

Overview of Switzerland

With snow-capped Alps, forested hills, fairytale castles, Renaissance cathedrals, shimmering lakes, stylish spas and luxury ski resorts, it's easy to see why Switzerland has been one of the world's top tourist destinations for the past two centuries.

It is the country that fashioned tourism, so it's no surprise that Switzerland caters to visitors all year round. In spring and summer it offers lakeside chalets, mountain trails and spa resorts. In the sunny southern region of Ticino, near the Italian border, visitors will find palm-fringed Riviera-style resorts offering a variety of water sports. Those keen on hiking and mountaineering will find over 31,000 miles (50,000km) of mountain and forest trails throughout the country.

In November the country's ski resorts begin opening, and visitors pour in throughout the Christmas season and the crowds do not abate until the snow begins to melt with the onset of spring. With the highest pistes in Europe, Switzerland's ski runs offer reliable snow and breathtaking views. Most resorts also have plenty to do for those not so keen on skiing, making Switzerland the perfect destination for a winter fantasy of log fires, fondues and glistening snow.

Key Facts

Language:

The four official languages are Swiss German, French, Italian and Romansch. Most people know at least three languages, including English.

Passport/Visa:

The borderless region known as the Schengen area includes the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and as of December 2008, Switzerland. All these countries issue a standard Schengen visa that has a multiple entry option that allows the holder to travel freely within the borders of all. It is highly recommended that travellers' passports have at least six months' validity remaining after the intended date of departure from their travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

Currency:

The official currency is the Swiss franc (CHF), which is divided into 100 rappen (German) or centimes (French). Although not part of the EU, many prices are indicated in euros and some merchants may accept euros. Credit cards are widely accepted and ATMs are widespread; many are equipped with the Cirrus or Maestro system. Banks offer the best exchange rates, but it is also possible to exchange money at major hotels, main train stations and airports. Banks are open Monday to Friday.

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.

Travel to Switzerland

Overview

Home to soul-stirring natural settings, wealthy cities and charming villages, Switzerland is rightly famous for being one of the first global tourist destinations. Foreign visitors will discover a country that is extremely well prepared for them, as getting to the many attractions is effortless, if rather expensive. Public transport options include buses, taxis and a clean and efficient rail network, and renting a car is an attractive option, thanks to the impeccably maintained and signposted roads.

This is truly a year-round destination, as its cold winters are perfect for skiing and mountain viewing, and its glorious summers are ideal for exploring the major cities and delightful Alpine villages. An obligatory stop on any grand tour of the continent, Switzerland is a sure bet for travellers looking to experience the best of what Europe has to offer.

Climate in Switzerland

The temperature is moderate with no extremes of hot and cold, so Switzerland can be visited at any time of year. Summer is warm to hot and lasts from about June to September and, although good for outdoor activities, it is also the most crowded time for a holiday. Ski resorts open in late November and remain so until the snow begins to melt in April.

Health Notes when travelling to Switzerland

Swiss medical facilities and health care are among the best in the world, but are very expensive, meaning health insurance is recommended. As of January 2021, most people cannot use a UK-issued European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) or a Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC) to get medical treatment in Switzerland. Everyone 16 years of age and older should get fully vaccinated for COVID-19 before travel.

Safety Notes when travelling to Switzerland

Switzerland has a low crime rate compared to other European countries and is generally a safe country to travel in. However, there has been a recent increase in petty theft and visitors should be alert to pickpockets and thieves, particularly in the city centres and on public transport. Travellers should be aware of robberies on overnight trains.

Customs in Switzerland

Privacy and discretion are highly valued in Swiss culture, and strangers generally do not speak to each other. The Swiss are naturally reserved and conservative, and prefer structured rules to govern their daily lives. Littering is a serious social crime in Switzerland, and visitors should also make an effort to throw their recyclables in the proper receptacle. French and German-speaking Switzerland have different customs in some areas. When being introduced to someone, German-speaking Swiss will shake hands, while French-speaking locals may kiss on the cheek three times (generally left, right, left). Though many Swiss speak English, it is considered polite to inquire before attempting conversation.

Duty Free in Switzerland

Travellers to Switzerland over 17 years do not have to pay duty on 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g tobacco; 2 litres alcohol up to 15 percent and 1 litre alcohol over 15 percent. The maximum allowance of wine is 20 litres, but duty will be payable on this quantity. VAT is liable if the total value of all goods exceeds CHF 300. Restricted items include meat and meat products from selected countries. Prohibited items are absinth and anaesthetics.

Doing Business in Switzerland

The Swiss business world reflects the local mastery at building well-oiled machines. Efficiency and organisation are prioritised, and the business culture is based predominantly on merit. The country's formal, no-nonsense approach to business offers little room for humour or lack of preparation in meetings and, though the Swiss are slightly less pedantic than their German or French counterparts, they attach great value to appearance and punctuality.

Dress codes for business people in Switzerland are quite formal and conservative, particularly in the banking sector, where dark suits are the norm. Business and pleasure are entirely separate in the Swiss work environment. In keeping work and personal compartmentalised, Swiss businesspeople even shy away from calling their colleagues by first names, which reinforces formality and boundaries between work and play. When invited to a Swiss business associate's home, a small gift such as flowers or a box of chocolates is appropriate.

