History

As a historical reality, William Tell probably never existed. But as a national legend, the man who helped to drive out Switzerland's foreign rulers by shooting an apple off his son's head has perfectly embodied the country's rather singular approach to independence throughout the ages.

PRE-CONFEDERATION

Modern Swiss history is regarded as starting in 1291, but people had already been living in the region for thousands of years. The first inhabitants were Celtic tribes, including the Helvetii of the Jura and the Mittelland plain and the Rhaetians near Graubünden. Their homelands were invaded firstly by the Romans, who had gained a foothold by 58 BC under Julius Caesar and established Aventicum (now Avenches) as their capital. Then, Germanic Alemanni tribes arrived to drive out the Romans by AD 400.

A comprehensive overview of the country's history, politics and society is provided by Jonathan Steinberg's *Why Switzerland?*

The Alemanni groups settled in eastern Switzerland and were later joined by another Germanic tribe, the Burgundians, in the western part of the country. The latter adopted Christianity and the Latin language, laying the seeds for the division between French- and German-speaking Switzerland. The Franks conquered both tribes in the 6th century, but the two areas were torn apart again when Charlemagne's empire was partitioned in 870.

Initially, when it was reunited under the pan-European Holy Roman Empire in 1032, Switzerland was left to its own devices. Local nobles wielded the most influence, especially the Zähringen family – who founded Fribourg, Bern and Murten, and built a castle at Thun (see p167) – and the Savoy clan, who established a ring of castles around Lake Geneva, most notably Château de Chillon (see p89).

Learn about historical exhibitions being staged by the Swiss National Museum and its partners at www.musee-suisse.com. Many interesting themes from Swiss history are also discussed at length here, although mainly in German or French.

However, when the Habsburg ruler Rudolph I became Holy Roman Emperor in 1273, he sent in heavy-handed bailiffs to collect more taxes and tighten the administrative screws. Swiss resentment quickly grew.

SWISS CONFEDERATION

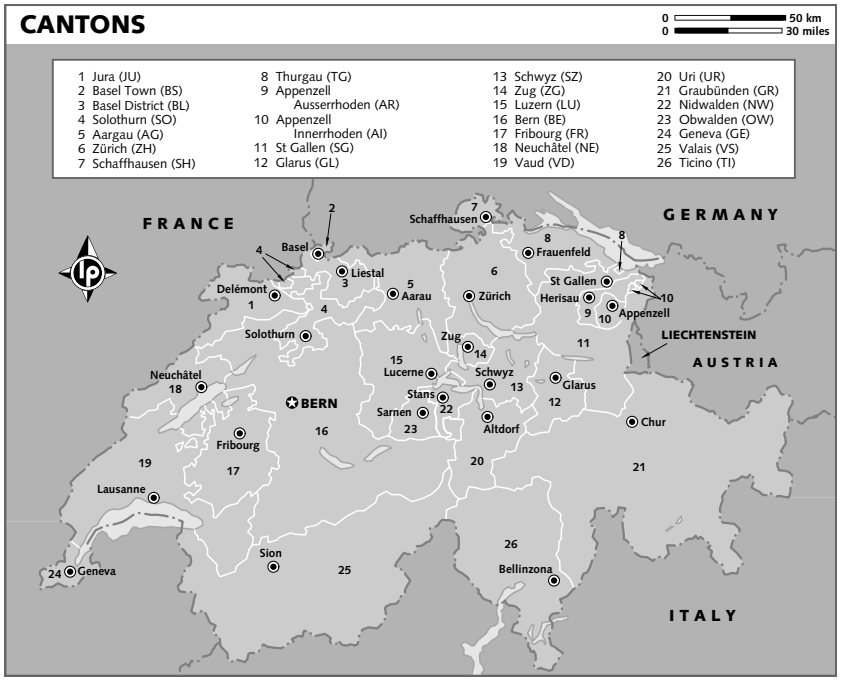
It was after Rudolph's death in 1291 that local leaders made their first grab for independence. It's taught in Swiss schools, although some historians see the tale as slightly distorted, that the forest communities of Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden met on the Rütli Meadow (p224) in Schwyz canton on 1 August that year to sign an alliance vowing not to recognise any external judge or law. In any case, a pact does exist, preserved in the town of Schwyz (p226). It's seen as the founding act of the Swiss Confederation, whose Latin name, Confoederatio Helvetica, survives in the 'CH' abbreviation for Switzerland (used on car number plates and in Internet addresses, for example). The story of the patriotic William Tell, a central figure in the freedom struggle's mythology, also originates from this period (see the boxed text The William Tell Tale, p225).

In 1315, Duke Leopold dispatched a powerful Austrian army to douse this growing Swiss nationalism. Instead, however, the Swiss inflicted an

TIMELINE

1032 Swiss clans are united under the Holy Roman Empire, but left with much autonomy

1273 Habsburg Emperor Rudolph I angers local 'William Tells' with heavy tax demands



epic defeat on his troops at Morgarten and prompted other communities to join the Swiss union. The next 200 years of Swiss history was a time of successive military wins, land grabs and new memberships. The following cantons came on board: Lucerne (1332), Zürich (1351), Glarus and Zug (1352), Bern (1353), Fribourg and Solothurn (1481), Basel and Schaffhausen (1501) and Appenzell (1513). In the middle of all this, the Swiss Confederation gained independence from Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I after a victory at Dornach in 1499.

Jura is the youngest of Switzerland's cantons, having only gained independence from Bern in 1979. Of 23 cantons, three (Appenzell, Basel and Walden) are divided in two to make the usual total of 26.

Then, having made it as far as Milan, the rampaging Swiss suddenly lost to a combined French and Venetian force at Marignano in 1515. This stinging defeat prompted them to withdraw from the international scene and for the first time declare neutrality. For several centuries afterwards, the country's warrior spirit was channelled solely into mercenary activity – a tradition still echoed in the Swiss Guard that protects the pope.

REFORMATION

The country's neutrality and diversity combined to give Switzerland some protection when the religious Thirty Years' War broke out in 1618, although parts of it still suffered. The Protestant Reformation and the subsequent Catholic Counter Reformation had caused deep divisions and upheaval throughout Europe. In Switzerland, too, preacher Huldrych

1291

Modern Switzerland 'begins' with independence pact signed at Rütli Meadow

1515

Having finally dispatched the Habsburgs in 1499, the Swiss declare neutrality

Zwingli had started teaching the Protestant word in Zürich as early as 1519, as had Jean Calvin in Geneva. But Zentralschweiz (central Switzerland) remained Catholic.

So, unable to agree even among themselves, the Swiss couldn't decide which side to take in the Thirty Years' War and fortuitously stuck to their neutrality.

However, religious disputes dragged on inside Switzerland. At first, the Catholic cantons were sucked into a dangerous alliance with France, before eventually agreeing to religious freedom. At the same time, the country was experiencing an economic boom through textile industries in the northeast.

Protestant Swiss first openly disobeyed the Catholic Church during 1522's 'affair of the sausages', when a printer and several priests in Zürich were caught gobbling Wurst on Ash Wednesday, instead of fasting as they should.

The French invaded Switzerland in 1798 and established the brief Helvetic Republic. But they were no more welcome than the Austrians before them, and internal fighting prompted Napoleon (now in power in France) to restore the former Confederation of cantons in 1803 (the Act of Mediation), with France retaining overall jurisdiction. Further cantons joined the Confederation at this time: Aargau, St Gallen, Graubünden, Ticino, Thurgau and Vaud.

After Napoleon's defeat by the British and Prussians at Waterloo in 1815, the Congress of Vienna peace treaty for the first time formally guaranteed Switzerland's independence and neutrality, as well as adding the cantons of Valais, Geneva and Neuchâtel.

TOWARDS A MODERN CONSTITUTION

Civil war broke out in 1847, during which the Protestant army, led by General Dufour, quickly crushed the Sonderbund (or special league) of Catholic cantons, including Lucerne. In fact, the war lasted just 26 days, later leading German Chancellor Bismarck to dismissively declare it 'a hare shoot'. Victory by Dufour's forces was rapidly underlined with the creation of a new federal constitution in 1848 – largely still in place today – and the naming of Bern as the capital.

The 780-page *Dunant's Dream: War, Switzerland and the History of the Red Cross,* by Caroline Moorhead, examines the triumphs, ethical dilemmas and occasional moral failures of the world's leading humanitarian organisation.

The constitution was a compromise between advocates of central control and conservative forces wanting to retain cantonal authority. The cantons eventually relinquished their right to print money, run postal services and levy customs duties, giving these to the federal government. However, they retained legislative and executive control over local matters. Furthermore, the new Federal Assembly was established in such a way as to give cantons a voice. The lower national chamber, or *Nationalrat,* has 200 members, allocated from the 26 cantons in proportion to population size. The upper states chamber, or *Ständerat,* comprises 46 members, two per canton.

Lacking in mineral resources, Switzerland developed cottage industries and skilled labourers began to form guilds. Railways and roads were built, opening up Alpine regions and encouraging tourism. Between 1850 and 1860, six new commercial banks were established. The International Red Cross was founded in Geneva in 1863 by Henri Dunant.

Opposition to political corruption sparked a movement for greater democracy. In 1874, the constitution was revised so that many federal laws had to be approved by national referendum – a phenomenon for which Switzerland remains famous today. A petition with 50,000 signatures

1519

Protestant Huldrych Zwingli starts preaching 'pray and work' in Zürich

1847

'Hare shoot' civil war between Protestants and Catholics lasts just 26 days

can challenge a proposed law; 100,000 signatures can force a public vote on any new issue.

EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Despite some citizens' pro-German sympathies, Switzerland's only involvement in WWI lay in organising Red Cross units. After the war, Switzerland joined the League of Nations, but on a strictly financial and economic basis, without military involvement.

Although Swiss industry had profited during the war, the working classes had suffered as prices soared and wages fell. Consequently, a general strike was called in November 1918. With the country at a halt, the Federal Council eventually accepted some of the strikers' demands; a 48-hour week was introduced and the social security system was extended, laying the groundwork for today's progressive social state.

Geneva sociologist Jean Ziegler's *The Swiss, the Gold and the Dead: How Swiss Bankers Financed the Nazi War Machine* offers a fascinating and controversial account of Switzerland's WWII history.

Switzerland was left largely unscathed by WWII. Apart from some accidental bombings (see Schaffhausen, p248), the most momentous event of the war for the country came when Henri Guisan, general of the civilian army, invited all top military personnel to the Rütli Meadow (site of the 1291 Oath of Allegiance) to show the world how determined the Swiss were to defend their own soil.

Although Switzerland proved a safe haven for escaping Allied prisoners, the country's banks have since been criticised for being a major conduit for Nazi plunder during WWII.

POST WWII

Switzerland's post-war history has been dominated by economic, social and political stability. The Swiss were horrified when these started to unravel slightly at the end of the 20th century, but recently have become reconciled to being a little more ordinary.

THE SWISS WAY OF GOVERNMENT

- The make-up of Switzerland's Federal Council, or executive government, is determined not by who wins the most parliamentary seats, but by the 'magic formula', a cosy power-sharing agreement made between the four main parties in 1959.
- The Federal Council consists of seven ministers. All are part-time, even the president, and continue to hold down their everyday jobs.
- The president is drawn on a rotating basis from the seven federal ministers, so there's a new head of state each year.
- Until 2003, the 'magic formula' decreed the Free Democrats, Social Democrats and Christian Democrats had two council members each, with one going to the right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP).
- In 2003, the anti-EU and anti-foreigner SVP, led by Christoph Blocher, won almost 28% of the vote and used this electoral success to wangle an extra place on the Federal Council. Controversially rewriting the 1959 compact, it took over the Christian Democrats' second seat.
- Many federal laws must first be approved by public referendum; there are several of these every year.

1863
Pacifist Henri Dunant founds the International Red Cross in Geneva

1918
Workers stage a general strike; the 48-hour week and social state follows

www.lonelyplanet.com

Immediately after the war, that certainly wasn't the case. While the rest of Europe was still recovering, Switzerland was able to forge ahead from an already powerful commercial, financial and industrial base. Zürich developed as an international banking and insurance centre, while the World Health Organization and many other international bodies set up headquarters in Geneva. Its much-vaunted neutrality led it to decline to actually join either the UN or the EU, but the country became one of the world's richest and most respected.

