

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 20 (1993)
Heft: 4

Artikel: St. Gall : the landscape is trumps
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907433>

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St. Gall

The landscape is trumps

The 700-year jubilee scheme "Visit Switzerland in 1991" was a stunning success. Its continuation was called "Visit Switzerland - See the World", and the idea was to put it under the aegis of one canton every year. Last year it was Grisons, and this year it is the turn of St. Gall.

Why this particular choice? In the second half of the last century, Canton St. Gall was an important emigration area. Between 1850 and 1890, about 12,000 people left the canton to seek new livelihoods elsewhere,

Heidi Willumat

2,000 from Werdenberg District alone. So it seems appropriate now - or so think the people inhabiting this hospitable and open-minded frontier canton - that the descendants of the old emigrants should be given an opportunity of spending a holiday in their homeland with a Swiss family.

"Visit Switzerland - See the World", organised by the Stapferhaus in Lenzburg, was one of the few jubilee schemes to continue beyond 1991. It gives Swiss Abroad the chance to stay with Swiss families in all 26 cantons; and now Swiss residents can also stay with Swiss Abroad families in other countries.

January in rural St. Gall: Mt. Säntis at back. (Photo: Archives)

A mini-Switzerland

Last year's sponsor canton, Grisons, was introduced as a "Little Switzerland within Switzerland" (Swiss Review 4/5 1992). And the fore-Alpine countryside of Canton St. Gall, situated between the Lake of Constance, the Lake of Zurich and the Walensee, is another true reflection of rural Switzerland - with its gentle hills, its fruitful valleys and its myriad small lakes.

The variety of its landscape makes up the tourism capital of this canton, whose towns and villages bear witness to a history stretching far back along the centuries.

Winter sports

Family friendliness is of the greatest importance in St. Gall. This is particularly true for the Toggenburg area, with its wellknown ski resorts, Wildhaus, Unterwasser and Alt St. Johann. Flumserberg, Amden and Bad Ragaz/Wangs/Pizol, with their modern cable ways, carefully tended downhill and cross-country ski runs, are also excellent for winter sports. Panoramic views, everything

taken in at a glance, as well as ski slopes for all levels, guarantee carefree holidays.

In summer and autumn, the easy slopes of the fore-Alpine hills of St. Gall are ideal for cycling and walking.

Nor should it be forgotten that charming Appenzell and the Principality of Liechtenstein are immediate neighbours.

UNESCO World Heritage

St. Gall is the economic, scientific and artistic centre of eastern Switzerland. It is best known for its historic old city with the world-famous cathedral close - made up of the magnificent baroque abbey church and library - which in 1983 was added to UNESCO's prestigious World Heritage List.

The abbey was founded as a hermitage in the 7th century by the Irish missionary, Gallus, but it later took up the Benedictine rule and became one of the biggest artistic centres of medieval Europe. The library still contains many unique treasures of the past, although little of the old buildings is left.

The great baroque abbey church - the locals (and others) prefer this expression - was built between 1755 and 1767, one of the latest of Europe's great monastic edifices. In 1823, when the Swiss part of the old diocese of Constance was detached, St. Gall's abbey church was declared a cathedral. In 1833 the end of the double diocese of Coire and St. Gall brought it independence. Because of its date, the abbey church lacks the sweeping pathos of high baroque, but its simple and elegant lines announce the rebirth of classicism. Its rich interior - with rococo stucco work painted in a riot of colour rather than with the usual pastel shades - comes as a magnificent surprise to the visitor. ■

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