

Welcome to Switzerland

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

Picture Perfect

Switzerland is a harmonious tableau of beautiful images, a slideshow of epic proportions that has been seducing travellers since the days of the Grand Tour and the birth of winter tourism in the 1930s. From the chink of Verbier glitterati hobnobbing over Champagne to the reassuring bell jangle of silky black Val d'Hérens cattle in the Valais, Switzerland mixes rural and urban with astonishing ease, grace and precision. Ride a red train between peak and pine, soak in mountain spa waters, snowshoe to your igloo or scamper across medieval bridges; this country is picture perfect, with not a hair out of place.

Alpine Tradition

Variety is the spice of rural life in this rich, earthy land where Alpine tradition is rooted in the agricultural calendar and soaring mountains are as common as muck. Travellers are mapped by villages with timber granaries built on stilts and chalet farmsteads brightened with red geranium blossoms. Ancient markets, folkloric fairs, flag waving and alpenhorn concerts mark the passing of seasons in every soul. And then there's the food: a hearty and flavoursome celebration of gooey cheese, along with velvety chocolate, autumnal game and air-dried meats.

Urban Chic

The perfect antidote to rural beauty is a surprise set of cities: 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, 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.

Great Outdoors

Switzerland's hallucinatory landscapes demand immediate action – grab boots, leap on board, toot bike bell and let spirits rip. Skiing and snowboarding in Graubünden, Bernese Oberland and Central Switzerland are winter choices, and when pastures turn green, hiking and biking trails abound in glacier-encrusted mountain areas and lower down along lost valleys, glittering lake-shores and pea-green vineyards. View the natural grandeur from a hot-air balloon or parachute, or afloat a white-water raft. Then there's those must-do-before-death moments like encountering Eiger's chiselled north face up close or reaching crevassed ice on Jungfrauoch. Most extraordinary of all, you don't need to be a mountaineer to do it.



Why I Love Switzerland

By Nicola Williams, Author

Lake Geneva's southern shore has been home for a decade and it still tickles me pink that my journeys by train or plane begin with a soul-stirring 20-minute boat ride across the water, sometimes aboard a nippy little 'commuter' boat at dawn, sometimes on one of the magnificent belle époque steamers that I often see twinkling after dark from my kitchen window. Lakes, mountains, urban chic: Switzerland delivers every weekend with yet another uplifting activity and, being someone who'd rather be outside than in (call me and my kids ski fiends, paddle-board mad, hiking kings and queens), it suits me down to the ground.

For more about our authors, see page 352