



Understand Switzerland

SWITZERLAND TODAY328

How has Europe's traditional home of Alpine skiing and secret banking fared amid a warming climate and a shaky global economy?

HISTORY330

Idiosyncratic, insular, forever neutral and famously privileged – learn about Switzerland's unique historical journey.

THE SWISS WAY OF LIFE336

Four languages, bags of ancient Alpine tradition, an exceptional art and design scene: life in cultural Switzerland is enviable.

THE SWISS TABLE343

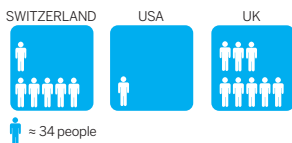
There's far more to Swiss cuisine than chocolate, cheese and Swiss-German rösti. Tempt tastebuds with this ravishing guide to Swiss food.

SWISS WINE348

Have vineyard walks and wine-tasting with local winemakers ever been so exquisitely scenic?



visitors per sq km



Switzerland Today

Victim of its own Success: Franc Matters

Peaceful and prosperous, safe and sound, a magnet for the rich and a safe haven for wealth: this privileged land of quality living and global finance, of outdoor magnificence and Alpine aesthetic found itself the victim of its own success in 2011. The Swiss franc, long recognised as one of the world's most stable currencies, had become so overvalued it was threatening the traditionally robust Swiss economy. So strong was the franc that Swiss exports were falling along with the number of incoming tourists as price-conscious visitors from abroad suddenly realised just how much a cup of coffee in Switzerland was going to cost them. Even the Swiss were abandoning their local shops and hopping across the border into the cheaper France, Germany and Italy to do their weekly shop. So the Swiss National Bank, in an unprecedented move, made the value of the Swiss franc tumble in an instant (by 9% in 15 minutes!) by pegging it at 1.20 to the euro. An entire nation waited with bated breathe to see if the contrived depreciation would pay off. Critics were not convinced.

To the Polls: Parliamentary Elections

Federal elections, held every four years, saw 49% of the Swiss electorate turn out to cast their vote in the 2011 nationwide ballot. The incumbent Swiss People's Party (SVP; UDC or Union Démocratique du Centre in French) lost the greatest share of votes – a disappointment for the right-wing party who'd hoped to beat the record 29% of votes it had set four years previously. The country's other main political party, left-wing rivals the Social Democrat Party, likewise saw a drop in support, as Swiss punters hedged their bets with smaller, relatively new parties like the Liberal Greens and Conservative Democrats.

» Highest point: Dufourspitze (4634m)

» Internet domain: ch

» Annual chocolate consumption (per person): 11.3kg

» Non-Swiss nationals (of total population): 20.7%

Top Films

Home (2008) By a motorway, by Geneva director Ursula Meier

The Kite Runner (2007) Film adaption of Khaled Hosseini's novel by Oscar-winning Swiss-German director Marc Forster

The Pledge (2001) Love-it-or-loathe-it adaption of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *Das Versprechen*

Journey of Hope (1991) Oscar-winning tale of a Kurdish family seeking a better life in Switzerland

Breathless (1960) New wave classic by Swiss avant-garde film-maker Jean-Luc Godard

Top Books

Swiss Watching (Diccon Bewes) Amusing, astute portrait
The Alpine Set in Switzerland (Lindsay Greatwood) Charlie Chaplin, Graham Greene et al
The Swiss Cookbook (Betty Bossi) Culinary culture by canton/region