See Climate Charts (p315)

for more information.

# **Getting Started**

With everything from soaring Alpine peaks in Zermatt to cavernous late-night dance clubs in Zürich, Switzerland offers a kaleidoscopic palette of options in a very small space. Whether you want to explore hidden jewels of medieval art in distant villages or the cutting edge of modern architecture in the humming cities, there is plenty of choice for the art buff. What other country offers at least three types of different national cuisine? You could set yourself a gastronomical route full of pleasant surprises. For the more energetic, the range of scenery and outdoor activities is almost unlimited. From cow-fighting to curling, hiking to hang-gliding, there is barely a sport or activity that isn't catered for here.

#### WHEN TO GO

When you visit Switzerland you will, at least in part, be dictated by where you want to go and what you intend to do, but there are good reasons for exploring at least parts of the country at any time of year.

Summer lasts roughly from June to September and offers the most pleasant climate for outdoor pursuits (apart from exclusively winter sports). In fact, many adventure sports, such as canyoning, are only offered during this time. The peak period is July and August, when prices are high, accommodation often fully booked and the sights packed. You'll find better deals, and fewer people, in the shoulder seasons either side of summer: in April, May and October. With the exception of the busy Easter break, spring is a beautiful time of year to explore the blooming countryside. In Ticino, flowers are in bloom as early as March. Hikers wanting to walk at high altitudes, however, should be equipped for snow and ice until well into June (and, in some tricky spots, all year).

The winter season in Alpine resorts kicks off in mid-December and moves into full swing around Christmas, closing down again when the snows begin to melt around mid-April. Between the summer and winter seasons, Alpine resorts all but close down (except where year-round glacier skiing is on offer). At the very best, they go into snooze mode and can even be a little depressing.

At any time, as you travel around the country you'll hit many different climatic conditions. The continental climate in the Alps tends to show the greatest extremes between summer and winter. Mid-August to late October generally has fairly settled weather, and is a good period for hiking trips.

#### DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Valid travel insurance (p318)
- Your ID card or passport and visa if required (p322)
- Your driving licence (p329) and car documents if driving, along with appropriate car insurance (p326)
- Sunglasses in summer and winter (all that snow makes for sharp glare!)
- Hiking shoes for the mountains

#### **COSTS & MONEY**

Okay, let's get this over and done with quickly: Switzerland is an expensive place. Even people from the UK and Scandinavia will notice this, although the difference between Switzerland and its European neighbours has narrowed over the years, especially since the introduction of the euro in 2002 in Switzerland's neighbouring countries sent prices in those countries soaring. Indeed, UK estate agents specialising in holiday properties in ski resorts have started promoting Switzerland, as nearest rival France becomes 'too expensive'! The floods of Swiss swarming over the French and Italian borders for cheaper goods are largely a thing of the past. One very good piece of news is that petrol in Switzerland is cheaper than in its neighbouring countries (Austria, France, Germany and Italy).

Travellers from North America or Australia will find all of Europe more expensive, and the pain in Switzerland only marginally worse.

Your biggest expenses while in Switzerland are likely to be longdistance public transport, accommodation and eating out. In the most modest hotels, expect to pay at least Sfr70/100 per single/double. A full meal with 500ml of house wine for two can easily cost Sfr50 to Sfr60 and up per person.

But there are ways to keep costs down. Travel passes almost invariably provide big savings (see p327) on trains, boats and buses. It is essential to check these out and see which might suit you. Camping, sleeping in barns in summer (p313) and staying at youth hostels are cheap(ish) accommodation options. Preparing your own meals, not drinking alcohol and eating at the many supermarket and department-store restaurants will keep your food budget under control. Finally, a student card will entitle you to reduced admission fees for many attractions (see p316).

Your budget depends on how you live and travel. If you're moving around fast, going to lots of places, spending time in the big cities or major ski resorts, then your day-to-day living costs are going to be quite high; if you stay in one place and get to know your way around, they're likely to come down.