Visit www.parliament.ch or www.admin.ch for more information on Switzerland's unusual political system, with its 'direct democracy', 'magic formula' and part-time politicians.

Then, in the late 1990s, a series of scandals forced Switzerland to begin reforming its famously secretive banking industry. In 1995, after pressure from Jewish groups, Swiss banks announced that they had discovered millions of dollars lying in dormant pre-1945 accounts, belonging to Holocaust victims and survivors. Three years later, amid allegations that they had been sitting on the money without seriously trying to trace its owners, the two largest banks, UBS and Credit Suisse, agreed to pay $1.25 billion in compensation to Holocaust survivors and their families.

Banking confidentiality dates back to the Middle Ages here, and was enshrined in law in 1934, when numbered, rather than named, bank accounts were introduced. However, in 2004, the country made another concession to that veil of secrecy, when it agreed to tax accounts held in Switzerland by EU citizens.

When Switzerland finally joined the UN in 2002, officials mistakenly ordered a rectangular Swiss flag to fly outside the organisation's New York headquarters. Swiss functionaries strenuously objected, insisting the UN run up the proper square flag pretty damn quick.

The year 2001 was truly Switzerland's *annus horribilus*. The financial collapse of the national airline Swissair, a canyoning accident in the Bernese Oberland that killed 21 tourists, an unprecedented gun massacre in the Zug parliament and a fatal fire in the Gotthard Tunnel, all within 12 months, prompted intense soul-searching.

However, when devastating floods washed through the country in 2005, causing several deaths and an estimated Sfr2 billion damage, there were fewer anguished cries about what was going wrong with Switzerland and more pragmatic debate on what should be done.

While swinging to the conservative right in its parliamentary government in 2003 (see the boxed text The Swiss Way of Government, opposite), the country also recognises that it's facing universal challenges, and has reached out more to the world. In 2002 it finally became the 190th member of the UN. In 2005 it joined Europe's 'Schengen' passport-free travel zone and, in theory, opened its borders to workers from the 10 new EU members.

It still isn't a member of the EU itself and, although the French-speaking regions would like it, doesn't look like becoming one any time soon. However, in many ways Switzerland no longer views isolation as quite so splendid.

1940
General Guisan's army turns out at Rütli to warn off potential WWII invaders

2005
Summer floods sweep through Switzerland, causing an estimated Sfr2 billion damage

The Culture

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

The Swiss consider themselves a bit different; a fundamental concept of their national identity has been 'Sonderfall Schweiz', or Switzerland as a special case. And despite moves towards more international cooperation recently, there's still much about the country that's idiosyncratic and unique. Not only does it bring four language groups – German, French, Italian and Romansch – under one national umbrella, it promotes 'direct democracy' with frequent referendums and practises 'armed neutrality', with a militia trained to do battle with an enemy that's not supposed to exist. While home to many global institutions, including the European headquarters of the UN, the country is yet to join the EU.

Obtaining Swiss citizenship is notoriously difficult. Foreigners must approach the federal government, as well as their canton and commune, which have several ways of assessing an application, including panel interviews and public assemblies and votes.

There are lots of stereotypes about Switzerland – chocolate, cheese, cuckoo clocks, precision watches and banking secrecy, Heidi, yodelling and the Alps – and just as many well-worn clichés surround the Swiss themselves. Thought of as dull, boring and overly cautious, ruthlessly efficient and hard-working, they inevitably display a touch of these attributes. In his rib-tickling *Xenophobe's Guide to the Swiss*, Paul Bilton even theorises that the national character is essentially a mountain farmer's: tough, independent, prepared for any emergency and, above all, insular, parochial and conservative.

However, Switzerland is such a diverse country that making any generalisations is foolhardy in the extreme. For a start, German-, French- and Italian-speaking Swiss all display similar attitudes to those of the Germans, French and Italians respectively. For every right-wing voter, there's always someone who's helped push through a wide range of progressive laws on subjects as different as gay marriage and voluntary suicide. There are marked differences between the older, more introspective generation and more outgoing younger people. Finally, for every well-meaning, if slightly dull, citizen, there are scores of happy, life-loving inhabitants.

ON GUARD

Machiavelli wrote that 'the Swiss are most armed and most free', but more than 400 years after their last major military excursion, even the Swiss are losing some of their enthusiasm for 'armed neutrality'.

While it's still the only Western nation to retain compulsory conscription, Switzerland's armed defences have been diminished. At the height of the Cold War, the country had more than 600,000 soldiers and 'universal militia' of reservists with a gun at home, comprising almost the entire male population. Today, every able-bodied Swiss man must still undergo military training and serve 260 days' military service between the ages of 20 and 36. However, community service is now an option, and the number of soldiers that can be mobilised within 48 hours has been scaled back to 220,000.

For many years, Switzerland maintained enough bunkers with food stockpiles to house just about the entire population underground in the event of attack. As army cost-cutting measures bite, however, some 13,000 military installations have recently been decommissioned.

But all is not lost. The enterprising army has, in part, turned to another trusty Swiss stand-by – tourism. The bunkers at Faulensee, for example, are now open to visitors (see the boxed text Bunker Mentality, p169).

In that respect, the Swiss – even though they consider themselves a bit different – are exactly like the rest of the world. You have to take everyone as you meet them.

LIFESTYLE

'They are,' wrote the UK's *Guardian* newspaper in 2004, 'probably the most fortunate people on the planet. Healthy, wealthy, and, thanks to an outstanding education system, wise. They enjoy a life most of us can only dream about. For ease of reference we commonly refer to them as the Swiss.' This deadpan doffing of the cap, from a nation that usually scorns 'dull' Switzerland, was prompted by yet another quality-of-life survey listing Geneva, Zürich and Bern among the planet's best cities. Those ratings haven't changed much since.

The Swiss have a strangely modest way of displaying wealth. For example, Hans J Bär, founder of private bank Julius Baer, admits in his autobiography to buying two identical limousines – to fool the neighbours into believing he owned only one.

Urban Swiss don't enjoy a particularly different lifestyle from other Westerners; they just enjoy it more. They can rely on their little nation, one of the world's 10 richest in terms of GDP per capita, to deliver excellent health services, efficient public transport and all-round security. Spend a little time among them and you realise their sportiness, attention to diet and concern for the environment is symptomatic of another condition: they want to extract the most from life.

It's hardly surprising, then, that the Swiss have the greatest life expectancy in Europe; women here live to an average 83 years, men to 77. Switzerland isn't immune to modern worries, including AIDS and drugs, but the distribution of wealth in Switzerland is more even than in many contemporary societies. Most people can afford to rate friends and family – not work – as their top priority.

However, if you've not come to Switzerland to photosynthesise with envy, but are more interested in traditional culture, you'll find it in the rural regions, especially Appenzellerland or Valais. Here people still wear folk costumes during festivals and mark the seasons with time-honoured Alpine rituals. Every spring, shepherds decorate their cattle with flowers and bells before herding them, in a procession known as the *Alpauffahrt,* to mountain pastures where they both spend the summer. In autumn, the *Alpabfahrt* brings them down again.

POPULATION

Switzerland averages 172 inhabitants per square kilometre, with Alpine districts more sparsely populated and the urban areas more densely populated.

Hoi – Your Swiss German Survival Guide, by Nicole Egger and Serge Liviano (www.bergli.ch), offers English speakers a frequently hilarious insight into Switzerland's most frequently spoken language.

On a basic analysis, German speakers account for 64% of the population, French 19%, Italian 8% and Romansch under 1%. However, the situation is really more complex. 'German' speakers in Switzerland write standard or 'high' German, but they speak their own language, Schwyzertütsch, which has no official written form and is mostly unintelligible to outsiders. Linguists have identified at least two Romansch dialects and three variants of Italian, sometimes varying from valley to valley.

The various language communities have their differences of opinion; if it were left to the French-speaking regions, for example, Switzerland would have long been an EU member. However, spats only rarely go beyond words (see the boxed text Rocky Horror, p149).

SPORT

Ice hockey and football (soccer) are the two most popular spectator sports. Swiss football has been undergoing a recent renaissance, with the national squad winning a surprising, and infamously bad-tempered,

play-off against Turkey to go into the 2006 World Cup. Although FC Basel and Zürich Grasshoppers still generally top the national league, FC Thun has also hit the international headlines with wins against Dynamo Kyiv and Sparta Prague in the European Champions League. Thun even gave London's mighty Arsenal a scare in 2005.

Of course, the biggest name in Swiss sport is tennis ace Roger Federer (at the time of writing still the unchallenged world number one). Additionally, former women's champion Martina Hingis hit the comeback trail late in 2005.

To check the latest cultural and sporting events in Switzerland, visit www.ticketcorner.com. Its booking line, ☎ 0900 800 800, costs Sfr1.19 per minute.

Tennis events include the Swiss Open in Gstaad (Allianz Suisse Swiss, p176) in July and an indoor tournament in Basel (p240) in October.

For traditional Swiss sports, see p49.

MULTICULTURALISM

Around 20% of people living in the country (more than 1.45 million) are immigrants who are residents but not Swiss citizens. This figure does *not* include the numerous seasonal workers, temporary residents, and international civil servants and administrators. Most of the permanent residents arrived after WWII, initially from Italy and Spain, and later from the former Yugoslavia.

The Swiss have reacted to this influx of immigrants as many other European countries. Parts of the populace appreciate the cultural wealth – and labour – these immigrants bring, while others have tended towards xenophobia. In 2002, a referendum trying to deny entry to asylum seekers arriving from other European countries was defeated by the narrowest of margins. A year later, however, the far-right SVP achieved enormous electoral success (see the boxed text The Swiss Way of Government, p30) and a proposed law to make naturalisation easier was voted down in a referendum.

MEDIA

Switzerland's media is mostly privately owned, although some broadcasters get state funding. It's independently minded, but can be worthy and conservative. The country's oldest and most distinguished organ is the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* founded in 1780 and now nicknamed the 'old aunt' for its fussy ways. (It's only begun putting photos on its front page in recent years.) The Geneva papers, especially *Le Temps,* provide an antidote, being progressive and pro-European.

The Swiss are bigger consumers of print media than TV, which is hardly surprising when you see how unexciting the broadcast fare is. Hundreds of small local newspapers dot the landscape to help feed this appetite for reading. For further details, see the boxed text Practicalities, p313.

THE NUMBERS GAME

Switzerland is virtually synonymous with numbered accounts and financial secrecy. It has seen the country become the fourth most important global financial centre, after New York, London and Tokyo, and the guardian of 27% of the world's offshore funds.

However, its policy of anonymity for account holders has also created damaging controversy. Since the 1990s scandal over dormant WWII accounts (see p30), banks have frozen accounts believed to belong to Al-Qaeda, agreed to tax accounts held by EU citizens and returned money looted from Nigeria by former dictator Sani Abacha.

Despite this, Swiss banks continue to have a reputation for opacity.

RELIGION

The country is split pretty evenly between Roman Catholicism (46%) and Protestantism (40%), mostly along cantonal lines that confusingly don't follow linguistic divisions. The main Protestant areas include Zürich, Geneva, Vaud, Thurgau, Neuchâtel and Glarus; strong Catholic areas include Valais, Ticino, Uri, Unterwalden and Schwyz, as well as Fribourg, Lucerne, Zug and Jura.

This split has been pivotal in the development of Swiss history and identity, but is less influential today. It still might have some residual bearing on, say, which school a Swiss person attends. However, in a recent nationwide poll, only 16% of the populace said religion was very important to them.

Assisted suicide is legal in Switzerland and much international debate, both for and against, has surrounded the role of Dignitas (www.dignitas.ch) in offering medical help to terminally or chronically ill foreign nationals who travel to the country.

WOMEN IN SWITZERLAND

Gender equality has been a latecomer to the party in Switzerland. Women only won the right to vote in federal elections in 1971 and, as late as 1990, they still weren't permitted to participate in communal voting in parts of Appenzellerland.

Their countrymen's tardiness in acceding to their demands for suffrage and greater workplace recognition has meant a desperate game of catch-up for Swiss feminists. Switzerland was ahead of many when in 1999 it elected a woman president – the high-profile Ruth Dreifuss, who was also the first Jewish president. However, the World Economic Forum's 2005 Gender Gap Index placed Switzerland 34th out of 58 countries, well behind the Scandinavian nations, the UK and the US.

