

EUROPE · MOUNTAINS · HIKING · WINTER SPORTS · ADVENTURE · FOOD



Switzerland

Switzerland fits much of the Alps' finest scenery into a country smaller than Scotland, linked by famously punctual trains. Zermatt frames the Matterhorn, the Glacier and Bernina Expresses rank among the world's great rail journeys, and the lakes of Lucerne and Geneva add a gentler side. It is eye-wateringly expensive, so plan transport and meals carefully.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Switzerland and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 11 August 2026.

 CAPITAL Bern	 CURRENCY Swiss franc (CHF) £1 ≈ CHF 1.10	 LANGUAGE German, French Italian, Romansh	 BEST TIME Jun–Sep, Dec–Mar
 DAILY BUDGET £95–£420 £££ Expensive	 PLUGS Type J, C 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 1h 40m direct ~£80–£280 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+1 standard time

Switzerland packs four language regions, 48 peaks over 4,000m and an outstanding public transport network into a compact space. A first trip usually links a city or two, such as Zurich, Lucerne or Geneva, with time in the mountains: the Jungfrau region around Interlaken and Lauterbrunnen, Zermatt and the Matterhorn, or the Engadine around St Moritz. The great scenic railways join these up, and Bern's arcaded medieval old town and the Italian-speaking lakes of Ticino make easy additions. Summer is for hiking and lake swimming; winter brings some of Europe's best-organised skiing.

Everything works, and you pay for it: Switzerland is among the most expensive countries in the world, and a sandwich, a mountain railway ticket and a hotel room will all cost more than you expect. The trade-off is effortless travel, spotless towns, excellent tap water and paths so well marked that independent hiking is easy. Peak summer and school-holiday ski weeks are busy, while May, early June and autumn are quieter, though some lifts close for maintenance. It suits hikers, rail enthusiasts and food lovers. Many visitors are surprised by how quiet Sundays are and how good supermarket picnic food can be.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

NATURE

Zermatt and the Matterhorn

A car-free resort beneath the 4,478m Matterhorn. Ride the rack railway to Gornergrat for the classic view, walk the Five Lakes trail for reflections, and in winter ski across the border to Cervinia in Italy.
- 2

ADVENTURE

Jungfrau region

Lauterbrunnen's sheer valley of 72 waterfalls, car-free Wengen and Mürren, and the Eiger's north face make up Switzerland's classic Alpine scenery. The railway to Jungfraujoch reaches Europe's highest station at 3,454m; it is expensive, so pick a clear day.

3

NATURE

Glacier Express

An eight-hour panoramic train between Zermatt and St Moritz, crossing the Oberalp Pass and the curving Landwasser Viaduct. Regular regional trains run the same tracks for less, and the Bernina Express to Tirano is a shorter alternative.

4

CITY

Lucerne

A medieval old town on the lake, crossed by the 14th-century Kapellbrücke, a wooden covered bridge rebuilt after a fire in 1993. Take a paddle steamer across the lake and ride the world's steepest cogwheel railway up Mount Pilatus.

5

FOOD

Lavaux vineyards

UNESCO-listed terraces of Chasselas vines falling steeply to Lake Geneva between Lausanne and Montreux. Walk between villages such as Cully and Epesses, taste at family-run cellars, and continue to the lakeside Château de Chillon.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Zurich

≈ 1.5 million people

Livelier than its banking reputation suggests: swim in the Limmat's river baths, explore the old town and the Kunsthaus, and eat in the converted factories of Zurich West.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Geneva

≈ 635,000 people

Lakeside home of the UN, the Red Cross museum and CERN's free exhibitions; the Jet d'Eau, the old town and boat trips on Lake Geneva fill a day or two.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Basel

≈ 570,000 people

Swiss, French and German at once, with outstanding art at the Fondation Beyeler and Kunstmuseum, a handsome old town on the Rhine and summer swims downstream.