The minimum that budget travellers can expect to scrape by on is about Sfr80 to Sfr100 per day, and that's if they stick to camping/hostelling, self-service restaurants or self-catering, hitching (or have previously purchased a rail pass), hiking instead of taking cable cars, visiting only inexpensive sights and confining alcohol consumption to bottles purchased in supermarkets. Add at least Sfr30 a day if you want to stay in a budget pension instead, and a further Sfr30 for a wider choice of restaurants and sightseeing options. You still have to be careful with your money at this level; if you have a larger budget available, you will have no trouble spending it! Always allow extra cash for emergencies.

Admission prices on most museums and galleries range from Sfr5 to Sfr10, with a handful more expensive still. An expense that can blow any budget is trips on cable cars; these are rarely covered by travel passes (at best you can expect a 25% to 50% reduction). A short to medium ascent can cost Sfr10 to Sfr25. Return trips up and down Mt Titlis and Schilthorn exceed Sfr70.

#### TRAVEL LITERATURE

Culture Shock — Switzerland (Shirley Eu-Wong) A curious and at times amusing look at how things are done in Switzerland, this book is part of a series and something of an etiquette guide. **Laughing Along with the Swiss** (Paul Bilton) Published in Switzerland by Bergli, this is an often side-splitting outsider's handbook to the oddities of Swiss life. As Bilton points out, only the

#### **HOW MUCH?**

Local newspaper Sfr2-2.50

City bus/tram ride Sfr2-2.80

10-minute taxi ride Sfr12-15

one-day ski-pass Sfr35-70

Bar of Toblerone chocolate (100g) Sfr2.20 www.lonelyplanet.com

#### **Our Favourite Festivals & Events**

The Swiss have a calendar stuffed with festivals, ranging from curious local traditions to international music fests. We have chosen the following (in chronological order):

- Schlitteda (January), St Moritz, Pontresina and Silvaplana (p278)
- Vogel Gryff (mid- to late January), Basel (p240)
- Fasnacht (Carnival; February), Lucerne (p217)
- Sechseläuten (third Monday in April), Zürich (p200)
- Montreux Jazz (July), Montreux, Vaud (p90)
- Festival Internazionale di Film (August), Locarno (p300)
- Fête des Vendanges (Grape Harvest Festival; September), Neuchâtel (p110)
- Foire du Valais (October; cow fights feature), Martigny (p121)
- Zibelemärit (onion market; fourth Monday in November), Bern (p185)
- L'Escalade (11 December), Geneva (p68)

#### **Our Favourite Ski Resorts**

- Zermatt, Valais (p134)
- Davos-Klosters, Graubünden (p275)
- St Moritz, Graubünden (p282)
- Les Portes du Soleil, Champéry, Valais (p119)
- Verbier, Valais (p124)
- Saas Fee, Valais (p137)
- Wengen & Mürren, Bernese Oberland (p150)
- Crans-Montana, Valais (p130)
- Engelberg, central Switzerland (p229)
- St Luc & Chandolin, Valais (p131)

#### **Top Museums & Galleries**

Switzerland is not just for snowboarders and mountain-climbers. The country fairly bristles with important and intriguing museums and art galleries. Among the best are the following:

- Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern (p183)
- Fondation Beyeler, Basel (p237)
- Museum Jean Tinguely, Basel (p237)
- Kunsthaus, Zürich (p197)
- Fondation Pierre Gianadda, Martigny (p120)
- Musée de l'Art Brut, Lausanne (p81)
- Freilichtmuseum Ballenberg, outside Brienz (p171)
- Picasso Museum, Lucerne (p216)
- Musée International de la Croix Rouge et du Croissant Rouge, Geneva (p66)
- Musée Olympique, Lausanne (p82)

Swiss could 'make the Germans look untidy and the Texans poor'. Some overly-worn clichés aside, there are plenty of amusing truths (or near truths) in this light tome.

Little is the Light (Vitali Vitaliev) The Ukrainian-born journalist in this book takes an almost serious look at various European mini-states, including Liechtenstein.

Stamping Grounds: Liechtenstein's Quest for the World Cup (Charlie Connelly) Taking football as the centre pitch from which to launch a whimsical exploration of the little principality, Connelly has pulled off the remarkable trick of writing an engrossing account of this curious countryette.

