

Winter holidays in Switzerland

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WINTER HOLIDAYS IN SWITZERLAND

Holidays are an escape from the clockwork compulsions of everyday. In the mountain winter sun, snow and wind determine the contents of our hours. It is the interplay of changing factors in nature that gives us new strength, stimulating us to activity in sports and offering relaxation in many different keys; relaxation on white paths cleared by the snow-plough, in deck-chairs on sunny terraces, or beside shining ice-rinks; and activity above all on skis, which more than anything else have helped to open up the mountain winter. In Switzerland this movement began less than a century ago. The first efforts in skiing in the Swiss Alps were undertaken in 1891 in the Canton of Glarus, on skis specially made for the purpose. It was there that the first Swiss skiing club was formed on 22nd November, 1893. It is just 75 years, too, since the Maienfelder Furka between Davos and Arosa was crossed on skis by local pioneers. That was in spring 1893, and in the following year, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, repeated the feat with his brother.

The first crossing of the Bernese Oberland on skis was made in 1897. These achievements were the beginning of an unbroken chronicle of skiing exploits which have led, as spring skiing tours have become more popular, into ever higher regions, to culminate today in the impressive conquest of the slopes of the Titlis in Central Switzerland and the traversing of the *haute route* in the Alps of the Valais. The needs of beginners are now catered for by ski-schools that have long been a feature of every Swiss holiday resort and that do a great deal to foster an atmosphere of winter companionship.

Skating, curling and tobogganing are all older sports than skiing in the Swiss mountains, having been practised first in the Grisons. The constitution of the curling club of St. Moritz was drawn up in 1880, and the first Swiss skating club came into existence in Davos in 1883. It was in these two resorts too that winter visitors first made a sport out of the tobogganing that had long been a winter amusement of the village boys. The Davos toboggan soon established its name, and skeleton and bobsleigh now contribute greatly to the sporting thrills of the Upper Engadine. The attractions of skating have led to the construction of rinks that have become international meeting-places for the world's best exponents of this elegant and athletic sport, while not far away curlers can go about their own more contemplative pastime.

Many Swiss resorts now have their own indoor swimming pools. These have upset the old-fashioned calendar by prolonging the bathing season into the depths of winter. Funiculars and a rapidly growing number of aerial cableways in Alps and Jura do the same in the opposite sense, extending the skiing season far into the spring. When the shores of the Lake of Geneva or of the Ticinese lakes are already in full blossom, it is today an easy matter to spend a day skiing on the surrounding hills.

Horse-racing on snow conjures the atmosphere of fashionable summer events into the winter Alps, and the long evenings favour all the varied pleasures of conviviality. Thus Swiss winter holidays have something to offer everybody, skiers and non-skiers, lovers of the polished hospitality of multi-star hotels, or of the simple comfort of the remote ski-cabin, or of the clear, frosty sky. As the year grows old, it calls out in its winter strongholds for youth — and for all who wish to stay young.

[S.N.T.O.]

WEATHER NEWS

The much-feared *Föhn* wind played havoc in Central Switzerland early in November, especially the following rain and floods. These were worst in the Ticino, and the Bernese Oberland, whilst the first snow fell in the Valais and in Central Switzerland, but also in the Ticino. A large number of passes had to be closed to traffic.

Mid-November brought snow to many parts in the low-lying country, and with it the usual road accidents. Six degrees centigrade below zero was very low for November at Kloten Airport. Near Romoss (Lucerne) and at Malans (Grisons) two men were found frozen to death after accidents.

Warm air improved conditions towards the end of November, but there was quite some fog and mist. Mid-December saw a fairly warm atmosphere in most places, and whilst resorts longed for snow, there was plenty of sunshine. In the Valais forsythias were in bloom. But then, on 17th December, the snow came silently and persistently, and soon even roads in town had to be treated with salt. Snow-clearing equipment was put in service. Whilst the Gotthard had 25cm. of new snow, there was little in the Grisons. By Christmas, there was snow in most resorts, and the first avalanche went down in the Vaudois Alps near L'Etivaz and La Lècherette; one of the victims was a woman from Lausanne, wife of Prof. J.-L. Seylaz (Lausanne University and Berne).

Talking of avalanches, the figure recently published for compensation paid out to victims of the black avalanche season last year, amounted to 7.5 million francs, not including 5m. paid out by the Grisons Cantonal Insurance. The insured themselves carried a loss of about $\frac{1}{4}$ million. There are still some 2 million francs to be paid out for damages not yet covered.

The Swiss hail insurance had to pay out about 14.5m. francs last summer, though damage caused by hail was not excessive.

[A.T.S.]

SWISS STATION "BUFFETS" INCLUDE TIPS

The Swiss Federal railways have recently announced that their 70 Station Restaurants will include the tips in their prices from 1st January 1969. These 70 "buffets" employ over 3,000 staff, offer 20,000 seats and have an annual turn-over of over £10 million. The Station "Buffet" at Zurich Main Station alone employs 600 staff. With its 2,000 seats, it ranks amongst the largest catering establishments in Europe.

[S.N.T.O.]

Discussion whether all tips should be included in the prices goes on in many parts and in a number of organisations, and the new system has already been introduced in some establishments.

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