ARTS

Many foreign writers and artists, such as Voltaire, Byron, Shelley and Turner, have visited and settled in Switzerland. However, many home-grown creatives leave Switzerland to make a name for themselves abroad (see the boxed text I Didn't Realise They Were Swiss, p38).

Visit the Arts Council of Switzerland, Pro Helvetia (www.pro-helvetia.ch) for information on innovative projects promoting Swiss culture, both at home and abroad.

Architecture

Switzerland's contribution to modern architecture has been pivotal, given that it's the birthplace of Le Corbusier (1887–1965), one of the most influential pioneers. Born Charles-Edouard Jeanneret-Gris in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Le Corbusier was famous for his economy of design, formalism and functionalism; without him, today's cities would look very different indeed. He spent most of his working life in France and his most famous constructions – Nôtre Dame du Haut chapel at Ronchamps in France and Chandigarh in India – are found outside Switzerland. However, the Villa Turque (Villa Schwob, see the boxed text The Concrete King, p112) can still be seen in his home town and the last building he ever designed is now a museum in Zürich (Le Corbusier Pavilion, p197).

Le Corbusier left a legacy of innovation and faith in modernism, which has helped contemporary Swiss architects push to the forefront. Basel-based partners Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron are undoubtedly the best known, as creators of London's Tate Modern gallery, 2001 winners of the prestigious Pritzker Prize and the designers of the main stadium for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. However, Ticino architect Mario Botta also enjoys an international reputation, especially as the creator of San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art. Both of these practices have several noteworthy buildings in Basel and Botta's Church of San Giovanni Battista in Mogno (p303) is outstanding.

Other noteworthy modern Swiss buildings include Peter Zumthor's award-winning Therme Vals (see the boxed text Spas & Thermal Springs, p47), and the Kirchner Museum (p276) in Davos by architects Annette Gigon and Mike Guyer. For more details, ask Switzerland Tourism (p322) for its free, 128-page *Art & Architecture* book.

Rural Swiss houses vary according to the region. The Freilichtmuseum Ballenberg (see p171) outside Brienz showcases a wide variety.

Literature

In her coffee-table tome *Eigentlich Sind Wir Anders* (*We're Different Actually*), photographer Christina Koerte visually subverts seven Swiss clichés, with ugly motorway service stations in Heidiland, an unheroic-looking William Tell and a cheeky look at Swiss food.

Thanks to a 1930s Shirley Temple film, Johanna Spyri's *Heidi* is the most famous Swiss novel. The story of a young orphan living with her grandfather in the Swiss Alps who is ripped away to the city is unashamedly sentimental and utterly atypical for Swiss literature. Otherwise, the genre is quite serious and gloomy.

Take the German-born, naturalised Swiss Hermann Hesse (1877–1962) for example. A Nobel Prize winner, he fused Eastern mysticism and Jungian psychology to advance the theory that Western civilisation is doomed unless humankind gets in touch with our own essential humanity – as in *Siddharta* (1922) and *Steppenwolf* (1927). Later novels, such as *Narzissus und Goldmund* (1930) and the cult *The Glass Bead Game* (1943), go on to explore the tension between individual freedom and social controls.

Similarly, the most recognised work by Zürich-born Max Frisch (1911–91), *Ich bin nicht Stiller* (1954; *I'm not Stiller/I'm not relaxed*) is a dark, Kafkaesque tale of mistaken identity. His *Homo Faber* (1957) examines how one engineer's cold-hearted affair with what turns out to be his daughter ultimately destroys them both. The book was adapted into the movie *Voyager*, with Sam Shepard and Julie Delpy, in 1991.

More accessible is Friedrich Dürrenmatt (1921–90), who created a rich seam of detective fiction. *Das Versprechen* (*The Pledge*), a little masterpiece about how much sheer dumb luck – or lack of it – shapes our existence, was turned into a love-it-or-loathe-it film in 2001 by Sean Penn (starring Jack Nicholson). As a playwright, Dürrenmatt even penned comedies, such as *The Physicists*.

Green Henry (1854), by Gottfried Keller (1819–1900), is a massive tome revolving around a Zürich student's reminiscences and is considered one of the masterpieces of Germanic literature.

Music & Dance

Yodelling and alphorns are the two traditional forms of Swiss 'music'. Yodelling began in the Alps as a means of communication between peaks, but became separated into two disciplines. *Juchzin* consists in short yells with different meanings such as 'it's dinner time' or 'we're coming'. In *Naturjodel*, one or more voices sing a melody without lyrics.

Alphorns were used in the mountains to herd cattle. Long wind instruments 2m to 4m in length, they have a curved base and a cup-shaped mouthpiece. To learn more and see them made, visit Alphornbau Stocker (p221) outside Lucerne.

There's a symphony orchestra in every main city and music festivals throughout the year. Two of the most famous festivals, with worldwide reputations, are the Lucerne Festival (p217) and the Montreux Jazz Festival (p90).

Yodelling has recently become trendy with Swiss city slickers, who find it an excellent way of releasing stress. Award-winning folk singer Nadja Räss has been at the revival's forefront, releasing two solo CDs.

One performance group definitely worth seeing is Öff Öff (www.oeffoeff.ch), which tours using a transportable 'Air Station' (rotating climbing frame) and has been described as a combination of dance and (how very Swiss!) mountaineering.

Painting, Sculpture & Design

Aside from Dada (see the boxed text Completely Dada, p199), there haven't been many Swiss art movements. Homegrown painters and sculptors tend to be more individualistic. The painter who most concerned himself with Swiss themes was Ferdinand Hodler (1853–1918); he depicted folk heroes, like William Tell (see Kunstmuseum, p192), and events from history, such as the first grassroots Swiss vote (see Kunthaus, p197). Hodler also remained resident in Switzerland, unlike many fellow Swiss artists.

Abstract artist and colour specialist Paul Klee (1879–1940) spent most of his life in Germany, including with the Bauhaus school, although the largest showcase of his work is in Bern (see Paul Klee Centre, p183).

Swissworld (www.swissworld.org) offers a quick rundown on most aspects of Switzerland, from people and culture to science and economy.

Likewise, the sculptor Alberto Giacometti (1901–66) spent most of his working life in Paris, but many of his trademark stick figures have made it back to Zürich (see the Kunsthaus, p197).

Many quirky sculptures by the Paris-based Jean Tinguely (1925–91) are clustered around Basel. In fact, there's a museum (p237) dedicated to the sculptor and one of his fountains (p239) is also here.

One area where the Swiss tend to excel collectively is in graphic design. The 'new graphics' of Josef Muller-Brockmann (1914–96) and Max Bill (1908–94) are still extremely well regarded, as is the branding work by Karl Gerstner (1930–) for IBM, and the **Büro Destruct** (www.burodestruct.net) studio's typefaces (seen on many music album covers).

The country is also strong in product design and installation art. It gave the world Cow Parade – the different processions of life-sized, painted fibreglass cows that have decorated several different cities around the globe. The first herd, of more than 800 cows, had their outing in Zürich in 1998, and stray animals can still be found lurking around the country. Pipilotti Rist (1962–), whose City Lounge (Stadtlounge, p253) stands in St Gallen, also falls into this category.

MY NAME IS...

The file on Swiss film is pretty thin, with few of the nation's movies having been released abroad. However, in 2005, locals were enjoying one home-grown hit that's not likely to be forgotten easily. Hilariously Swiss, *Mein Name ist Eugen* (My Name is Eugene) went on to win the national film prize that year.

Based on a popular children's book from 1955 from Klaus Schädelin, it follows 12-year-old Eugen and his rascally three friends as they journey from Bern to the mountains and down to Zürich in search of long-lost treasure.

In 2006, the same production team released another movie about events that at least created a blip on the international radar. *Grounding*, about the 2001 bankruptcy of national airline Swissair at least got overseas press coverage, if not – at the time of writing – a worldwide release.

ON HIS SOAPBOX

Switzerland is full of private galleries selling works to collectors, and a popular buy recently has been the work of Gianni Motti (1958–). This Italian artist has made Switzerland his home and, when not selling bars of soap made from Silvio Berlusconi's liposuctioned fat for US$18,000, he makes headlines pulling 'artistic' stunts.

I DIDN'T REALISE THEY WERE SWISS

Switzerland has always attracted celebrities – famous non-Swiss residents and former residents include Charlie Chaplin, Yehudi Menuhin, Audrey Hepburn, Richard Burton, Peter Ustinov, Roger Moore, Tina Turner, Phil Collins, the Aga Khan, Michael Schumacher and *Wallpaper* magazine founder Tyler Brûlé. Yet plenty of native Swiss have made their mark on the world stage too. Some people you may not immediately think of as Swiss include the following:

Ursula Andress (1936–) Actress, most famous for her bikini-clad appearance in the James Bond flick *Dr No*.

Sepp (Joseph) Blatter (1936–) Outspoken president of FIFA, world football's governing body.

Alain de Botton (1969–) Pop philosopher and globally best-selling author of the *Art of Travel* etc, who was born in Zürich.

Louis Chevrolet (1878–1941) Founder of the Chevrolet Manufacturing Company in 1911, producer of archetypal 'American' automobiles.

Le Corbusier (1887–1965) Architectural innovator, often believed to be French.

Carla del Ponte (1947–) Tough-gal public prosecutor at the International Criminal Court who's taken on former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic.

Marc Forster (1969–) Oscar-winning director of *Monster's Ball* and *Finding Neverland*.

Albert Hofmann (1906–) The first person to synthesise and experiment with lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD).

Jean-Luc Godard (1930–) More-Swiss-than-French avant-garde film-maker.

Elisabeth Kübler Ross (1926–2004) Psychiatrist whose *On Death and Dying* articulated the famous five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

Erich von Däniken (1935–) Expounder of far-fetched early-history theories in the 1970s bestseller *Chariots of the Gods?*

SCIENCE

Science is important in Switzerland. The formula 'E=MC²' was coined by Albert Einstein when he was living in Bern (see Einstein Museum, p182) and the World Wide Web was born at the CERN (European Organisation for Nuclear Research) research institute (p66) outside Geneva. Furthermore, the Swiss themselves have more registered patents and more Nobel Prize winners (most in scientific disciplines) per head of population than any other nationality.

Helvetica: Homage to a Typeface, by Lars Müller, highlights Switzerland's pre-eminence on planet design, with a paean to an iconic font that appears everywhere from US tax forms to Windows and Mac iPhoto software.

The country's pharmaceuticals industry is a major contributor to the economy, which makes it hardly surprising that Swiss voters take a very liberal approach when voting on issues like allowing stem-cell research. The two Swiss pharmaceutical giants are Novartis and Roche (the manufacturer of the much sought-after antiviral drug Tamiflu). Both are among the world's top 40 companies, according to the *Financial Times* newspaper.

Nestlé, founded in Switzerland more than 100 years ago, remains the world's biggest consumer food firm.

Environment

THE LAND

Landlocked Switzerland – sandwiched between Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein, Italy and France – is essentially an Alpine country. The magnificent Alps and Pre-Alps in the centre and south make up 60% of the modest 41,285 sq km that Switzerland clocks on the European map. The mightily less-known, mysterious Jura Mountains in the west comprise another 10% and central Mittelland (otherwise known as the Plateau Central) makes up the rest. Farming of cultivated land is intensive, cows being moved to upper slopes to graze on lush summer grass as soon as the retreating snow line allows.

Meadow and pasture make up 45% of Swiss land, forest 24% and arable fields 6%.

It is here that Europe's highest elevations smugly sit. The Dufourspitze (Dufour Peak; 4634m) of Monte Rosa in the Alps is Switzerland's highest point, but the Matterhorn (4478m) with its dramatic pyramidal cap is way better known; inhale incredulous views of it on the Zermatt–Gornergrat cogwheel train (p134) or while skiing in its shadow. Then of course there's Mont Blanc (4807m), a hulk of a mountain – Europe's highest to boot – shared with France and Italy. Enjoy the Swiss side of it with the Mont-Blanc Express (p122), Mont Blanc circuit (p124) or a simple stroll (on a clear day) along Geneva's Quai du Mont-Blanc (p65).

Southern Switzerland contains a series of high mountain passes that provide overland access into Italy. Glaciers account for a total area of 2000 sq km; most notable is the Aletsch Glacier, the largest valley glacier in Europe with an area of 169 sq km. Several glaciers proffer summer skiing, memorably the Glacier de Tsanfleuron (3000m) in Les Diablerets (p95).