Switzerland: A Village History (Paul Birmingham) Birmingham takes a different look at the balloon town of Château d'Oex, tracing its history as a rural village, through the impoverishment in the wake of the Napoleonic invasions and back to prosperity in the tourist age.

Take Me to Your Chalet (Eugene Epstein) The American-born writer has written several humorous accounts of life in Switzerland. A highly personal take on the country's idiosyncrasies, his books also include such titles as Once Upon an Alp and Lend Me Your Alphorn.

The White Spider (Heinrich Harrer) A classic of mountaineering literature, this is the account of a young climber and his ascent of the north face (the first ever) of the Eiger peak in 1938.

Ticking Along with the Swiss (Dianne Dicks) Dicks has collected 49 short stories on Switzerland by authors from as far afield as Australia, Canada, the USA and Ethiopia.

#### **INTERNET RESOURCES**

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Can get you started with summaries on Switzerland, links to Switzerland-related sites and travellers trading information on the Thorn Tree.

My Swiss Alps (www.myswissalps.com) This site concentrates on mountain areas, hiking (with plenty of hiking route suggestions) and sports, particularly in the Bernese Oberland, Valais and Graubünden.

SBB/CFF/FFS (www.sbb.ch) The Swiss railway website allows you to check timetables and buy tickets online. It's in four languages, including English.

Swiss Info (www.swissinfo.org) A multilingual news and info site presented by the country's public broadcaster, Swiss Radio International. It also has a host of links, many of them tourism-related. Switzerland Tourism (www.myswitzerland.com) The Swiss national tourist body's website has information on everything from local tourist office addresses to information on food and wine and links to Swiss mountain resorts.

Traveling.ch (www.traveling.ch) Another general site with loads of links and info ranging from embassy addresses to dinner recipes.

# **Itineraries CLASSIC ROUTES**

### **GENEVA TO ZÜRICH**

Two Weeks / Geneva to Zürich

Forget your skis and hang up your hiking boots. This is a trip for the urbanites among us who want to mix up some metropolitan fire with some small-town charm. With the possibility now available to fly in to one hub and back home from another, this tour is eminently doable by either private car or public transport. And should you need to fly out from the same place, Geneva and Zürich are only separated by 23/4 hours by fast train. This trip can be done in either direction and plenty of variations suggest themselves en route.

Landing in Geneva (p59), immerse yourself in the most cosmopolitan of Switzerland's big cities. From Geneva, it's about 45 minutes by train northeast around the lake to bustling Lausanne (p77), the hilly lakeside city and seat of the International Olympic Committee. Follow the same glorious route through the Lavaux wine terraces to Montreux (p89), from where you head north to the medieval fortress town of Gruyères (p106) known especially for its fine cheese. Further north still, you arrive at **Fribourg** (p99), on the French-German language frontier, which you cross to make for the pretty national capital, **Bern** (p179), to the northeast. From here you drop down in the depths of Bern's cantons and the lakeside towns around **Interlaken** (p144). Nearby there is plenty of great skiing, hiking and other outdoor options. Our route swings north to another bewitching lady of the lake, the town of **Lucerne** (p214), before we change atmosphere completely by rolling onwards via **Zug** (p232) to Switzerland's most happening city, the once-stuffy banking town of **Zürich** (p194).

the destinations on this route you will want at least two weeks, leaving two days apiece for places like Geneva, Lausanne, Bern, Lucerne and Zürich. The changes in scenery and culture on this 385km route are extraordinary.

In order to give a

little time to all



### THE GLACIER EXPRESS

7½ Hours / Zermatt to St Moritz

Although not quite as long as the Trans-Siberian, the classic rail journeys of Switzerland make up for the length in horizontal travel time with the spectacle of the vertical. Of the several scenic mountain rail trips on offer, perhaps the best is the Glacier Express, which runs from Zermatt, high in the southern Alps of Valais canton, northeast to St Moritz, via Chur, in Graubünden.

As Switzerland's Alpine resorts became increasingly popular with Europe's hoity-toity in the early 20th century, the idea for a train linking Zermatt and St Moritz grew. In 1930, the inaugural steam-train journey between the two Alpine towns took place. The excursion hasn't lost its appeal since. The 7½-hour trip can be done year-round and the literal high point of the trip is the crossing of the Oberalp Pass, at 2033m.

