

"The colossal and the well-ordered" or about culture and management in Switzerland

*„Grandoare și perfecțiune”
sau despre cultură și management în Elveția*

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Abstract

This paper tries to describe for students, for managers, for tourists, the complex experience that I had travelling, for the second time, in the summer of 2010, for a few weeks, in Switzerland, visiting friends, but also discovering again cities, towns, castles, museums, and even some small and medium sized private companies.

Keywords: *history; culture; nature; people; cantons; Swiss Confederation; tourism*

Rezumat

Articolul încearcă să prezinte pentru studenți, pentru manageri, pentru turiști, experiența complexă pe care am avut-o călătorind, pentru a doua oară, în vara anului 2010, pentru câteva săptămâni în Elveția, vizitând prieteni, dar și descoperind din nou orașe, castele, muzee, chiar și câteva companii private mici sau mijlocii.

Cuvinte-cheie: *istorie; cultură; natură; oameni; cantoane; Confederația Helvetică; turism*

JEL Classification: Z10, Z19

General presentation

Switzerland (Schweiz, Suisse, Svizzera, Svizzra) offers its share of clichés – irresistible chocolates, kitsch cuckoo clocks, yodeling Heidis, humorless bankers – but plenty of surprises too. Travelers will find flavors of Germany, France and Italy, always seasoned with a unique Swissness.

Goethe described Switzerland as a combination of “the colossal and the well-ordered”, a reference to the majestic Alpine terrain set against the tidy, efficient, watch-precision towns and cities.

The first inhabitants of the region were a Celtic tribe, the Helvetii (Fahrni, 2003). The Romans appeared on the scene in 107 BC by way of the Great Saint Bernard Pass. They were gradually driven back by the Germanic Alemanni tribe, which settled the region in the 5th century. The territory was united under the Holy Roman Empire in 1032 but central control was never very tight. That was all changed by the Germanic Habsburg family, spearheaded by Rudolph I, who gradually brought the squabbling nobles to hell.

Upon Rudolph's death, local leaders saw a chance to gain independence. The forest communities of Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden thus formed an alliance on 1st of August 1291. Their pact of mutual assistance is seen as the origin of the Swiss Confederation, and soon other communities joined: Lucerne in 1332, Zürich in 1351, Glarus and Zug in 1352, Bern in 1353. The Swiss gained independence from Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I after their victory at Dornach in 1499.

The French Republic invaded Switzerland in 1798 and established the Helvetic Republic. The Swiss vehemently resisted such centralized control, causing Napoleon to restore the former confederation in cantons in 1803. Following Napoleon's defeat by the British and Prussians at Waterloo, Switzerland gained the independence and established its neutrality.

Throughout the gradual move towards one nation, each canton remained fiercely independent, even to the extent of controlling its own coinage and postal services. They lost these powers in 1848 when a new federal constitution was agreed upon, with Bern as a capital.

The Swiss have carefully guarded their neutrality in the 20th century. Their only involvement in World War I lay in organizing units of the Red Cross, founded in Geneva in 1863. Despite some accidental bombing, World War II left Switzerland largely unscathed, and its territory proved a safe haven for escaping allied prisoners.

To preserve the neutrality after the World War II, Switzerland declined to become a member of both the United Nations, though Switzerland currently has observer status, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Switzerland EU's application has been frozen following a Swiss 1992 referendum, in which voters failed to endorse the federal government's strategy.

Mountains make up 70 % of Switzerland's 41285sq km. The land is 45 % meadow and pasture, 24 % forest and 6 % arable. Farming of cultivated land is intensive and cows graze on the upper slopes in the summer as soon as retreating snow line permits.

With a population of 7.1 million, Switzerland averages 172 inhabitants per sq km Zürich is the largest city with population of 360000, followed by Basel with 185,000, Geneva with 180000, and Bern with 135000. More data can be obtained from Information about Switzerland (n.d).

Despite its long-standing neutrality, Switzerland maintains a 400000-strong civilian army. Every able-bodied male undergoes national service at age 20

and stays in the reserve for 22 years, all the while keeping his rifle and full kit at home.

In a few mountain region such as Valais, people still wear traditional rural costumes, but dressing up is usually reserved for festivals. Yodeling and playing the alp horn are also part of the Alpine tradition, as in Swiss wrestling.

Switzerland has three official languages: German, spoken by 63% of the population, French 19%, and Italian 8%. A fourth language, Rhaeto-Romanic or Romansch is spoken by less than 1% of the population, mainly in the canton of Graubünden. Though German-speaking Swiss have no trouble with standard High German, they use Swiss German in private conversation. English is also widely understood in the German-speaking parts of Switzerland.

Visited cities

Founded in 1191 by Berchtold V, *Bern* (Berne, in French) is Switzerland's capital. The story goes that the city was named for the bear (Barn, in local dialect) that was Berchtold's first kill when hunting in the area. Even today the bear remains the heraldic mascot of the city. Despite playing host to the nation's politicians, Bern retains a relaxed, small-town charm. A picturesque old town contains 6 km of covered arcades and 11 historic fountains. The world's largest Paul Klee collection is housed in the Museum of Fine Arts.



The old city of Bern



Lake Geneva (Leman)

Geneva (Genève, Genf, Ginevra) is comfortably encamped on the shore of the Lake Geneva (Lac Leman). Geneva belongs not so much to French-speaking Switzerland as to the whole world. Over 40 % of residents are non-Swiss and many international organizations are based here. Geneva won respite from the Duke of Savoy in 1530, and was ripe for the teaching of John Calvin two years later. It soon became known as the Protestant Rome, during which time fun became frowned upon. Thankfully this legacy barely lingers and today Geneva offers a varied nightlife. By day, you can see some of the best Geneva has to offer by simply strolling along the lakeside.



The old city of Lausanne



The old city of Basel

Lausanne is the capital of the canton of Vaud, a hilly city, the fifth largest Switzerland' town. You cannot miss the fine Gothic Cathedral, the Musée de l'Art Brut, the Musée Olympique, and the Palais de Rumine, with his several museums.

Basel (Bâle in French) joined the Swiss Confederation in 1501. Despite being a relatively large industrial city, it has an attractive old town, a handful of worthy museums, and a lively student-led nightlife. Basel's strategic position on the Rhine, at the dual border with France and Germany, has been instrumental in its development as a strong commercial centre.



The old city of Zürich

Switzerland's most populous city, *Zürich*, offers an ambience of affluence and plenty of cultural diversions. Banks and art galleries will greet you at every turn, in a strange marriage of finance and aesthetics. Zürich started life as a Roman customs post and graduated to the status of a free city under the Holy Roman Empire in 1218. It joined the Swiss Confederation in 1351. The city's long-standing reputation as a cultural and intellectual centre was given fresh impetus during the World War II, with the influx of luminaries as James Joyce, Tristan

Tzara and Hans Arp, key figures in the founding of Dadaism in 1916 at the Cabaret Voltaire.

Prices are high in Switzerland, so you may be tempted to get in and to get out again as quickly as possible. You don't have to do it that way. Scenery and hiking cost nothing. So base yourself at a friendly ho(s)tel in the mountains, slow down, recharge your batteries, and enjoy some of the most spectacular landscapes Europe has to offer.

References

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