In Swiss business culture those in senior positions garner a great deal of respect, but decision-making processes are often quite democratic. Switzerland is home to over 1000 multinationals and has become something of a melting pot of business customs, regional influences and etiquette. English is the corporate language, particularly for multinationals. However, regional languages, such as French, German and Italian, are sometimes preferred in their respective areas. Swiss-German business meetings are rarely over food and are often as brief as possible, with little small talk. By contrast, Swiss-French and Swiss-Italians often meet over lunches and talk is not restricted to business. Handshakes are common for addressing both men and women. Business hours are from 8am to 5pm on weekdays with a lunch break from 12pm to 2pm.

Communication in Switzerland

The international country dialling code for Switzerland is +41. Travellers can purchase local prepaid SIM cards for unlocked phones, and WiFi is widespread.

Tipping in Switzerland

A 15 percent service charge is normally included in all hotel, taxi, bar and restaurant bills, and further tipping is not necessary.

Passport/Visa Note

The borderless region known as the Schengen area includes the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and as of December 2008, Switzerland. All these countries issue a standard Schengen visa that has a multiple entry option that allows the holder to travel freely within the borders of all. It is highly recommended that travellers' passports have at least six months' validity remaining after the intended date of departure from their travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

Entry Requirements

Entry requirements for Americans:

US passport holders require a passport valid for three months beyond period of intended stay. A visa is not necessary for stays of up to 90 days within a 180 day period.

Entry requirements for Canadians:

Canadian passport holders require a passport valid for three months beyond period of intended stay. A visa is not necessary for stays of up to 90 days within a 180 day period.

Entry requirements for UK nationals:

United Kingdom citizens require a passport valid for at least three months beyond period of intended stay, with the exception of passports marked 'British Citizen', 'British Subject' (containing a Certificate of Entitlement to the Right of Abode issued by the United Kingdom), and 'British Overseas Territories Citizen' issued by Gibraltar, which will be accepted if valid on arrival.

No visa is required for passports endorsed 'British Citizen', 'British Overseas Territories Citizen' issued by Gibraltar, Identity Cards issued by Gibraltar, and 'British Subject' (containing a Certificate of Entitlement to the Right of Abode issued by the United Kingdom). All other British nationals are entitled to a maximum stay of 90 days without a visa, within a 180 day period.

Entry requirements for Australians:

Australian passport holders require a passport valid for three months beyond period of intended stay. A visa is not necessary for stays of up to 90 days within a 180 day period.

Entry requirements for Irish nationals:

Irish nationals require a valid passport, valid for the period of the intended stay, but no visa is necessary.

Entry requirements for New Zealanders:

New Zealand nationals require a passport valid for three months beyond period of intended stay. No visa is necessary for a stay of up to 90 days within a 180 day period.

Entry requirements for South Africans:

South African passport holders require a passport valid for three months beyond period of intended stay, and a Schengen visa.

Tourist Offices

Swiss Tourist Office, Zurich: +41 44 215 4000 or <http://www.myswitzerland.com>

Switzerland Embassies

In the United States:

Swiss Embassy, Washington DC, United States: +1 202 745 7900.

In Canada:

Swiss Embassy, Ottawa, Canada: +1 613 235 1837.

In the United Kingdom:

Swiss Embassy, London, United Kingdom: +44 20 7616 6000.

In Australia:

Swiss Embassy, Canberra, Australia: +61 2 6162 8400.

In Ireland:

Swiss Embassy, Dublin, Ireland: +353 1 218 6382.

In New Zealand:

Swiss Embassy, Wellington, New Zealand: +64 4 472 1593.

In South Africa:

Swiss Embassy, Pretoria, South Africa: +27 12 452 0660.

Foreign Embassies in Switzerland

American Embassy

United States Embassy, Bern: +4131 357 7011.

Canadian Embassy

Canadian Embassy, Bern: +41 31 357 3200.

British Embassy

British Embassy, Bern: +41 31 359 7700.

Australian Embassy

Australian Consulate-General, Geneva: +41 22 799 9100.

Irish Embassy

Irish Embassy, Bern: +41 31 352 1442.

New Zealand Embassy

New Zealand Consulate-General, Geneva: +41 22 929 0350.

South African Embassy

South African Embassy, Bern: +41 31 350 1313.

Currency

The official currency is the Swiss franc (CHF), which is divided into 100 rappen (German) or centimes (French). Although not part of the EU, many prices are indicated in euros and some merchants may accept euros. Credit cards are widely accepted and ATMs are widespread; many are equipped with the Cirrus or Maestro system. Banks offer the best exchange rates, but it is also possible to exchange money at major hotels, main train stations and airports. Banks are open Monday to Friday.

