungfrau region to explore some kick-ass alpine scenery (think James Bond racing an avalanche down a sheer snowy rock face). Take a pit stop in beautiful Lucerne before finishing up in country capital Bern.

Two Weeks

As above, then head west for French-immersion lessons in Geneva or lakeside Lausanne. Stop in Gruyères to dip into a cheesy fondue and overdose on meringues drowned in thick double cream. Zip to Zermatt or across to St Moritz to frolic in snow or green meadows, then loop east to taste the Italian side of Switzerland at lakeside Lugano.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Fondue** Switzerland's best-known dish, in which melted Emmental and Gruyère cheese are combined with white wine in a large pot and eaten with bread cubes.
- » **Raclette** Another popular artery-hardener of melted cheese served with potatoes.
- » **Rösti** German Switzerland's national dish of fried shredded potatoes is served with everything.
- » **Veal** Highly rated throughout the country; in Zürich, veal is thinly sliced and served in a cream sauce (*Gschnetzeltes Kalbsfleisch*).
- » **Bündnerfleisch** Dried beef, smoked and thinly sliced.
- » **Chocolate** Good at any time of day and available in dozens of luscious flavours.