Starting in **Zermatt** (p134), the train winds slowly north down the valley to Brig (p138). From there it swings northeast along the pretty eastern stretch of the Rhône valley towards the Furka Pass (which it circumvents by tunnel) and descends on Andermatt (p233) before again climbing up to the Oberalp Pass. From there it meanders alongside the Vorderrhein river, passing through **Disentis/Mustér** (p272) before arriving in **Chur** (p264). The main train continues to **St Moritz** (p282), with a branch line heading northeast to Davos (p276).

The trip can be done in either direction. For practical details, see the Transport chapter (p331).

Of the many remarkable railway trips on offer in Switzerland, this is the most breathtaking. The 272km trip through Alpine country, surrounded by icy peaks, high mountain pastures and pretty towns, winds its way through 91 tunnels and over 291 bridges.



Get well off the

beaten trail on

trip, taking in

such gems as

this circular road

vivid Romanesque

frescoes, quaint

Engadine towns,

villages, medieval

mountain passes

thermal baths

and two tempting

stops. Give yourself

two to three weeks

for this 685km trail.

remote Ticino

castles, high

### ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

#### **LOST IN GRAUBÜNDEN & TICINO** Two to Three Weeks / Chur to Vals

With the exception of high wilderness mountaineering, this is one of the best routes for getting away from it all (with occasional options to jump back into the tourist fray). As a circular route, you can kick off anywhere, but we start in the Graubünden capital of Chur (p264), from where we head north for a quick detour to pretty Maienfeld (p274) and its vineyards. Make east for the skiing centres of Klosters (p275) and Davos (p276), where you leave the bustle behind to surge east into the lower Engadine valley, with pretty towns to admire like Guarda (p278) and Scuol (p279). In the latter, hang about for some great bath treatment. From there the road ribbons east to the Austrian border, which you cross to then head south through a slice of Austria and Italy, before veering back west into Switzerland to contemplate the frescoes at Müstair (p280). The road continues west and then southwest, passing through picturepostcard **Zuoz** (p281) before reaching chic **St Moritz** (p282). We then follow the Julier Pass mountain road that swings north and west, then dropping down the gorges of the Via Mala (p273) to the hamlet of Zillis (p273), another key art stop.

The road continues south and crosses into Ticino and the medieval castles of Bellinzona (p289). From there, steam on past lakeside Locarno (p299) and up the enchanting Valle Maggia (p302). Backtracking to Bellinzona, the main route takes you along the Valle Leventina, with a stop in Giornico (p291) and any high valley hamlets you fancy, before crossing the Gotthard Pass (p233) to Andermatt (p233) and then veering back east into Graubünden. Make a quick stop at the monastery of Disentis/Mustér (p272) before making one last highly recommended detour to the baths of **Vals** (p271), the last stop before Chur.



### TAILORED TRIPS

#### **WORLD HERITAGE SITES**

In spite of all its natural wonders and considerably man-made beauty, Switzerland only boasts six Unesco World Heritage sites, all but one in

the eastern half of the country. Starting in the north, St Gallen (p251) is the seat of a grand abbey and church complex that is home to one of the world's oldest libraries. On a similarly artistic note is the Kloster de St Johann (St John's Monastery) in Müstair (p280) in the far east of the country, graced with vivid Carolingian and Romanesque frescoes. Both sites were declared in 1983.

The canton of Ticino has two of the country's heritage sites. The first is the inspiring trio of defensive castles in Bellinzona (p288), added in 2000. The second site, Monte San Giorgio (p299), was added in 2003. A pyramid-shaped, wood-



covered mountain (1096m) south of Lago di Lugano, it was selected by Unesco as the best fossil record of marine life from the Triassic period.

In the south of the country, the Jungfrau-Aletsch-Bietschhorn Alpine area (selected in 2001), was listed for its receding glaciers, especially the 24km-long **Aletsch Glacier** (p139). Finally, the old city centre of **Bern** (p179), which was listed in 1983, is the only Unesco site in the western half.

