

# SWITZERLAND



Switzerland is a mountainous Central European country, home to numerous lakes, villages and the high peaks of the Alps. Its cities contain medieval quarters, with landmarks like capital Bern's Zytglogge clock tower and Lucerne's wooden chapel bridge. The country is also known for its ski resorts and hiking trails. Banking and finance are key industries, and Swiss watches and chocolate are world renowned.

## GENERAL INFO:

**Location:** The country is situated in Western-Central Europe, and is bordered by Italy to the south, France to the west, Germany to the north, and Austria and Liechtenstein to the east. Switzerland is a landlocked country geographically divided between the Alps, the Swiss Plateau and the Jura (GMT+1)

**Size:** 41285 km<sup>2</sup>

**Population:** There are approximately 8 million people in Switzerland.

**Climate:** The Swiss climate is generally temperate, but can vary greatly between the localities, from glacial conditions on the mountaintops to the often pleasant near Mediterranean climate at Switzerland's southern tip. There are some valley areas in the southern part of Switzerland where some cold-hardy palm trees are found. Summers tend to be warm and humid at times with periodic rainfall so they are ideal for pastures and grazing. The less humid winters in the mountains may see long intervals of stable conditions for weeks, while the lower lands tend to suffer from inversion, during these periods, thus seeing no sun for weeks.

**Capital:** Bern City

**Currency:** Swiss Francs (CHF)

**Food:** It may be a small nation, but that hasn't stopped Switzerland from making a name for itself on the world stage. When it comes to food, Swiss cuisine is often described as a blend of Italian, French and German influences. The dishes aren't elaborate, but they are executed well. Switzerland is known for its cheese fondue and chocolate (try this heavenly mousse), but there's plenty more than meets the eye. For an authentic Swiss meal think rösti and liver pate, spätzle (an egg noodle "dumpling" dish), followed by a slice of Engadine nut tart.

Swiss drinking water – a quality product from natural resources – of which 80 percent stems from natural springs and groundwater, and the rest from lakes. Strict regulations concerning water and the quality of it have led to such positive development that, in some places, you can drink straight out the lake without second thoughts! Swiss tap water also demonstrates a more balanced ecology as opposed to water purchased in bottles and mineral waters travelling from near and far.

**History:** Founded in 1291, independent since 1648



**Languages:** One of the key features of Switzerland is its cultural diversity. The ancestors of the people who live in this country today have their origins in different cultures. The most obvious result of this cultural variety is the fact, that - even if Switzerland is only a small country - there are as much as four different official languages

**Mountains:** 48 of Switzerland's mountains are 4,000 metres (13,000 ft) above sea in altitude or higher. At 4,634 m (15,203 ft), Monte Rosa is the highest, although the Matterhorn (4,478 m or 14,692 ft) is often regarded as the most famous. Both are located within the Pennine Alps in the canton of Valais, on the border with Italy. The section of the Bernese Alps above the deep glacial Lauterbrunnen valley, containing 72 waterfalls, is well known for the Jungfrau (4,158 m or 13,642 ft) Eiger and Mönch, and the many picturesque valleys in the region. In the southeast the long Engadin Valley, encompassing the St. Moritz area in canton of Graubünden, is also well known; the highest peak in the neighbouring Bernina Alps is Piz Bernina (4,049 m or 13,284 ft).

**Unesco World Heritage:** Switzerland is known for its mountains and landscapes, but that is not all the country of Heidi and William Tell has to offer. With 12 sites listed by UNESCO, the country is also renowned for its cultural heritage. Under the United Nations convention designed to protect the world's cultural and natural heritage of 'exceptional universal value', over the years nine Swiss sites have been listed for their cultural dimension and three for their natural beauty.