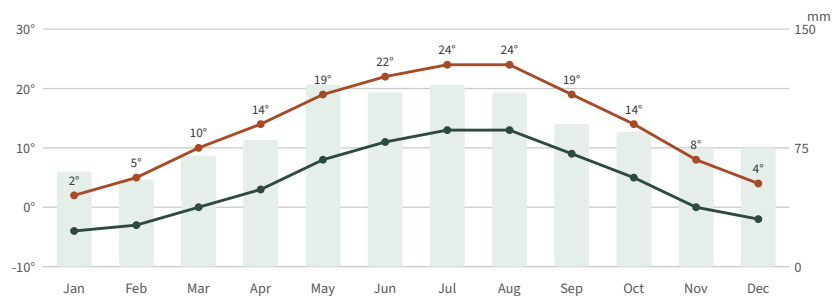
Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Switzerland

Best time: **Jun–Sep, Dec–Mar.**

**Average climate in Bern**

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb–Mar	Basel Fasnacht Switzerland's biggest carnival starts at 4am on the Monday after Ash Wednesday with the Morgestraich, when the city lights go out and lantern-lit piccolo and drum cliques parade for three days.
Jul	Montreux Jazz Festival Two weeks of concerts on the shore of Lake Geneva each July, from big-name ticketed shows to free stages and late-night jams along the lakeside promenade.
Aug	Swiss National Day On 1 August, the anniversary of the 1291 Federal Charter, towns and villages light hilltop bonfires, set off fireworks and hold brunches on farms across the country.

How much does Switzerland cost?

SHOESTRING £95 per person / day ≈ CHF 105 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £210 per person / day ≈ CHF 232 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £420 per person / day ≈ CHF 463 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

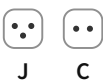
Fondue Gruyère and Vacherin Fribourgeois melted with white wine and kirsch in a shared caquelon, scooped up with bread on long forks; a winter ritual best eaten 'moitié-moitié'.	Raclette Valais cheese melted under heat and scraped onto boiled potatoes, eaten with gherkins and pickled onions, ideally with a glass of local Fendant.	Rösti Grated potato fried into a crisp golden cake in butter, originally a Bernese farmers' breakfast and now served alongside almost everything.
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Getting around

Trains, PostBuses, lake boats and many mountain railways run on a single integrated timetable, so most visitors never need a car. A Swiss Travel Pass gives unlimited travel and covers or discounts many mountain railways; the Half Fare Card halves most fares. Book Supersaver tickets in the SBB app. Drivers need a motorway vignette, and Zermatt, Wengen and Mürren are car-free.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



230V — bring a UK-to-J/C adapter

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Telephone: **112** (ambulance, fire, police)

Ambulance: **144**

Fire: **118**

Police: **117**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

DIALLING CODE

+41

TIME ZONE

UTC+1 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Generally safe to drink

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Service is included in prices, so tipping is optional; round up or add 5–10% for good restaurant service, and round up taxi fares.

ETIQUETTE

Be punctual and greet shop staff when you enter. Respect quiet hours, usually after 10pm and on Sundays, sort your recycling carefully, and don't cross against a red pedestrian light.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Zurich Airport (ZRH), Zurich; Geneva Airport (GVA), Geneva; EuroAirport Basel Mulhouse Freiburg (BSL), Basel

Visas & entry for Switzerland

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can travel without a visa to the Schengen area, which includes Switzerland, for up to 90 days in any 180-day period. This applies if you travel: as a tourist; to visit family or friends; to attend business meetings, cultural or sports events; for short-term studies or training.

At passport control, use the 'All passports' lane.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Bat Lyssavirus

Tick-borne encephalitis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Switzerland

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Thu 6 May 2027	Ascension Day
Sun 1 Aug 2027	National Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Swiss German

ENGLISH	SWISS GERMAN	SAY IT
Hello	Grüezi	<i>GROO-et-see</i>
Thank you	Merci vilmal	<i>MAIR-see FEEL-mahl</i>
Please	Bitte	<i>BIT-teh</i>
Excuse me	Exgüsi	<i>ex-GOO-see</i>
How much is this?	Was choschtet das?	<i>vass KHOSH-tet dass</i>

Know before you go

Price out your itinerary before buying a Swiss Travel Pass: for slower trips, a Half Fare Card plus Supersaver tickets often works out cheaper than the pass.

Swiss sockets accept slim two-pin Europlugs but not chunky Schuko-style plugs, so a standard UK-to-Europe adaptor may not fit; pack a Swiss Type J adaptor.

Picnic from Coop and Migros supermarkets, which are far cheaper than restaurants (Migros supermarkets sell no alcohol). Shops close on Sundays, but station branches stay open.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.