Lakes are dotted everywhere except in the gentle Jura (p114) where the substrata rock is too brittle and porous. (These mountains peak at around 1700m and are less steep and less severely eroded than the Alps.) The most prolific source of lakes and rivers, including the mighty Rhine and Rhône, is central Switzerland's St Gotthard Massif (p233). The Rhône remains a torrent from its source to Martigny, from where it then flows west to create Europe's largest Alpine lake and Switzerland's best-known – Lake Geneva (Lac Léman in French).

Man meets Matterhorn in *Scrambles Amongst the Alps*, a mountaineering classic in which Edward Whymper describes his breathtaking ascent of Switzerland's most famous mountain in 1869 and the tragedy that befell his team coming down.

From Lake Geneva in the southwest the Mittelland runs in a band to the Bodensee (Lake Constance) in the northeast. This region of hills is crisscrossed by rivers, ravines and winding valleys; it contains the most populous cities and is where much of the farming takes place. The sole canton entirely south of the Alps is Ticino, home to the northern part of Lago Maggiore. At 193m, this lake is the lowest point in the country.

WILDLIFE

With some of Europe's largest mountains and lakes and some of the strongest environmental legislation in its green fold, Switzerland's wildlife portfolio is rich, but not without risk. Experts reckon the last 150 years have blasted 200-odd plant and animal species in Switzerland into extinction, lark and otter included – and dozens more (such as the freshwater mussel, pretty purple monkey orchid and 81 bird species) hover on the brink.

Animals

The bearded vulture with its unsavoury bone-breaking habits and awe-inspiring 3m wing span only remains in the wild thanks to reintroduction

RULES OF THE WILD

- Leave the rural environment as you found it.
- Stick to the marked paths when hiking. Short cuts straight down a slope could be transformed into a watercourse during the next heavy rainfall and cause soil erosion.
- Don't pick Alpine wildflowers; they really do look lovelier on the mountainsides.
- Farm gates should be left as you found them.
- Approach wildlife with discretion; moving too close will unnerve wild animals.
- Don't light fires, except in established fireplaces.
- Take everything you bring into the mountains out again: rubbish, used packaging, cigarette butts and used tampons included.
- If you really can't avoid leaving some memento of your visit, such as faeces, bury it in the ground at least 100m away from any watercourse.

programmes pursued by Alpine national parks, Swiss National Park (opposite) included. Extinct in the Alps by the 19th century, 21 captive-bred baby vultures in all were released into the park's Stabelchod Valley between 1991 and 2001, where they have since bred successfully and continue to prey. Since June 2005 the park has tracked two young bearded vultures live-time using satellite telemetry as part of a European project aimed at better understanding the vulture.

Follow young bearded vultures, Folio and Natura, as they flit around the Swiss National Park marked with satellite transmitters as part of the Bearded Vultures on the Move web project (www.wild.unizh.ch/bg). Get the background scoop at the Foundation Pro Bearded Vulture (www.bartgeier.ch).

The European kestrel and golden eagle are other impressive birds to spot in protected Swiss Alpine skies. More plentiful than the vulture, the eagle nests with vigour in the Graubünden area and munches its way through marmots in summer, ungulate carcasses in winter. Markedly smaller is the Alpendohle, a relative of the crow; look for a flutter of jet-black feathers and yellow beak around mountain tops.

The most distinctive Alpine animal is the ibex, a mountain goat with huge curved and ridged horns. There are about 12,000 of them left in Switzerland and they migrate up to 3000m altitude. The chamois (a horned antelope) is more timid but equally at home on the peaks – it can leap 4m vertically. Marmots (chunky rodents related to the squirrel) are also famous residents, although they are hard to spot given they spend most of their lives darting in a maze of underground burrows or metres-long tunnels to escape from hungry predators. Come September, marmots hibernate, body temperatures bizarrely shooting every fortnight from between 3°C and 6°C to 38°C, where they remain for two days before plummeting back down to single digits. The reintroduced European lynx, mountain hare, ermine, weasel and fox are other Alpine residents, as is – experts say with bated breath – the European brown bear. Hunted into extinction in Switzerland by 1904, the lumbering mammal made a couple of controversial appearances when one crossed over the border from Italy in 2005 (see the boxed text A Little Animal Magic, p280).

The ibex was extinct in the Graubünden by 1650, prompting an enterprising soul a couple of centuries and a bit later to poach a couple from the Italian royal herd. In 1920 the first ibex bred from the pair was released into the Swiss National Park.

The rutting season in September and early October is easily the most impressive time to spot roe deer and larger red deer in forested regions and Alpine pastures. Fights can be fierce as stags defend their harem of hinds from other stoked-up males. With the rutting season done and dusted, the deer abandon Alpine pastures like the Swiss National Park for the sunnier slopes of warmer valleys like Engadine, Val Mustair and Vinschgau.

The noisy nutcracker with its distinctive sound and white-speckled brown plumage can be seen or heard practically everywhere you turn on pine forest hiking paths, be it on a Swiss National Park information panel (the nutcracker is the park's symbol) or high in a tree plucking out cone seeds with its long beak or stashing away nuts for the coming winter. Another ornithological treat – look out for it on rocky slopes and in Alpine meadows above 2000m – is the rock ptarmigan, a chicken-like species that has been around since the Ice Age, which moults three times a year to ensure a foolproof camouflage for every season (brown in summer, white in winter).

Where to Watch Birds in Switzerland, by Marco Sacchi, Peter Ruegg and Jacques Laesser, is the definitive guide to birdwatching in Switzerland. It details 45 sights countrywide, including best times to spot them.

Plants

Climatic variation means that vegetation ranges from palm trees in Ticino to Nordic flora in the Alps. At higher altitudes, flowers bloom April to July, species depending. The famous Edelweiss, with star-shaped flowers, grows up to 3500m altitude. Alpine rhododendrons, known locally as Alpenroses, are numerous at 2500m. Spring gentians are small, violet-blue flowers. White crocuses are early bloomers (from March) at lower elevations.

Trees are a mixture of deciduous and conifers in the Mittelland. At an elevation of 800m conifers become more numerous. The red spruce is common at lower levels, while the arolla pine (*Arve* or *Zirbe* in German) and larch mostly take over higher up. At around 2000m, tall trees are replaced by bushes and scrub, which then finally give way to Alpine meadows.

NATIONAL PARKS

Switzerland has just one national park, predictably called **Swiss National Park** (www.nationalpark.ch). Created in 1914, it gives hard-core protection to 172.4 sq km of coniferous forest (28%), alpine grassland (21%) and scree, rock or high mountains (51%) around Zernez (p280) in eastern Switzerland. Ibex, marmots and chamois are commonplace, 1800 to 2000 red deer roam around free as birds in summer, while the bearded vulture (reintroduced in 1991) is a rare treat for eagle-eyed visitors in the Stabelchod Valley. The main activity in the park is walking although it is limited, visitors being forbidden to stray off the 80km of designated footpaths. From November to May the entire national park is off-limits full stop.

Switzerland's Prix Ecosport awards sporting events (such as the Engadine Ski Marathon or Locarno Triathlon) that boost environmental awareness; read about past winners at www.prix-ecosport.ch, in German, French and Italian.

Since 2000, Swiss conservation group ProNatura (see the boxed text Green Card, below) has been campaigning for the creation of another national park in Switzerland by 2010. State funding of Sfr10 million a year was approved in June 2005 on the back of the completion of feasibility studies aimed at locating the new national park: nature-rich hot contenders

GREEN CARD

Environmental and wildlife organisations in Switzerland include:

Alpine Initiative (☎ 041 870 97 81, 027 924 22 26; www.alpeninitiative.ch; Kapuzinerweg 6, Altdorf) Mainly concerned with Alpine transport routes.

Birdlife Switzerland (☎ 044 457 70 20; www.birdlife.ch; Postfach Wiedingstr 78, Zürich) Swiss birdlife protection; visitor centres near Zürich and Berne.

Greenpeace Switzerland (www.greenpeace.ch in German & French) German speaking (☎ 044 447 41 41; Heinrichstrasse 147, 8031 Zürich); French speaking (☎ 022 731 02 09; Case Postale 1558, 1211 Geneva 1)

ProNatura French speaking (☎ 024 425 0372; www.pronatura.ch; Champ Pittet, 1400 Yverdon les Bains); German speaking (☎ 061 317 91 91; Postfach, 4018 Basel) Switzerland's largest conservation NGO dating to 1909 and responsible for national park and nature reserve management.

Wildlife Switzerland (☎ 044 635 61 31; www.wild.unizh.ch; Strickhofstrasse 39, Zürich)

WWF Switzerland (☎ 044 297 21 21; www.wwf.ch in German, French & Italian; Hohlstrasse 110, 8010 Zürich)

SUPPORT THE LOCAL ECONOMY – LEASE A COW!

Ramona, Ginette, Finette and a herd of other Alpine beauties with eyelashes to die for are there for the milking at **Wylerhof** (☎ 033 951 31 60; www.kuhleasing.ch in German & French; Stockmatte, Brienz), an Alpine dairy farm run by Helga and Paul Wyler in the Bernese Oberland. Lease the cow of your choice online for a month (Sfr2009) or the season (June to September Sfr380), invest half a day's manual labour on the farm and get 70kg to 100kg of cheese from your cow at a reduced rate.

include 600 sq km in Adula/Rheinwaldhorn near the San Bernardino Pass, a 349 sq km patch west of Locarno, 350 sq km snug against Matterhorn-proud Zermatt, and a pocket of the Muverans region.

A further 20% of Swiss land is protected to a substantially lesser degree by 600-odd nature parks, reserves and protected landscapes sprinkled around the country.

Two of the country's most precious sights deemed sufficiently incredible to star on Unesco's list of World Heritage Sights are green: pyramid-shaped Monte San Giorgio (1096m; p299), south of Lago di Lugano in Ticino, which safeguards the world's best fossil record of Triassic marine life from 245 to 230 million years ago; and southwestern Switzerland's spectacular Jungfrau-Aletsch-Bietschhorn mountain region (p139), where the Bernese Alps safeguard Europe's largest glacier and a rash of other equally stunning glacial creations.

Listen to the noise pollution of a jet plane; find out how much waste from households and small businesses is recycled annually; or hone in on an interactive air pollutant map at the Federal Office for the Environment (Bundesamt für Umwelt) at www.umwelt-schweiz.ch.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Switzerland is extremely environmentally friendly, its citizens producing less than 400kg of waste each per year (half the figure for the USA). To say the Swiss are even more diligent recyclers than the Germans, with households religiously separating waste into different categories prior to collection, speaks volumes.

Hydroelectric power meets almost 60% of the country's energy demands and five Swiss nuclear power stations built between 1969 and 1984 provide the rest – and will continue to do so following the electorate's rejection in 2003 of an extension of a 10-year moratorium on the building of new plants that expired in 2000 and the *Strom ohne Atom* proposal calling for the closure of Switzerland's nuclear plants by 2014.

Gem up on Swiss ozone facts, figures and daily readings at www.ozone-info.ch (in German, French and Italian).

Mountain protection is of paramount importance in a country where the vast majority of land is Alpine, that shelters fragile ecosystems particularly vulnerable to pollution and environmental damage – and that receives 120 million-odd visitors a year. Global warming could have a serious impact on Switzerland because of the effect on Alpine glaciers. Since the 1950s the federal government has introduced various measures to protect forests, lakes and marshland from environmental damage and in 1991 it signed the Alpine Convention, which seeks to reduce damage caused by motor traffic and tourism.

Air pollution caused by vehicle emissions remains a major issue, with larger cities like Geneva tackling the problem head-on by introducing alternative circulation of vehicles with odd-/even-number plates in summer when ozone levels hit unacceptable highs. Reducing speed limits on motorways and encouraging motorists to leave their cars at home on chosen 'slow-up' days (www.slowup.ch in German and French) is another means of controlling air pollution. On a national level the country is gallantly trying to switch freight carriage from road to rail, which is less harmful to the environment; see the boxed text Road Tolls, p325 for details.