- Old town of Bern
- Rhaetian Railway in the Albula / Bernina Landscapes
- Swiss Alps Jungfrau-Aletsch
- Three Castles of Bellinzona
- Benedictine Convent of St John at Müstair
- La Chaux-de-Fonds/Le Locle, Watchmaking Town Planning
- Lavaux, Vineyard Terraces
- Monte San Giorgio
- Prehistoric Pile Dwellings around the Alps
- Swiss Tectonic Arena Sardona
- Abbey of St Gall / St. Gallen
- The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier

**Electricity:** Electrical current in Switzerland is 230 volts, 50Hz. Plugs are of the linear, rounded three-pin type, but rounded two-pin plugs will fit the outlet.

**Passport & Visa:** Every traveler must have a valid passport. Visas are required for a continuous stay of more than three months. If your stay is shorter than three months you only need to bring your valid passport with you. This applies to citizens of the following countries: countries of the American Continent (except Belize, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Colombia and Peru), Europe, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.



## HOW TO GET THERE:

- By plane

Major international airports are in Zurich, Geneva and Basel, with smaller airports in Lugano and Berne. Flying into nearby Milan (Italy), Lyon or even Paris (France), Frankfurt (Germany), or Munich (Germany) are other options though rather expensive and time-consuming [3h Frankfurt-Basel, 4h Frankfurt-Berne/Zurich, 4h Milan-Zurich, 3h Paris-Basel/Geneva, 4h Paris-Berne/Zurich, 3.5h Munich-St. Gall, 4.5h Munich-Zurich] by train. Some discount airlines fly to Friedrichshafen, Germany which is just across Lake Constance (the Bodensee) from Romanshorn, not too far [1h] from Zurich.

- By train

Trains arrive from all parts of Europe. Switzerland is together with Germany one of the most central-lying countries in Europe, making it a nexus of railways and highways to the rest of Europe. Some major routes include:

- The TGV Lyria (Train à grande vitesse, French/Swiss high-speed rail connection to Switzerland), with several trains daily from Paris, Avignon, Dijon, and Nice with direct trains from Paris (Gare de Lyon) to either Geneva, or Vallorbe - Lausanne, or Basel - Olten - Bern (- Interlaken), or Basel - Zurich.
- Hourly trains to/from Milan with connections to all parts of Italy
- Hourly ICE (InterCity-Express, German high-speed trains) from Zurich to Karlsruhe, Mannheim, Frankfurt in Germany, many continuing toward Amsterdam, Hamburg or Berlin.
- Regular ICE trains from Zurich to Stuttgart
- Regular EuroCity trains from Zurich to Munich
- Night trains from Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, Hamburg, Prague, Vienna, Belgrade, Barcelona Rome and Venice to Basel, Geneva, Zurich and some also to Lausanne. These trains are either "EuroNight" (symbol: EN) or CityNightLine (symbol: CNL) services
- By bus  
Eurolines has incorporated Switzerland into its route network.
- By car  
Common tourist destinations within Switzerland are easily reachable by car, e.g. Geneva from central eastern France, and Zurich from southern Germany.

## PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The Swiss will spoil you with fantastic transport - swift, disturbingly punctual trains, clean buses, and a half dozen different kinds of mountain transport systems, integrated into a coherent system. The discount options and variety of tickets can be bewildering, from half fare cards to multi-day, multi-use tickets good for buses, boats, trains, and even bike rentals. In general there's at least one train or bus per hour on every route, on many routes trains and buses are running every 30min, or even 15min, but as with everything in Switzerland the transit runs less often, or at least for a shorter period of the day, on weekends, and especially on Sundays. Authoritative information, routes, and schedules can be found at Swiss Federal Railway's website, or from a ticket window in any train station.

For visitors only a Swiss Travel Pass grants you unlimited access to all national bus (including Swiss PostAuto bus) and rail, all boats, all city transit systems, and the same hefty discount as a half-fare card on privately operated cable cars, funiculars, and ski lifts. The Swiss Travel Pass is sold for 3, 4, 8 and 15 days and allows a free entrance to over 500 museums and exhibitions. [www.myswitzerland.com/rail](http://www.myswitzerland.com/rail)