#### **FAIRY-TALE CASTLES**

It seems almost inevitable that Switzerland, being the home of chocolate confectionery and picture-postcard countryside, should also have its fair share of sugary-sweet, Disney-style castles. It doesn't disappoint. However enchanting (or enchanted) they may seem today, castles were often built for less romantic) reasons than one might daydream about today. Used as fortresses and prisons as well as sumptuous residences, they all have plenty of intriguing history.

The best known of them all, immortalised by Lord Byron and many others, is the Château de Chillon (p89), which juts out over Lake Geneva just outside Montreux. Not far to the north is the Château de Gruyères (p106), in the eponymous high-hill cheese-making town.

To the west, on or near the waters of Lac de Neuchâtel, are the witch's hat turrets of the Château de Grandson (p93), just outside Yverdon-les-Bains, and **Château de Vaumarcus** (p113), south of

Neuchâtel. You can sleep over in the latter.

More lakeside castles stand proudly in Thun, notably Schloss Thun (p167) and Schloss Schadau (p168), and the altogether different, Italian-built, Escher-like **Castello Visconteo** (p299) at Locarno.

Away from the water, the most impressive castle scene is Castelgrande (p289), Castello Montebello (p290) and Castello di Sasso Corbaro (p290) at Bellinzona. In the Engadine valley is **Schloss Tarasp** (p279), just outside Scuol.

A curious cylindrical defensive castle in the north is the **Munot** (p249) in Schaffhausen.



# Snapshot

'This couldn't be happening to us!' many an unsettled Swiss commuter cried when, on a warm June day in 2005, the Helvetic image of seamless efficiency took a dramatic hammering. In a country where trains delayed by a couple of minutes raise disapproving eyebrows, the entire national rail system ground to a halt at evening rush hour after a massive power surge. Service was only fully restored the following day.

Hundreds of thousands of Swiss were stranded in the chaos and reactions ranged from speechless disbelief through childlike amusement – clearly deep in the heart of some Swiss burns a longing for the occasional unexpected upheaval!

That rare humiliation for Swiss transport followed another sad episode for national pride – the sale of troubled national airline Swiss to Germany's Lufthansa at a bargain-basement price.

In summer it seemed even the gods had it in for the Alpine paradise. In July massive hailstorms pelted the Lavaux wine district, on Lake Geneva, into submission, destroying a good part of its vineyards. One month later, torrential flooding brought chaos to much of central and northern Switzerland. Four people died as waters cut off the capital, Bern, and dissected transport routes over the Alps into Italy. Some 700 people were evacuated from mountain resorts, as well as 300 from residential districts in Bern. Rhine river traffic was halted. The Engelberg mountain resort was cut off until well into September after the collapse of an access road. Damage was estimated at one billion francs. Ouch!

The Swiss are careful with money and conservative with their currency. Since the franc went into circulation in the 1850s, it has rarely been tampered with. The decision in early 2005 to drop the five-cent coin (by 2006–07), because it costs six cents to make, came as a minor earthquake in a country where any change tends to be viewed warily.

Money matters aside, the Swiss had some important decisions to make in 2005. In June they narrowly voted in favour of joining the European Union's Schengen system, which will mean dropping standard border controls with its EU neighbours and plugging into the Dublin Treaty shared police-data systems. In September, they took an even bolder step when voting in favour of extending free circulation of citizens (to be limited by quotas until 2011) from the older 15 member nations of the EU to the 10 new (mostly Eastern European) members that joined in 2004.

The debate was acrimonious, with Christoph Blocher's extreme right-wing UDC party raising the spectre of a flood of cheap labour from the East. Blocher lost on another count when, in June, Swiss gays won an important victory with the passing of a referendum to legally recognise same-sex couples (but not marriages) from January 2007.

So many referendums are enough to make you grab for a smoke, but those Swiss with a nicotine need did not get the chance to vote against a ban on smoking on all trains (and most other public transport), effective December 2005.