Outdoor Activities

Rafting, cycling, hiking, skiing, canyoning, snow golf, zorbing – Switzerland offers a world of adventure for the wild at heart. And those sports are only half of it. In a Victorian-era postcard sold at the Tourism Museum in Interlaken, a cartoonist imagines how, for example, *Die Jungfrau in der Zukunft* (the Jungfrau Region in the future) will appear. Dated 1896, the card envisages crowds of mountain-climbers trekking up glaciers as skiers slither downwards, and shows small planes zooming overhead while thrill-seekers paraglide off mountaintops. Apart from the Mary Poppins–style umbrellas used by the latter – and the big-bottomed women being carried by the gentleman hikers – it's a surprisingly prophetic rendition of much of the Swiss landscape today.

Waffenlaufen is a uniquely Swiss race, where participants dress in military uniform and carry a rucksack and rifle over an 18km to 42km course.

ADVENTURE SPORTS

Rafting and canyoning are the two extreme sports most readily associated with Switzerland, and these and other adventure activities are mainly clustered around Interlaken (see p146), Lucerne (p217) and Engelberg (see p231). However, the best white-water rafting happens in Graubünden.

One of the largest operators with bases across the country is **Swissraft** (www.swissraft.ch). Otherwise look in individual chapters and destinations.

Activities include the following:

Bungee jumping/canyon jumping Tied by your ankle (bungee jumping) or your midriff (canyon jumping) to a long line, you leap off a cliff – before you look (from Sfr125).

Canyoning Described by some as 'white-water rafting without the boat', this controversial sport involves abseiling down waterfalls, rock-climbing and swimming through massive gorges. All in protective gear, of course (from Sfr110).

Hydrospeeding Kitted out in a helmet, wetsuit and scuba fins, participants lie on their stomachs, on top of specially designed, surfboard-like 'rafts' and ride the wild rivers, for example, in Graubünden (from Sfr120).

Zorbing This is an extreme sport even the faint of heart could comfortably choose (although perhaps not after a heavy night's drinking). You're strapped safely inside an inflated ball, inside another inflated ball, before being pushed head-over-heels down a hill. People who've zorbed in New Zealand say Swiss mountains are too steep to allow the leisurely roll-out that's the real thrill. But if Interlaken's closer than Rotorua, now's no time to compare (from Sfr95).

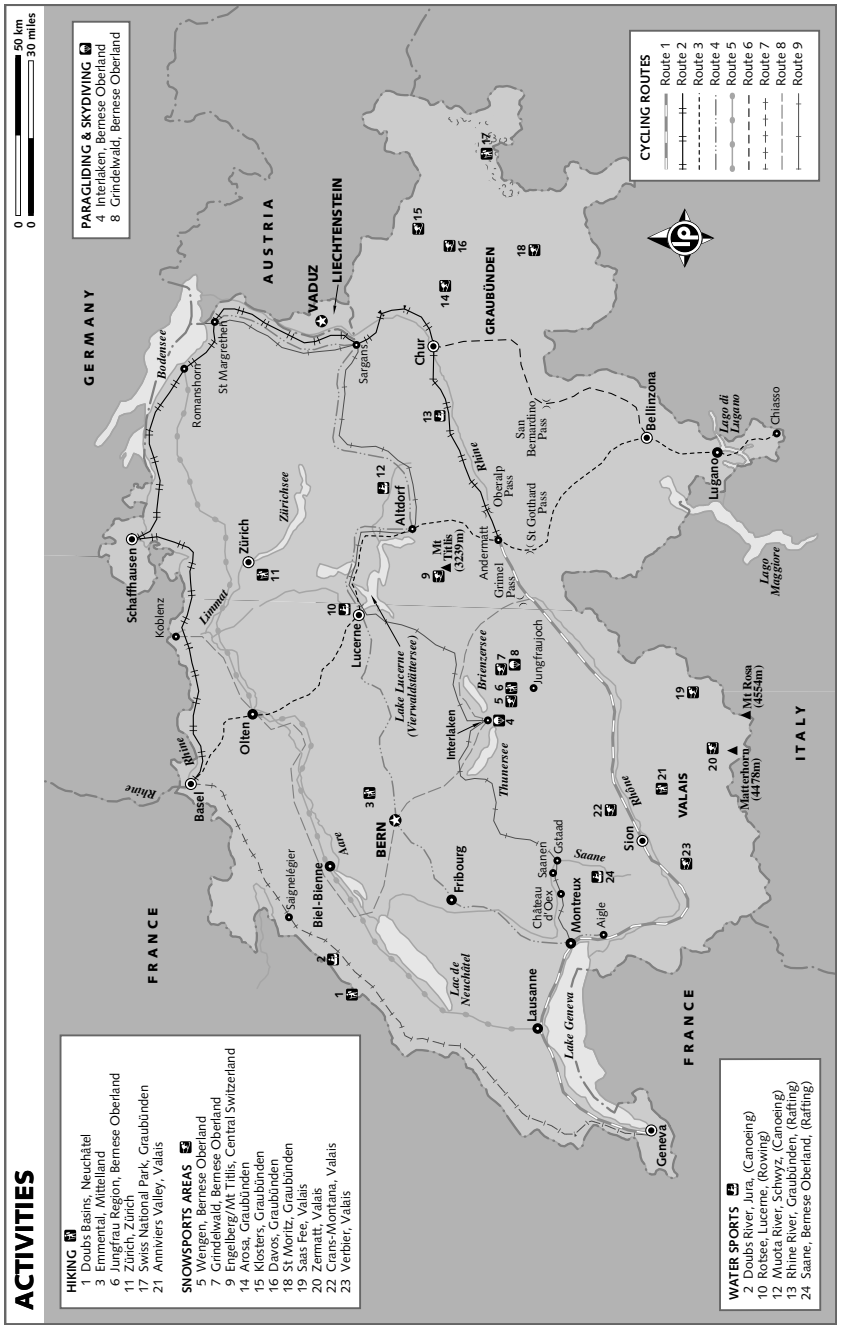
AERIAL SPORTS

There are more than 600 hot-air balloons in Switzerland, but **Château d'Oex** (www.chateau-doex.ch) is the best-known hub for this activity (from Sfr350). It's been the launch site for many round-the-world ballooning adventures, including the successful Breitling Orbiter journey in 1999 and some of Richard Branson's attempts. Every January the town hosts the **Semaine Internationale de Ballons à Air Chaud** (International Hot Air Balloon Week; www.festivaldeballons.ch), which is worth seeing just for the novelty-shape balloons. See also p96.

Paragliding and hang-gliding (from Sfr170) are possible just about anywhere there are mountains. Skydiving (from Sfr380) is also popular.

CYCLING

Thankfully, to enjoy cycling in Switzerland you don't have to be as good in the mountains as a Tour de France rider. Most bike paths, including the network of well-signposted national cycle routes, avoid too many



GETTING IT COVERED

Whether you're simply going hiking, or you plan to canyon down a white-water river, it's important to have the right insurance. Mountain rescue can be very expensive, as can health care in Switzerland generally. Normal policies don't cover many of the activities in this section. You will need to pay a premium for winter-sports cover. Further premiums are necessary for adventure sports like bungee jumping and canyoning.

The vast majority of adventures pass off without injury. However, there's always a risk. There have been two tragic adventure-sports accidents in Switzerland in recent years (see p146), so back up your insurance by asking about the safety standards of the company you choose.

hills, following the courses of lakes or rivers instead. In a country that often seems to live by the motto 'two wheels good, four wheels bad', you'll find drivers are pretty courteous if you cycle on roads, there are lots of rental outlets (including numerous train stations) and you will have few problems transporting your bike by train (see p328).

There are 3300km of major national cycling routes in Switzerland. Between 1998 and 2004, when the Swiss postal service issued a special stamp, it was estimated that cyclists clocked up between 130 and 150 million kilometres on these paths.

Just about everything you could ever need while planning a cycling tour in Switzerland is available via **Veloland Schweiz** (www.veloland.ch, www.cycling-in-switzerland.ch), which includes details of lesser, regional trails as well as the following nine national routes:

Aare Route From the Grimsel Pass to Koblenz via Interlaken, Bern and Olten.
Alpine Panorama Route From St Margrethen on the Austrian border to Aigle near Lake Geneva, via Altdorf, Lake Lucerne and Fribourg.
Graubünden Route From Bellinzona to Chur.
Jura Route From Basel to Geneva running close to the northwestern border of the country.
Lakes Route From Lac Leman at Montreux to the southeastern end of the Bodensee near St Margrethen, via Gstaad, Lucerne and Sargans.
Mittelland Route From Lausanne on Lac Leman to Romanshorn on the Bodensee, via Biel, Olten and close to Zürich airport.
North–South Route From Basel to Chiasso via Lucerne, Andermatt and Lugano.
Rhine Route From Basel to Andermatt via Schaffhausen, the Bodensee (Lake Constance) and Chur.
Rhône Route From Geneva to Andermatt via Lausanne, Montreux and Sion.

All routes are well signposted in red with a bicycle icon. Hard-copy maps, should you want one, are also available from most Swiss bookshops or Switzerland Tourism (Sfr19.90).

HIKING

With 50,000km of designated paths (German: *Wanderweg,* French: *sentier*) at their disposal, it's no wonder the Swiss are mad-keen hikers and it's pretty easy for holidaymakers to join them. Bright-yellow direction signs along the trail make it difficult to get lost, and each usually gives an average walking time to the next destination. Of course, you should always wear proper hiking boots and take rain gear and a water bottle.

To learn a little bit about the history of Nordic walking, as well as the best techniques, head to www.nordicwalkingonline.com. The German-language www.nordic-walking-online.de is more comprehensive and less commercial.

Trails are colour-coded according to difficulty. When yellow markers are painted on trees alongside a path, it's considered suitable for everybody. At higher altitudes, signs and markers for mountain paths (German: *Bergweg,* French: *sentier de montagne*) are painted white-red-white. These paths are deemed to be more suitable for experienced mountain walkers, though anybody with reasonable fitness and sturdy, nonslip footwear should be OK. High Alpine routes are white-blue-white.

Using poles to swing your upper body in the Nordic walking technique burns 400 calories an hour on average, compared to the 280 for normal walking, and causes your heart to speed up by an extra five to 17 beats per minute.

Some of the best hiking is in the Jungfrau Region, where you will find trails of varying difficulty and length. There's a fantastic all-day trail stretching from Grindelwald-First to Schynige Platte (or vice versa), and a much shorter, easy walk from Männlichen to Kleine Scheidegg. In the Swiss National Park (see p280) you can combine hiking with some wildlife-spotting.

One local passion is Nordic walking. If you see people rhythmically swinging themselves between two walking poles, don't be taken aback; they're simply working their upper bodies more and giving themselves a better cardio work-out. You might want to try it yourself. Snowshoe hiking is another recent trend in winter. For more details, see www.myswitzerland.com.

For walking suggestions and detailed route descriptions, see Lonely Planet's *Walking in Switzerland* by Clem Lindenmayer. Walks are detailed and accompanied by lots of maps.

The **Schweizer Wanderwegen SAW** (Swiss Hiking Federation; ☎ 061 606 93 40; www.swisshiking.ch in German; Im Hirshalm 49, CH-4125 Riehen) organises guided walking tours and produces good hiking maps. The **Schweizer Alpenclub** (Swiss Alpine Club; ☎ 031 370 18 18; www.sac-cas.ch in German & French; Monbijoustrasse 61, CH-3001 Bern) maintains huts for overnight stays at altitude; see p313.

MOUNTAINEERING

Many books have been published on Switzerland's notoriously difficult Eiger mountain – from Heinrich Harrer's seminal *The White Spider* to Joe Simpson's *The Beckoning Silence*. Those planning to ascend the mountain themselves might appreciate Daniel Anker's photographic and historical record *Eiger: The Vertical Arena*.

There are well-established mountaineering schools in Pontresina and Meiringen, and in many other locations. Zermatt is perhaps the most famous destination for experienced mountaineers, although the Eiger mountain in the Jungfrau Region is also popular. Ski mountaineering is also popular along the Haute Route in Valais. Verbier (p124), Zermatt (p135) and Saas Fee (p137) all offer good mountaineering.

