

welcome to Switzerland



The Good Life

What giddy romance Zermatt, St Moritz and other legendary names evoke. From the intoxicating chink of Verbier glitterati hobnobbing over Champagne in ice-carved flutes, to the reassuring bell jangle of cows coming home in the Engadine Valley, Switzerland is a harmonious tableau of beautiful images. This small, landlocked country was an essential stop on every Grand Tour – the place where winter tourism was born, where Golden Age mountaineers conquered new heights – and for good reason: no slideshow of such epic proportions is so darn easy to step into, experience and get your hands nice and dirty with. Ride a little red train between peak and pine, soak

in mountain spa water, snowshoe to your igloo, cross medieval bridges and know that life in Switzerland is good.

Action Stations

This country begs outdoor escapade with its larger-than-life canvas of hallucinatory landscapes etched so perfectly one wants to cry – or at least grab boots, leap on board, toot the bike bell and let spirits rip. Skiing and snowboarding in the winter wonderlands of Graubünden, Bernese Oberland and Central Switzerland are obvious choices. But there is plenty to do when pastures are green. Hiking and biking trails abound in both glacier-encrusted mountain areas and lower down along lost valleys, mythical



Look past the silk-smooth chocolate, cuckoo clocks and yodelling – contemporary Switzerland, land of four languages, is all about epic journeys and sublime experiences.

(left) Staubbach Falls in the Lauterbrunnen Valley
(below) Architect Renzo Piano's Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern



lakeshores and pea-green vines. View the natural grandeur from the sky in a balloon basket or parachute, or afloat from a white-water raft. Then there are those must-do-before-death moments like encountering the chiselled north face of the Eiger up close or reaching crevassed ice on Jungfrauoch (3454m). Most appealing of all, you don't need to be a mountaineer to do it.

Alpine & Urban

Variety is the spice of life in this rich land where Alpine tradition is rooted in the agricultural calendar, and soaring mountain backdrops are as common as muck. Travels are mapped by mountain villages with timber storage barns on stilts to keep the

rats out and chalet farmsteads brightened with red geraniums and milk churns on a bench waiting to be filled. Ancient markets (*Märit*), folkloric fairs (*Chilbi*), flag waving and gastronomic celebrations engrave the passing of seasons in every soul.

The perfect antidote is a surprise set of cities: the capital Bern with its medieval Old Town and world-class modern art, deeply Germanic Basel and its bold architecture, shopping-chic Geneva astraddle Europe's largest lake, tycoon-magnet Zug (play millionaire over a slice of liqueur-soaked cherry cake) and uber-cool Zürich with its rooftop bars and atypical Swiss street grit.

Beard cutting or stone throwing, Paul Klee art or hip club gig: what a euphoric journey indeed.