

Switzerland

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Jungfrau Region** Gargantuan mountain vistas and white-knuckle adrenalin adventures abound (p1169)
- **Zürich** Party all night in one of Europe's hippest cities (p1163)
- **Geneva** Get wet with a free fountain dash beneath the Jet d'Eau (p1153)
- **Bern** Be wooed by medieval charm, folkloric fountains and a pulsating party scene in Switzerland's capital (p1159).
- **Best journey** Ride the cable car to the top of the Schilthorn (p1170), check out million-dollar views over lunch in its revolving restaurant then ski down the mountain to Mürren (p1170)
- **Off-the-beaten track** Sleep on a farm and eat carrot cheese in the clover-shaped Jura (p1157); warm your cockles with a shot of absinthe (p1157)

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 41,285 sq km
- **Budget** Sfr60 to Sfr100 per day, excluding transport
- **Capital** Bern
- **Country code** ☎ 41
- **Famous for** cheese, yodelling, the Matterhorn, cuckoo clocks, banking
- **Languages** German, French, Italian, Romansch
- **Money** Swiss franc (Sfr); A\$1 = Sfr0.84; C\$1 = Sfr0.95; €1 = Sfr1.51; ¥100 = Sfr1.18; NZ\$1 = Sfr0.66; UK£1 = Sfr1.70; US\$1 = Sfr1.12
- **Population** 7.59 million
- **Phrases** *gruezi* (hello, good day), *merci vielmal* (thank you very much), *adieu*



(goodbye), *sprechen sie Englisch?* (do you speak English?)

- **Visas** No visa required for citizens of the UK, Ireland, the EU, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Norway and Iceland; others need a Schengen Visa (see p1230)

TRAVEL HINT

Drinking before a toast is unforgivable and will lead to seven years of bad sex...so superstition says.

ROAMING

Start in Geneva, saunter lakeside to Lausanne and Montreux then dive into the deep, dark Jura. Or hit Zermatt, Interlaken and the Jungfrau Region, Lucerne and Zürich.

In Europe's Heidi land of a trillion mountain scenes just begging to be made into a postcard, rosy-faced goat herders really do yodel to the clang of cowbells while cheesy fondues bubble inside snug chalets iced with snow. But there is far more to 21st-century Switzerland than

heart-warming Alpine tradition: this smart, smug, truly ravishing enclave in Europe gave the world absinthe, LSD, secret bank accounts and the world wide web.

Switzerland is addictive: it has a natural beauty that Hollywood and Bollywood moviemakers drool over, a gargantuan cultural diversity (four official languages says it all), and enough adrenalin-pumping action to fuel inner-junkie cravings for months. Winter or summer, the fest rages: fly down some of the world's most famous ski slopes, hobnob off-piste with celebrities over cocktails served in ice-carved flutes, snowshoe to your igloo, hike past marmots, party until dawn with Züri-West's urban cool crowd and know *this* is Europe's land (...OK, a bijou one) of plenty.

HISTORY

In 1291 the forest communities of Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden formed an alliance – the origin of the Swiss Confederation. The Swiss began seizing more land, but finally overreached themselves. Defeated by a superior force of French and Venetians, they declared neutrality. Swiss mercenaries continued to serve in other armies for centuries, earning an unrivalled reputation for skill and courage.

The French invaded in 1798, but following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, Switzerland gained full independence. In 1848 the Swiss agreed upon a new federal constitution. Having achieved political stability, Switzerland could concentrate on economic and social matters.

The Swiss carefully guarded their neutrality during the world wars, and emerged with a thriving commercial, financial and industrial base. Zürich developed as an international banking centre, and international bodies set up their headquarters in Geneva. However, an independent commission of historians has confirmed that tens of thousands of Jewish refugees were rejected from Switzerland's border during WWII and left to face their fate in Nazi Germany. Swiss banks were accused of banking Nazi plunder and Holocaust victims' accounts during WWII. After years of recriminations and a threatened lawsuit, two Swiss banks made a settlement of US\$1.25 billion to Holocaust victims' families in 1998.

Switzerland's *annus horribilis* was 2001: national airline Swissair collapsed, a canyoning accident in the Bernese Oberland killed 21 tourists, and an unprecedented gun massacre in the Zug parliament and fatal fire in the Gotthard Tunnel prompted intense soul-searching. Switzerland became the 190th member of the UN in 2002 and in 2005 it joined Europe's 'Schengen' passport-free travel zone, effective at land borders since December 2008 and at airports from March 2009. The Swiss banned smoking on public

transport in 2005 and in 2007 Ticino became the first canton to outlaw smoking in all public places. Others hope to do the same.

Switzerland's privileged banking sector was not immune to the global financial crisis. Switzerland's two largest banks, UBS and Crédit Suisse, both admitted heavy losses in 2008, prompting the government to wade in with a US\$60-billion bail-out package for UBS.

THE CULTURE

Living quietly with your neighbours is a national obsession and there are strict rules about noise levels. Good manners infuse the national psyche and politeness is the cornerstone of all social intercourse. Always shake hands when being introduced to a Swiss, and kiss on both cheeks to greet and say goodbye to friends. Don't forget to greet shopkeepers when entering shops.

Most locals are of Germanic origin, and this is shown in the breakdown of the four national languages. German speakers account

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

- Albert Einstein came up with his theories of relativity, including the $E=mc^2$ formula, in Bern.
- Switzerland gave birth to the world wide web at the acclaimed CERN research institute (www.cern.ch) in Geneva.
- Val de Travers, near Neuchâtel, claims to be the birthplace of the mythical green alcohol, absinthe.
- Chemist Albert Hofmann was using LSD to conduct migraine-cure tests in Basel in 1943 when he accidentally absorbed the compound through his fingertips and became the first man to trip on acid.