The best organisation to contact is the **Verband Bergsportschulen Schweiz/Association Suisse des Ecoles D'Alpinisme** (Swiss Mountain Sports School Association; ☎ 027 922 08 03; www.bergsportschulen.ch; Haus der Wirtschaft, Kerhstrasse 12, CH-3904, Naters), which has details of the 32 leading schools. Otherwise, try the **Swiss Mountain Guides' Association** (www.4000plus.ch), with its list of individual qualified guides. The **Schweizer Alpenclub** (☎ 031 370 18 18; www.sac-cas.ch in German & French; Monbijoustrasse 61, CH-3001 Bern) has details of mountain huts.

Mountaineering is not for the uninitiated and you should never climb on your own, or without being properly equipped/attired.

NOVELTY SPORTS

Switzerland is such a sports-loving nation that people have invented activities, or borrowed traditional activities from other countries, in their restless quest to test their limits.

Look out for the following throughout individual regions, although a high percentage of them seem to be offered in St Moritz.

A comprehensive source on spas and thermal baths in Switzerland is www.heilbad.org, although its information is reproduced in only German and French.

Ski-joring Racers are pulled along on skis behind horses in this Scandinavian sport that came to Switzerland in the early 20th century. Several tournaments are still held around St Moritz (www.whiteturf.ch, www.stmoritz-concours.ch in German).

Dog-sledding Take the reins on a team of huskies, helped by an experienced driver (from Sfr6 for short runs, including on Jungfraujoch).

Cricket-on-ice (www.cricket-on-ice.com) Exactly as the name suggests, this is a tournament of the newly trendy gentleman's game on ice, which has been held by an eccentric mix of English, Swiss and Asian cricket lovers in St Moritz every February since 1989.

Trotti-biking Essentially the country cousin of the mini-scooter so popular with urban hipsters in the late 1990s, the Trotti-bike is used for whizzing down rural hills. Expect to pay Sfr15-20.

SPAS & THERMAL SPRINGS

If just the thought of all the adrenaline-pumping on these pages has you crying out for a nice cup of (herbal) tea and a good lie down, there are dozens of Swiss spas, clinics and health resorts where you can rest your feet, and submit yourself to world-class pampering. The following is just a small selection of leading spas and treatment centres; for more details contact **Switzerland Tourism** (www.myswitzerland.com), which produces a *Wellbeing* booklet.

Fashionable Spas

Clinique la Prairie (☎ 021 989 33 11; www.laprairie.ch in French; Clarens-Montreux; beautymed/revitalisation programmes per week from Sfr11,000/17,200) Switzerland's most famous spa, Clinique la Prairie is where the famous and *seriously* wealthy come for a complete anti-ageing overhaul. Specialising in 'scientific rejuvenation', or 'beautymed' treatments, it offers heavy-duty procedures like muscle-toning via electrical pulsing, microdermabrasion, botox, rejuvenating injections and even plastic surgery, as well as more usual spa treatments like whirlpool baths and (water-based) thalassotherapy.

Le Mirador (☎ 021 925 11 11; www.kempinski-mirador.com; Mont Pélerin, Montreux/Vevey; 2-night spa packages per person from Sfr700, spa day packages from Sfr310) One of Switzerland's finest grand-luxe resorts, Le Mirador has fabulous views of Lake Geneva, even from its glass-domed indoor/outdoor pool. Its relaxing Givenchy Spa offers facials, body wraps and stone therapy, plus anti-ageing and weight-loss programmes.

Park Hotel Weggis (☎ 081 926 80 80; www.phw.ch; Weggis; spa cottages per 2hr from Sfr260, s/d from Sfr340/515) The stand-out feature of this designer hotel's award-winning 'wellness' centre is its six private 'spa cottages' surrounded by a Japanese meditation garden. The cottages (open 10am to 9pm daily) contain a range of saunas, baths and whirlpools; one even has a TV and stereo. Massages and other treatments are offered here, and you can order milk baths or champagne for romantic breaks.

Hotel Crans Ambassador (☎ 027 485 48 48; www.crans-ambassador.ch; Crans-Montana; 2-night spa packages per person from Sfr790) The renowned Mességué-Phytotherm Centre here concentrates on detoxification through the use of medicinal plants, offering facials, Jacuzzi, hammam, herbal teas, cabbage compresses, massages and colonic irrigation.

Thermal Springs

These are among the more outstanding of the thermal bath options in Switzerland.

Therme Vals (☎ 081 926 80 80; www.therme-vals.ch; Vals) is one for the architectural buff. Peter Zumthor's award-winning building has been fashioned from concrete and quartzite to make it appear as if it's been hewn from rock. Inside, there's a Turkish bath, a deck pool with brilliant views and treatments including lymphatic drainage, thalassotherapy, reflexology, body peels and massages (foot, shiatsu, pregnancy or Hawaiian Lomi-Lomi, to name just a few). See p271.

Leukerbad (www.leukerbad.ch; Valais), at 1411m, is Europe's highest spa and pours out 3.9 million litres of water daily into 22 baths, six of them public. The best choice is either the huge **Burgerbad** (☎ 027 472 20 20; www.burgerbad.ch) with 10 thermal pools, a steam bath and Kneipp treatments, or **Lindner Alpentherme** (☎ 027 472 10 10; www.alpentherme.ch, www.lindner.de), combining centuries-old Roman-Irish baths with Chinese and Ayurveda treatments. See p132.

Wonderfully located between Lac de Neuchâtel and the Jura mountains, Yverdon-les-Bains, in Vaud, is known for its 14,000-year-old mineral springs. The waters are particularly good for arthritis/rheumatism or breathing difficulties, and are found in abundance at the modern **Centre Thermal** (☎ 024 423 02 32; www.cty.ch in French). This complex has three pools (both indoor and outdoor), whirlpool baths and treatment rooms. See p92.

More Roman-Irish baths are found at the **Engadin Bad Scuol** (☎ 081 861 20 00; www.scuol.ch; Scuol, Graubünden), with superb views of the Lower Engadine. See p279.

For something a bit different, try **Natur-Moorbad, Gontenbad, Appenzellerland** (☎ 071 795 31 23; www.naturbad.ch; Gontenbad, Appenzellerland) where you can dip in water from the moors (Sfr16) to help with stress or skin conditions, or luxuriate in a pampering rose bath (Sfr60 for two).

AVALANCHE WARNING

On average, 200 people a year are killed in the Alps by avalanches, and in Switzerland alone there are about 10,000 avalanches annually. Despite modern measures to help prevent them – ie crisscross metal barriers above resorts to prevent snow slips, controlled explosions to prevent dangerous build-up of snow and resorts' warning systems involving flags or flashing lights – skiers and boarders should never be complacent. Avalanche warnings should be heeded, and local advice sought before detouring from prepared runs.

Research suggests that most fatal avalanches are caused by the victims. So if you're going off-piste, or hiking in snowy areas, never go alone, take an avalanche shovel to dig out injured companions and be careful around narrow valleys below or close to ridges.

People's chances of being found and rescued are improved if they carry – and most importantly know how to use – a special avalanche radio transceiver. Such equipment is expensive, but it's foolhardy to forget it. Many boarders and off-piste skiers also now take a self-inflating avalanche balloon, which, if the worst happens, is designed to keep its owner above or close to the surface of the snow.

SKIING

Although budget travellers have turned their attention to the slopes in Eastern Europe, Switzerland still offers some of the best downhill skiing on the continent. Its big-name resorts, including Crans-Montana, Saas-Fee, Verbier and Zermatt, aren't cheap, but they are incredibly well equipped. The season generally lasts from mid-December to late March, although higher temperatures in recent years have curtailed the season. Nevertheless, at higher altitudes, some skiing is still possible into summer. Christmas through to February tends to be the best (and the busiest and most expensive) time.

Prices are generally quoted in this book for one day, or, if those are not available, two-day passes (and sometimes one week for an idea of the relative cost); but you can usually specify an exact number of days, or even buy parts of a day. You might pay anything from Sfr25 to Sfr65 per day, depending on the area. Free use of ski buses is usually included.

Check the latest snow and weather conditions for Swiss and other resorts at www.snow-forecast.com, which also includes skiing reviews.

Equipment can always be hired at resorts; expect to pay about Sfr50 for snowboarding, downhill and cross-country skiing to get up for one day (daily rates decline over longer rental periods).

Cross-country skiing (German: *Langlauf,* French: *ski de fond*) is nearly as popular as downhill skiing, and Switzerland's trails compare to the best in Scandinavia. One particularly good area for cross-country is the Jura Mountains around Saignelégier (p115).

All major ski resorts listed have at least one ski school and you can join a group class (fees around Sfr40 to Sfr50 for half a day) or pay for individual tuition on a per-lesson basis. It shouldn't be necessary to arrange these in advance, but if you want to, **Swiss Snowsports** (☎ 031 810 41 11; www.snowsports.ch in German & French) has a list/clickable map of ski schools around the country.

Weekly package deals will give you a good run for your money if you're happy to stick to one resort. So, too, will limiting your skiing to specific areas in the resort. Young adults and senior citizens usually get discounts on ski pass prices.

Skiing in Switzerland is possible in the Bernese Oberland, central Switzerland, Graubünden, Lake Geneva, northeastern Switzerland and Valais regions; to check out a list of the top 10 ski resorts in Switzerland, see p20.

SNOWBOARDING

Snowboarders love Switzerland. That's despite the expense of its resorts, which they usually gripe about. In the final analysis, any such complaints seem minor in the face of the country's magnificent terrain and facilities. There are lots of in-bounds cliffs, cornices and chutes for powder turns, great half-pipes and parks, as well as year-round boarding on the glaciers mentioned in the preceding section.

The biggest boarding meccas include Davos, the Laax-Flims area and the Engadine Valley (www.boarders-valley.com). That valley, which encompasses St Moritz, has been nicknamed 'the Hawaii of snowboarding' for the incredible runs created by its mix of north- and south-facing slopes.

Resorts such as Crans-Montana (p130), Grindelwald (p151), Saas Fee (p137), Verbier (p124), Zermatt (p134) plus Mt Titlis (p230), above Engelberg, are also popular snowboarding haunts.

SWISS SPORTS

Switzerland has three national sports. Apart from the following two, there's also *Steinstossen* (stone-throwing), most famously practised at the once-in-a-decade Unspunnenfest (see the boxed text Rocky Horror, p149).

Hornussen Taking its origins from medieval war games, this strange sport is played by two teams, one of which launches a 78g ball, or *Hornuss*, over a field. The other team tries to stop it hitting the ground with a *Schindel*, a 4kg implement resembling a road sign. To add to the game's bizarre quality, the *Hornuss* is launched by whipping it around a steel ramp with a flexible rod, in a motion that's a cross between shot-putting and fly-fishing, while the *Schindel* can be used as a bat to stop the 85m-per-second ball or simply tossed into the air at it. Some 16 to 18 players form each team.

Follow the exploits of the Swiss-financed *Alinghi* team and its competitors in the 2007 America's Cup yachting competition at www.americascup.com.

Schwingen This is the Swiss version of Sumo wrestling, where two brawny young farm lads or, since 1992, gals, face off across a circle of sawdust 12m in diameter. Each leans in towards the other and grabs their opponent by the back of the very short hessian shorts that all contestants wear as overalls. Through a complicated combination of proscribed grips (including crotch grips), jerks, feints and other manoeuvres, each tries to wrestle their opponent onto his or her back. At the end of the contest, the winner dusts the sawdust off the loser.

WATER SPORTS

Switzerland shocked the world in early 2003 when its boat, *Alinghi*, won the world's most prestigious ocean-going yacht race, the America's Cup. However, the result wasn't that unpredictable, really. Although landlocked, the country is full of lakes where you can sail, windsurf, water-ski and even wakeboard – the waterborne equivalent of snowboarding. The lakes in the Bernese Oberland are all particularly well suited to these sports.

FIFA, world football's governing body, is headquartered in Zürich. Its new, environmentally friendly offices were to open near the city's zoo in 2006.

The Rotsee, near Lucerne, is a favourite place for rowing regattas. Rafting is possible on many Alpine rivers including the Rhine at Flims (p270) and Scuol (p279) and the Saane. Canoeing is mainly centred on

EURO 2008

Switzerland and Austria will be the joint hosts of football's **European Championship Cup** (www.uefa.com, www.euro2008.com) in 2008. The 23-day tournament is due to kick off on 7 June 2008 at Basel's St Jakob Park (p243), designed by renowned architects Herzog & de Meuron. Bern's swanky new Stade de Suisse (p188) will be another venue in this, the largest sporting event ever to take place in Switzerland. Qualifying competitions begin in 2006.

the Muota River in Schwyz canton and on the Doubs River in the Jura. Paddleboats, or pedalos, are usually waiting for hire in lakeside resorts.