Exchange rate for 1 CHF - Swiss Franc

0.00 BMD Bermudan Dollar	1.03 EUR Euro	1.10 USD U.S. Dollar	0.88 GBP U.K. Pound Sterling	168.69 JPY Japanese Yen	1.51 CAD Canadian Dollar
1.67 AUD Australian Dollar	43.44 UAH Ukrainian Hryvnia	489.45 KZT Kazakhstani Tenge	102,624.29 LBP Lebanese Pound	5.36 LYD Libyan Dinar	7.56 BOB Bolivian Boliviano
0.00 NPR Nepalese Rupee	0.00 OMR Omani Rial	0.00 QAR Qatari Rial	1.49 SGD Singapore Dollar	11.93 SEK Swedish Krona	0.00 TTD Trinidad Tobago Dollar
0.00 VEF Venezuelan Bolivar	64.07 DOP Dominican Peso	0.00 HRK Croatian Kuna	18.69 MXN Mexican Peso	673.17 XOF West African CFA Franc	0.00 PGK Papua New Guinean kina
0.00 BSD Bahamian Dollar	0.00 FJD Fiji Dollar	0.00 HNL Honduran Lempira	147.60 DZD Algerian Dinar	0.00 MMK Myanma Kyat	0.00 BWP Botswana Pula
4.10 PEN Peruvian Nuevo Sol	1,034.72 CLP Chilean Peso	426.53 AMD Armenia Dram	25.68 CZK Czech Koruna	19.43 MDL Moldova Lei	154.24 ISK Icelandic Krona
13,873.33 UZS Uzbekistan Sum	4.10 ILS Israeli New Sheqel	0.78 JOD Jordanian Dinar	0.00 KWD Kuwaiti Dinar	42.07 UYU Uruguayan Peso	0.00 MUR Mauritian Rupee
0.00 NIO Nicaraguan Córdoba	12.00 NOK Norwegian Krone	4.44 PLN Polish Zloty	4.14 SAR Saudi Riyal	0.00 LKR Sri Lanka Rupee	40.56 THB Thai Baht
4.04 AED U.A.E Dirham	5.61 BRL Brazilian Real	5.11 RON Romanian New Leu	8.62 HKD Hong Kong Dollar	673.17 XAF Central African CFA Franc	28,012.27 VND Vietnamese Dong
968.48 ARS Argentine Peso	0.00 XCD East Caribbean Dollar	0.00 GTQ Guatemalan Quetzal	11.09 MAD Moroccan Dirham	0.00 BHD Bahrain Dinar	1.10 PAB Panamanian Balboa
1.87 AZN Azerbaijan Manat	4,322.18 COP Colombian Peso	97.49 KGS Kyrgyzstan Som	399.14 HUF Hungarian Forint	12.01 TJS Tajikistan Ruble	17,722.83 IDR Indonesian Rupiah
52.87 EGP Egyptian Pound	1,498.25 KRW South Korean Won	8,221.54 PYG Paraguayan Guaraní	5.23 MYR Malaysian Ringgit	560.47 CRC Costa Rican Colón	1.84 NZD New Zealand Dollar
306.38 PKR Pakistani Rupee	100.77 RUB Russian Rouble	20.41 ZAR South African Rand	3.46 TND Tunisian Dinar	0.00 BBD Barbadian Dollar	2.01 BGN Bulgarian Lev
35.65 TRY Turkish Lira	63.16 PHP Philippine Peso	35.63 TWD New Taiwan Dollar	1,284.35 NGN Nigerian Naira	0.00 XPF CFP Franc	0.00 GHS Ghanaian Cedi
0.00 JMD Jamaican Dollar	0.00 ANG Neth. Antillean Guilder	0.00 BND Brunei Dollar	120.08 RSD Serbian Dinar	7.98 CNY Chinese Yuan	7.65 DKK Danish Krone
3.85 TMT New Turkmenistan Manat	91.98 INR Indian Rupee				

Overview of the Attractions in Switzerland

Home to soul-stirring natural settings, wealthy cities and charming villages, Switzerland is rightly famous for being one of the first global tourist destinations. Foreign visitors will discover a country that is extremely well prepared for them, as getting to the many attractions is effortless, if rather expensive. Public transport options include buses, taxis and a clean and efficient rail network, and renting a car is an attractive option, thanks to the impeccably maintained and signposted roads.

This is truly a year-round destination, as its cold winters are perfect for skiing and mountain viewing, and its glorious summers are ideal for exploring the major cities and delightful Alpine villages. An obligatory stop on any grand tour of the continent, Switzerland is a sure bet for travellers looking to experience the best of what Europe has to offer.

Public Holidays in Switzerland

	2023	2024
New Year's Day	Mon. January 1	Mon. January 1
Saint Berchtold Day	Tue. January 2	Tue. January 2
Good Friday	Sun. April 7	Fri. March 29
Easter Monday	Wed. April 10	Mon. April 1
May Day	Wed. May 1	Wed. May 1
Ascension Day	Sat. May 18	Thu. May 9
Whit Monday	Wed. May 29	Mon. May 20
Swiss National Day	Thu. August 1	Thu. August 1
Assumption of Mary	Thu. August 15	Thu. August 15
All Saints' Day	Fri. November 1	Fri. November 1
Immaculate Conception	Sun. December 8	Sun. December 8
Christmas Day	Wed. December 25	Wed. December 25
St Stephen's Day	Thu. December 26	Thu. December 26