



Switzerland

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Best Places to Eat

- » Atrio Vulcanelli (p1187)
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Best Places to Stay

- » Pension für Dich (p1183)
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- » Mountain Hostel (p1177)

Why Go?

What giddy romance Zermatt, St Moritz and other glitterati-encrusted names evoke.

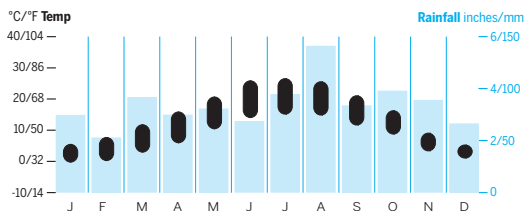
This is *Sonderfall Schweiz* ('special case Switzerland'), a privileged neutral country set apart from others, proudly idiosyncratic, insular and unique. Blessed with gargantuan cultural diversity, its four official languages alone say it all.

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 glühwein 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
- » **Population** 7.8 million
- » **Capital** Bern
- » **Telephone** country code ☎41; international access code ☎00
- » **Emergency** police ☎117; fire ☎118; ambulance ☎144

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	Sfr0.95
Canada	C\$1	Sfr0.93
Euro Zone	€1	Sfr1.29
Japan	¥100	Sfr1.12
New Zealand	NZ\$1	Sfr0.68
UK	UK£1	Sfr1.46
USA	US\$1	Sfr0.87

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** Sfr80–100
- » **Two-course dinner** Sfr25
- » **Museum entrance** Sfr15
- » **Beer** Sfr5
- » **Zurich one-day transport ticket** Sfr8.20

Resources

- » **swissinfo** (www.swissinfo.ch)
- » **MySwitzerland** (www.myswitzerland.com)

Connections

Landlocked between France, Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein and Italy, Switzerland's a doddle to move on from. Geneva city buses run as far as the French border (a couple cross into France, continuing along the southern shore of Lake Geneva) and there are plenty of direct train connections from Geneva and Zurich to Paris, as well as Hamburg, Milan and Barcelona. There are also TGV links from Geneva and Zurich. Cosmopolitan Zürich enjoys as many international rail connections, including daily trains to/from Stuttgart, Munich and Innsbruck. In northern Switzerland, Basel is the major European rail hub, with separate train stations serving France and Germany. Then, of course, there is Italy, a mere hop and a skip from Locarno in Italianate Ticino.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Starting in vibrant Zürich, shop famous Bahnhofstrasse and hit the bars of Züri-West. 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. Explore the Neuchâtel and Fribourg cantons, stopping 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.

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.
- » **Wurst** Like their northern neighbours, the Swiss also munch on a wide variety of sausages.