There are more than 350 beaches in the country, most of which are private and require an entrance fee (around Sfr5 per day).

Ironically, if you're interested in seeing Switzerland defend its America's Cup title in 2007, you'll have to go to Spain. The rules of the tournament dictate that the event be held in open seas and **Team Alinghi** (www.alinghi.com) has already built itself a base in Valencia.

Food & Drink

The land of Heidi is also the land of hearty. The eating can be excellent, not so much due to a rich indigenous menu, but because the country draws on three powerful neighbouring cuisines. Cooks in the French cantons take many of their cues from France, while the kitchens of Ticino lean towards Italy. To some the thought that the biggest chunk of the country looks to Germany and Austria for culinary clues may not seem like good news, but then they might not have thought about dessert!

The Swiss have some national munching icons. German Switzerland's potato-based rösti and the French melted cheese feasts of fondue and raclette, barely known beyond their respective cantons until the 1950s, are nationwide standards. And immigrants to Switzerland have enriched Swiss palates with imported cuisines, from Greek to Vietnamese.

All sorts of beers flow freely in the German cantons, but Switzerland is even more pleasing to wine-lovers. The bulk of its production comes from the French-speaking cantons and relatively little is exported. So your only chance to taste many of local drops is to come here – a rare and pleasing example of the limits of globalisation!

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Rösti (crispy, fried, shredded potatoes) is German Switzerland's star dish and by now a national favourite. Since the German and French parts of the country simply have to be different, the Swiss French cook it in oil and the Germans in butter or lard. Now as common (and cheap) as chips, you can buy it in vacuum-sealed packs in your local supermarket!

If you want to follow the raclette row or just find out the latest on what Swiss products have been awarded AOC denomination, see the official site www.aoc-igp.ch (in French and German).

Say Cheese!

The cheese (German: *Käse,* French: *fromage,* Italian: *formaggio*) with holes in it is a popular Swiss image. Contrary to popular belief, however, this cheese is not Gruyère (which comes from the similarly named town, see p106), but Emmental (from the Emme valley, see p191). There are plenty of other fine cheeses, including Etivaz (see the boxed text Looking Behind the Label, below), Tête de Moine from the Jura, the Tomme Vaudoise, Reblochon and Vacherin.

LOOKING BEHIND THE LABEL

A system of quality-control labelling of wines, much like those in neighbouring France and Italy, has long been in place in Switzerland. The AOC *(appellation d'origine contrôllée)* label denotes that a wine has been produced in its traditional area, by approved traditional methods and using approved ingredients. Anyone producing wine with the same name elsewhere is liable to prosecution.

Since the 1990s, the usage of AOCs has spread to other products. Etivaz, a raw milk cheese made in the Pays d'Enhaut in Vaud and ripened over eight months, was the first nonwine product to receive the AOC label in Switzerland. Nowadays, a big cheese debate rages over Raclette. Valais farmers claim the tangy round slabs of cheese used in the traditional dish (see p52) of the same name were first made in Valais – five centuries ago. The Ministry of Agriculture agreed in 2005, and so theoretically any cheese sold as Raclette must now come from that canton. Opponents in Switzerland and France protest that the word raclette refers to a dish, not a cheese, coming from the verb *racler* (to scrape – strips of the cheese are scraped on to plates as it melts under heat) and thus cannot be restricted to any one region. Stay tuned!

Indeed, the main French Swiss contribution to the dinner table is pots of gooey melted cheese. Raclette is the name of a meal and the cheese at its heart. Half-crescent slabs are screwed into a specially made 'oven' that melts the top flat side. As it melts, it is scraped off on to a diner's plate for immediate consumption with boiled potatoes and/or pickled onions and gherkins. Diners keep doing the rounds until they can stand no more.

The Swiss have their own Marmite (Vegemite to Australians)! Cenovis is a dark spread made of beer yeast and vegetable extracts. Invented in 1931, it is high in Vitamin B1.

Fondue (from *fondre*, to melt), which some claim originated in France, involves a different approach. A pot (the size can depend on the number of diners and the amount of space) is filled with cheese that is heated to melt, and kept on a slow burn throughout the evening (the trick is not to over- or under-do the heating). Diners dip morsels of food on slender forks into the cheese and munch. They say that if you lose your chunk in the cheese, you have to buy the next round of drinks. On the subject of drink, do not drink water while eating fondue. It cools and coagulates the cheese and makes for an unpleasant gut ache. As with raclette, the best accompaniment is a good local white wine (typically a Fendant from Valais). If you're getting stuffed but want more, the common trick is to swallow a *trou Normand* (Norman hole), a shot of high-octane liquor to burn some space in your tum. This might also occur before dessert, which ideally should be fluffy Gruyères meringues, topped with calorie-loaded double cream!

Müsli (muesli) was invented in Switzerland at the end of the 19th century. The most common form of this very healthy breakfast is *Birchermüsli,* sometimes served with less-than-slimming dollops of cream.

The classic fondue mix is of Emmental, Gruyère, white wine and flour, with potatoes and cubes of bread to accompany it. *Fondue moitié moitié* (half and half) mixes Gruyère with Vacherin Fribourgeois, *Savoyarde* (a French version) throws Comte cheese into the pot and there are plenty of other regional recipes. Common variants involve adding ingredients such as herbs, mushrooms or tomato.

Meeting Your Match

Fresh fish is the speciality in many lakeside towns. Perch and whitefish fillets are common. Lake Geneva is home to dwindling schools of *omble chevalier* (char), a meatier freshwater fish.

A wide variety of *Würste* (sausages) goes nicely with rösti and green salad. Veal is highly rated. In Zürich, it is thinly sliced, served in a cream sauce and called *Geschnetzeltes Kalbsfleisch*. A good dish from Schaffhausen is *Schaffhüser Bölletünne,* a savoury onion pie. *Rippli,* a pot of pork rib meat, is served in and around Bern with bacon, potatoes and beans. *Bündnerfleisch* is air-dried beef, smoked and thinly sliced, from Graubünden.

CRAZY FOR CHOCOLATE

In the early centuries after Christ's death, as the Roman Empire headed towards slow collapse on a diet of rough wine and olives, the Mayas in Central America were pounding cocoa beans, consuming the result and even using the beans as a system of payment.

A millennium later, the Spanish conquistador Hernando Cortez brought the first load of cocoa to Europe in 1528 but probably didn't think cocoa would catch on. Little did he know. Sweetened, it produced a beverage for which the Spaniards, and soon other Europeans, developed an insatiable thirst. The solid stuff came later.

Swiss chocolate built its reputation in the 19th century, thanks to pioneering spirits such as François-Louis Cailler (1796–1852), Philippe Suchard (1797–1884), Henri Nestlé (1814–90), Jean Tobler (1830–1905), Daniel Peter (1836–1919) and Rodolphe Lindt (1855–1909). Cailler established the first Swiss chocolate factory in 1819, near Vevey. Daniel Peter added milk in 1875 and Lindt invented *conching,* a rotary aeration process that gives chocolate its melt-in-the-mouth quality.

TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

Brisolée An autumn Valais dish of chestnuts cooked to be crunchy on the outside and soft on the inside, served with Alpine cheeses.

Cuchaule A saffron-scented bread served with la Moutarde de Benichon, a thick condiment made of cooked wine must, spices, sugar and flour. It is the first course in a traditional meal known as La Benichon, usually prepared in October.

Papet Vaudois A stew with potato and leek as its basis, but much more interesting if it includes cabbage sausage, itself a Vaudois speciality.

Taillée aux Greblons A Vaudois pastry, crispy on the outside and soft on the inside, with little dices of pork lard throughout.

Speaking of Graubünden, this canton has two particularly tasty local dishes. *Capuns* is a rich mix of *spätzli* dough, *Bünderfleisch,* ham and herbs, mixed together, cooked, then cut into tiny morsels that are wrapped in more *spätzli* with spinach. *Bizochel* (or *pizokel*) are little globs of *spätzli* boiled with herbs and then presented with a cheese *gratiné*. An Engadine speciality is *pian di pigna*, a dense potato, sausage and onion bake.

Autumn is hunting (and mushroom!) season. This is the time to sample fresh game, especially the various varieties of deer meat. Restaurants up and down the country will advertise the *Wildspezialitäten/specialités de gibier* (or *chasse)/cacciagione*.

Chocolate-loving Swiss gobble down more of the sticky stuff than anyone else in the world – a staggering 11.3kg per person per year.

Fruity Afters & Ladies' Thighs

Thurgau and Aargau are centres of fruit production (especially apples and pears, hence their use in drinks and food).

Fruit finds its way into typical sweets such *raisinée* (Vaud) or *vin cuit* (Fribourg). These are basically apple juice cooked over 24 hours into a dense, semi-hard mass used in tarts.

Cuisses de dame (ladies' thighs) is a sugary pastry deep-fried and in the vague shape of a thigh, and is found across the French cantons. Apart from the ubiquitous *Apfelstrudel* (apple pie), best served with vanilla sauce, the German cantons propose *Vermicelles,* a chestnut cream creation made to look like spaghetti and served with cream or ice cream.

For those who fear no calories, a must is meringue from Gruyères, topped with dollops of Gruyères double cream!

For Italian cuisine, see the boxed text What's Cooking in Ticino?, p298.

For a short history and explanation of everything you ever wanted to know about chocolate, especially in Switzerland, browse www.chocolat.ch.

DRINKS

Nonalcoholic Drinks

Tap water is fine but there is plenty of locally produced mineral water. In the French cantons you will come across Henniez and, in Valais, Aproz. Various mineral waters are produced in Graubünden (like Rhäzünser, Passugger and Valser).

Try the German Swiss soft drink Rivella, made in Rothrist. Uniquely, it's made with lactose. The blue-label (reduced-fat) version is probably the best introduction, but it also comes with red (original) and green (mixed with green tea) labels.

Suessmost is a nonalcoholic cider made in the German part of the country.

Coffee is more popular than tea – the latter will come without milk unless you ask for it. Hot chocolate is also popular, although disappointingly it often comes as powder in sachets to be added to a cup of hot milk.

Alcoholic Drinks

BEER & CIDER

In bars, lager beer comes in 300ml or 500ml bottles, or on draught *(Bier vom Fass, bière à la pression, birra alla pressione)* with measures ranging from 200ml to 500ml. The German part of the country is where most of the beer-guzzling is done. Feldschlösschen is a well-known brand that you will encounter around the country. Founded in 1876, it has been producing pils (lager) and dark beers for more than a century. Many smaller breweries are more closely identified with their area, such as St Gallen's Schützengarten, the country's oldest brewery (founded 1779).

The rate of liver cirrhosis is much higher in the French and Italian parts of Switzerland than in the German part.

Sauermost is the alcoholic-cider version of *Suessmost* and generally only found in the German cantons.

WINE

The bulk of wine production takes place in the French-speaking part of the country, particularly in Valais and by Lake Geneva and Lac de Neuchâtel. Quality reds, whites and rosés are produced.

Much of the land north of the Rhône river in western Valais, which gets good sunlight from above the southern Alps, is given over to the grape. Some of the country's best wines come from here.

To learn more about Swiss wines and see when the upcoming wine fairs are being staged, check out www.swisswine.ch.

Two-thirds of Valais production is the dryish white Fendant, the most common accompaniment for fondue and raclette. Johannisberg is another excellent white, and comes from the Sylvaner grape. Look out for the sweeter Petite Arvine and Amigne whites.

The area's principal red is Dôle, made of Pinot Noir and Gamay grapes. Full bodied as an opera singer, it also has a firm fruit flavour. If you're looking for the Cadillacs of Valais reds, seek out drops made with the Humagne Rouge, Syrah, Cornalin and Pinot Noir grape varieties.

Some Valais dessert wines, like the Malvoisie (Pinot Gris) and Muscat, are also excellent.

The bulk of wine production in Vaud is done on either side of Lausanne. The Lavaux region (see the boxed text Vintners of Lavaux, p88) between Lausanne and Montreux produces some riveting whites, most born of the Chasselas grape and occasionally combinations of this with other types. The two *grands crus* from the area are Calamin and Dézaley.