#### FAST FACTS

Population: 7.42 million Non-Swiss nationals: 20% of population Area: 41,285 sq km

GDP: €449 billion GDP per person:

Sfr54,000

GDP growth: 2.6%

Inflation: 1%

Unemployment rate: 3.7%

Average life expectancy: 78.6 (men), 83.7 (women)

Highest point: Dufourspitze at 4634m © Lonely Planet Publications

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THE AUTHORS 17

## The Authors



#### **DAMIEN SIMONIS**

#### Coordinating Author; Lake Geneva & Vaud; Valais; Graubünden; Ticino

The kaleidoscopic fare on offer in Switzerland would probably have passed Damien by had his other half not decided on moving to Lausanne on Lake Geneva. And yet it might have seemed an obvious place for him to be, speaking as he does French, German and Italian (not to mention the unofficial lingua franca, er, English!). The further he explores the place, from its tempting Italian eateries in Ticino to the top-of-the-world ski runs of Zermatt, the more he fails to understand how he didn't cotton on to the place earlier. Still, better late than never! Nowhere else in Europe has he found such a concentration of breath-taking natural beauty and cultural variety. Damien also updated the Destination: Switzerland; Getting Started; Itineraries; Snapshot; Food & Drink; Health; and Language chapters.

#### **My Favourite Trip**

An autumn favourite is to head east from home base Lausanne (p77), taking the high lanes through the Lavaux (p88) wine region, stopping off for a nibble and tipple at wine cellars along the way. From there, I like to put away some kilometres along the Rhône valley in Valais and making directly for Leukerbad (p132) and its thermal baths, where a first evening is well spent. From there, a detour leads up the Lötschental to Fafleralp (p133) for some healthy walking far from the regular tourist trails. Now it is time to swing south for some pre-season ski fun in Zermatt (p134), to try out the latest skis on the glacier on a weekend package that gets you dreaming of the white winter ahead!



#### **SARAH JOHNSTONE**

Bernese Oberland; Mittelland; Zürich; Central Switzerland; Basel & Aargau; Northeastern Switzerland; Liechtenstein

Sarah covered the German-speaking parts of the country and came away (worryingly) with a Swiss accent and (surprisingly) with a rudimentary understanding of Schwyzertütsch. A freelance journalist based in London, she's previously worked for Reuters and several travel magazines. After nearly 10 Lonely Planet guidebooks (you think she'd learn) she still hates author bios. Sarah also updated the History; The Culture; Outdoor Activities; Directory; and Transport chapters.

#### My Favourite Trip

Visitors to the Bernese Oberland are forever looking out the train window and gasping words along the lines of 'Oh, my god, isn't it beautiful?' The journey between Grütschalp (above Lauterbrunnen, p156) and Mürren (p165) has this effect on me. If you arrive here as the sun is setting, the train really does seem to float along the horizontal ridge, while the peaks opposite shimmer purple and look tantalisingly within reach. In blazing sunshine, there's no such optical illusion. However, I'm happy to make this journey at any time, simply because it lands me in breathtaking Mürren.



#### **NICOLA WILLIAMS**

#### Geneva; Fribourg, Neuchâtel & Jura

Ever since Nicola moved to medieval Yvoire plump on the southern side of Lake Geneva, she has never quite been able to shake off that uncanny feeling that she is on holiday. A year on, a 1960s house in neighbouring Messery with a garden tumbling down the hillside towards that same glittering lake and Switzerland's mysterious Jura mountains beyond, is what she wakes up to each morning. Nicola has lived in France since 1997 and when not flitting into Geneva or delving into the Swiss countryside, she can be found at a desk writing. Nicola also updated the Environment chapter.

#### My Favourite Trip

There's always something to thrill to, living where I do: be it gorging on a truly authentic Asian feast (p71) in Geneva, viewing the latest MAMCO exhibition (p64), brunching in Carouge (p72) or indulging in a night out at the opera (I've just booked for *The Nutcracker*), Switzerland's oh-so-international city just doesn't tire. Elsewhere, riding the train up to Zermatt and skiing in the Matterhorn's shadow (p134); hanging out in the Engadine (p278) with friends during March's cross-country ski marathon (they do it, I don't); bombing down Davos' ab-fab luge track (p276) and or watching Jurassic cows (p114) being milked before farm breakfast (fresh-from-the-udder milk et al) are Swiss moments I'd repeat.



#### **LONELY PLANET AUTHORS**

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