The generic Vaud equivalent of the Dôle is the Salvagnin, divided into several labels and generally combining the Pinot Noir and Gamay. A home-grown offshoot is the Gamaret (created in the 1970s), which produces a throaty red.

Straddling Vaud and Valais is the Chablais wine-making area. Look for drops such as Yvorne whites from the Vaud side.

Lac de Neuchâtel is known above all for its fruity rosé, Oeil-de-Perdrix. And against an industry tendency to filter out impurities in whites, some producers from this canton are making unfiltered whites with considerable success. These need to be shaken up a little before serving and have a robust flavour.

In the Ticino, the favourite liquid for lunch is Merlot (around 88% of the canton's production). Some white Merlots are also made, and a handful of other grape varieties. The main wine-making areas are between Bellinzona and Ascona, around Biasca and between Lugano and Mendrisio.

German Swiss wines are less well known and produced in smaller quantities, but they count some good drops. About 75% are reds, especially Pinot Noir (Blauburgunder). The main white is Müller-Thurgau (a mix of Riesling and Sylvaner). Gewürztraminer is another dry white variety.

A TOUCH OF THE *BLEUES*

After a century on the index of banned beverages, absinthe (known as *la fée verte,* or green fairy) was legalised in Switzerland on 1 March 2005. This was good news for the Val-de-Travers (a valley in Neuchâtel canton), where villagers had long been forced to produce the liquor in clandestine fashion, if at all. About 10 types of the aniseed-based rocket fuel are produced here. The *bleue* (blue), as it is also affectionately known, typically has an alcohol reading approaching the Richter-scale proportions of 56% or more. For more on this fairy tale see the boxed text The Green Fairy, p113. Soon after the ban was lifted, one distillery in Val-de-Travers launched absINt 56, aimed at a hip, clubbing crowd and with a smidgin of mint to take the aniseed edge off. Its makers hope to conquer the clubs of the world. Smirnoff, move over.

Graubünden also produces some good Pinot Gris white varieties, as well as Blauburgunder in the Bündner Herrschaft region north of Chur.

One orders wine in multiples of the *déci* (100ml), a uniquely Swiss approach.

The annual *Guide des Vins Suisses,* published by Wend Verlag, is probably the most comprehensive guide to the country's wines. It carries extensive notes on wineries and the latest developments in wine-making across the country.

SPIRITS & SCHNAPPS

There is a choice of locally produced fruit brandies, often served with or in coffee. Kirsch is made from the juice of compressed cherry pits. Appenzeller Alpenbitter (Alpine Bitters) is a liquor made from the essences of 67 different flowers and roots. Damassine, which you are more likely to find in the French cantons, is made of small prunes and makes a good post-prandial digestive. A pear-based drop is the popular Williamine and Pflümli is a typical plum-based schnapps in the German cantons.

CELEBRATIONS

Fondue and raclette lend themselves to get-togethers. The intrinsically social nature of sharing a pot of bubbling cheese *(*fondue*)* or the ingredients for raclette makes an easy dinner-party option, whether in restaurants or at home.

One of the most impressive traditional feasts, if only for the sheer volume consumed, is La Saint-Martin, celebrated in the Jura around the Fête de la Saint Martin (Feast of St Martin; p116) on the second Sunday after All Saints' Day in November. At this time of year, in Switzerland and elsewhere in Europe, pigs were (and often still are) traditionally slaughtered. Fattened over the summer, they are ready for the butcher and for centuries on farms and in villages the slaughter would be followed by the salting of meat and the making of sausages. The work done, folk would then pass over to feasting to celebrate the day's toil. The main dishes for the feast: pork.

In the Jura nowadays you are unlikely to witness any sausage-making, but the tradition of feasting lives on, with particular energy in and around Porrentruy (p116). If anything, it has become increasingly popular through the years and some bars and restaurants in the region organise feasts for several weekends on the trot in October and November.

A typical pork binge consists of eating as many as seven courses, which few humans can complete. You might start with *gelée de ménage,* a pork gelatine dish. This will be followed by *boudin, purée de pommes et racines rouges* (black pudding, apple compote and red vegetables), piles of sausages accompanied by rösti and *atriaux* (a dish based on

pork fat, sausage and liver, all roasted in sizzling fat). Then comes, if you will, the main (!) course, with *rôti, côtines et doucette* (roast pork, ribs and a green salad). Courses are copious, so don't wolf it all down from the beginning – you'll never make it to the roast! A liquor-soaked sorbet might follow to aid digestion, followed by a serving of *choucroute* (boiled cabbage enlivened by, hmm, bacon bits). Finally, a traditional dessert is *striflate en sauce de vanille,* strings of deep-fried pastries in vanilla sauce.

For some enticing recipes that bring out the northern Italianate flair of Ticino cooking, take a look at *La Cucina Ticinese,* a trilingual book (but no English) published by FONA.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

For sit-down meals you will generally wind up in a restaurant (the same word in French and German, *ristorante* in Italian). Many hotels, especially in the ski resorts, have their own. In the French cantons, many *brasseries* (beer bars) and cafés double as eateries. In Ticino, less-fancy eateries include the generally family-run *trattoria* and *osteria* (there is little to distinguish these nowadays). The *locanda* is similar and often offers a handful of rooms too. For authentic eating in rural Ticino, find a *grotto* (usually housed in a simple stone structure, once often used as simple houses or storage rooms, and generally partly built in the rocky walls of hill- or mountainsides on the edge of Ticino towns). Some wine bars *(Weinstübli)* and beer taverns *(Bierstübli)* in the German cantons also serve meals.

À la Mode de Chez Nous – Plaisirs de la Table Romande, by M Vidoudez and J Graniger, is a delightful introduction, in French, to the 'pleasures of Swiss French dining'.

Main meals in Switzerland are usually eaten from about noon, and a little later in the French and Italian parts of the country. At lunch you could opt for a cheapish, fixed-menu dish of the day *(Tagesteller, plat du jour* or *piatto del giorno)*. Hours can vary quite substantially. Many restaurants will serve lunch from noon to 1.30pm, and as late as 2pm in the French and Italian cantons. Dinnertime can be as early as 6.30pm and in many places, especially in the German cantons and mountain resorts, you will have trouble being served after 9.30pm. On the other hand, in the cities you will find dining hours more generous, until as late as 11pm. Many places in the German cantons open right through the day from 11am to 11pm, although often they serve only cold dishes between the main meal times. All stay open for an hour or so beyond the kitchen closing time to allow diners time for dessert, coffee and an after-dinner tipple.

Most places have a day off *(Ruhetag, jour de fermeture, giorno di riposo)*.

OUR TOP FIVE

This a quick selection (in strictly alphabetical order) of some of our favourite places to move mandibles, chosen for palate pleasure over price considerations. Turn to the appropriate page to initiate salivation.

Hotel Engiadina (☎ 081 864 14 21; www.engiadina-scuol.ch; tasting menu Sfr78; ⏲ Tue-Sat) Gourmet Engadine cooking in the heart of Scuol. See p279.

Hôtel Terminus (☎ 027 455 13 51; www.hotel-terminus.ch; Rue du Bourg 1, Sierre; mains Sfr70-75, tasting menus Sfr120-185; ⏲ Tue-Sat) One of Switzerland's leading chefs tickles your tastebuds. See p130.

Osteria Chiara (☎ 091 743 32 96; Vicolo della Chiara 1, Locarno; pasta & mains Sfr15-30; ⏲ Tue-Sat) All the atmosphere of a traditional Ticino *grotto* and lovingly prepared Italian comfort food. See p301.

Pittaria (Theatergasse 12, Solothurn; snacks Sfr7.50-13.50; ⏲ 10am-11pm Tue-Sat) The finest takeaway in the land – it's official! See p193.

Wirtshaus Taube (☎ 041 210 07 47; Burgerstrasse 3, Lucerne; mains Sfr18-40; ⏲ 11am-midnight Mon-Sat) For good old Germanic munching. See p220.

Quick Eats

Budget travellers could seek out self-service restaurants in the larger Migros and Coop outlets, and in department stores such as Manor. These are usually open from around 11am to 6.30pm on weekdays and until 4pm or 5pm on Saturday. Manor serves the tastiest meals of the lot. A filling meal with drinks need not cost more than Sfr15 to Sfr20 per person.

Kiosks often sell cheap snacks that, like sausage and bread in St Gallen, are as much a regional speciality as are the fancy dishes. Takeaway kebab places are increasingly common in Swiss towns.

The Swiss like their biscuits – eating an average 6kg a year according to the local biscuit industry body, Biscosuisse.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Dedicated vegetarian restaurants are more common in the cities, but you will usually find a pasta or rösti dish on most menus. *Fitnessteller* (fitness dish) for the health-conscious, are increasingly offered, especially in the ski resorts.

Even vegetarians will be able to sample *Alpermagaroninen,* basically a fancy version of macaroni cheese, which regularly arrives with cooked apple and onion. Soups are popular and sometimes contain small dumplings *(Knöpfli)*.

EATING WITH KIDS

Children are generally welcome in most restaurants. Some even offer smaller, kid-sized menus and servings. Toddlers are usually fed straight from their parents' plates and if high-chairs aren't available, staff will improvise.

EAT YOUR WORDS

If you wish not only to be grateful for what you are about to receive, but also to have some idea of what it is, you will want to learn something of the names of dishes you may come across. To get an idea of how to pronounce them, turn to the Language chapter (p338).

Useful Phrases

The following phrases are in German (G), French (F) and Italian (I).

A table for…, please.		
Einen Tisch für …, bitte. (G)	*Une table pour…, s'il vous plaît.* (F)	*Un tavolo per …, per favore.* (I)
May I see the menu, please?		
Darf ich die Speisekarte sehen, bitte? (G)	*Est-ce que je pourrais voir la carte, s'il vous plaît?* (F)	*Posso vedere il menù, per piacere?* (I)
May I see the wine list, please?		
Darf ich die Weinkarte sehen, bitte? (G)	*Est-ce que je pourrais voir la carte aux vins, s'il vous plaît?* (F)	*Posso vedere la carta dei vini, per piacere?* (I)
Bon appetit!		
Guten Appetit! (G)	*Bon appétit!* (F)	*Buon appetito!* (I)
Good health/Cheers!		
Prost! (G)	*Santé!* (F)	*Salute!* (I)
The bill, please.		
Zahlen, bitte. (G)	*L'addition, s'il vous plaît.* (F)	*Il conto, per favore.* (I)
Is service included in the bill?		
Ist die Bedienung inbegriffen? (G)	*Est-ce que le service est compris?* (F)	*È compreso il servizio?* (I)
I'm vegetarian.		
Ich bin Vegetarier(in). (G)	*Je suis végétarien(ne).* (F)	*Sono vegetariano(a).* (I)

Food Glossary

These are some food terms that you may come across in German (G), French (F) and Italian (I):

boiled potatoes		
Salzkartoffeln (G)	*pommes nature* (F)	*patate lesse* (I)
butter-fried trout		
Forelle Müllerinart (G)	*truite à la meunière* (F)	*trotta frittata al burro* (I)
fillet of beef		
Rindsfilet (G)	*filet de boeuf* (F)	*filetto di manzo* (I)
flat pasta/noodles		
Nudeln (G)	*nouilles* (F)	*tagliatelle* (I)
fruit salad		
Fruchtsalat (G)	*macédoine de fruits* (F)	*macedonia di frutta* (I)
grilled salmon		
Grillierter Lachs (G)	*saumon grillé* (F)	*trotta salmonata alla griglia* (I)
ice cream		
Eis (G)	*glace* (F)	*gelato* (I)
pasta		
Teigwaren (G)	*pâtes* (F)	*pasta* (I)
pork		
Schwein (G)	*porc* (F)	*maiale* (I)
rice		
Reis (G)	*riz* (F)	*riso* (I)
sirloin steak		
Zwischenrippenstück (G)	*entrecôte* (F)	*costata di manzo* (I)
soup		
Suppe (G)	*potage* or *consommé* (F)	*zuppa* (I)
veal		
Kalb (G)	*veau* (F)	*vitello* (I)
vegetables		
Gemüse (G)	*légumes* (F)	*vedura* (I)
whitefish fillets (with almonds)		
Felchenfilets (mit Mandeln) (G)	*filets de féra (aux amandes)* (F)	*filetti di coregone (alle mandorle)* (I)