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Switzerland in the UK

1/08



Is Sir Richard Branson's pad the most expensive chalet in the Alps?

Sir Richard Branson is calling it "my Necker in the Snow", after the millionaires' island he owns in the Caribbean. Now, after a £7.5 million refurbishment, the chalet-style hotel he bought on the slopes above Verbier in the Valais is about to open its doors.

But a stay at Verbier Lodge will be way beyond the means of most visitors to the bustling, super chic resort. The ideal client will be expected to take over all nine bedrooms and invite his friends along to spend the week in the last word in luxury.

The cost? During the winter months just one week alone starts at £35,000, going up to £57,000 in the high season.

That includes exclusive use of the lodge for up to 18 adults and six children who will sleep together in the Kids' Bunk room, together with an indoor pool and mini ice rink, indoor and outdoor jacuzzi, fully equipped gym – and your own driver on call 24 hours a day.

You'll still have to buy your own ski passes for Verbier and the Four Valleys, offering one of the largest ski areas in the Alps. However, as much Champagne as you like will be on the house. As the

prospectus puts it: "No limit is placed on the amount of food or drink consumed, and guests are encouraged to treat the Lodge like their own home. They are therefore welcome to help themselves to anything they want at any time."

Verbier Lodge is the latest jewel in the crown of Sir Richard Branson's holiday company, Virgin Limited Edition. His four other top holiday spots include Necker island, in the British Virgin Islands group.

This was named after a Swiss, Jacques Necker, who was born in Geneva and found his fortune in Paris, where he became a French statesman and Louis XVI's finance minister.

He married the daughter of a Lausanne pastor and their own daughter was to achieve fame in her own right as the renowned author Madame de Staél.

Jacques Necker's downfall came when he crossed swords with the powerful Marie Antoinette, then became involved in the French Revolution and was eventually exiled to Coppet near Geneva where he died in 1804.

Chaplin's memorial



Thirty years after his death, the Swiss home of the 'exiled' Charlie Chaplin is about to become a unique museum. Read about it on Page 3.

Railways' resurgence



It's quicker – and cheaper – than ever. Rail travel to Switzerland is getting a big boost in order to compete with airlines. Find out more on Pages 4-5.

Studer's fightback



He may have failed to become a Swiss MP at the last federal elections, but Edgar Studer is still on the campaign trail. It's all explained on Page 8.

Switzerland in the UK

The magazine for Swiss living and

Switzerland in the UK

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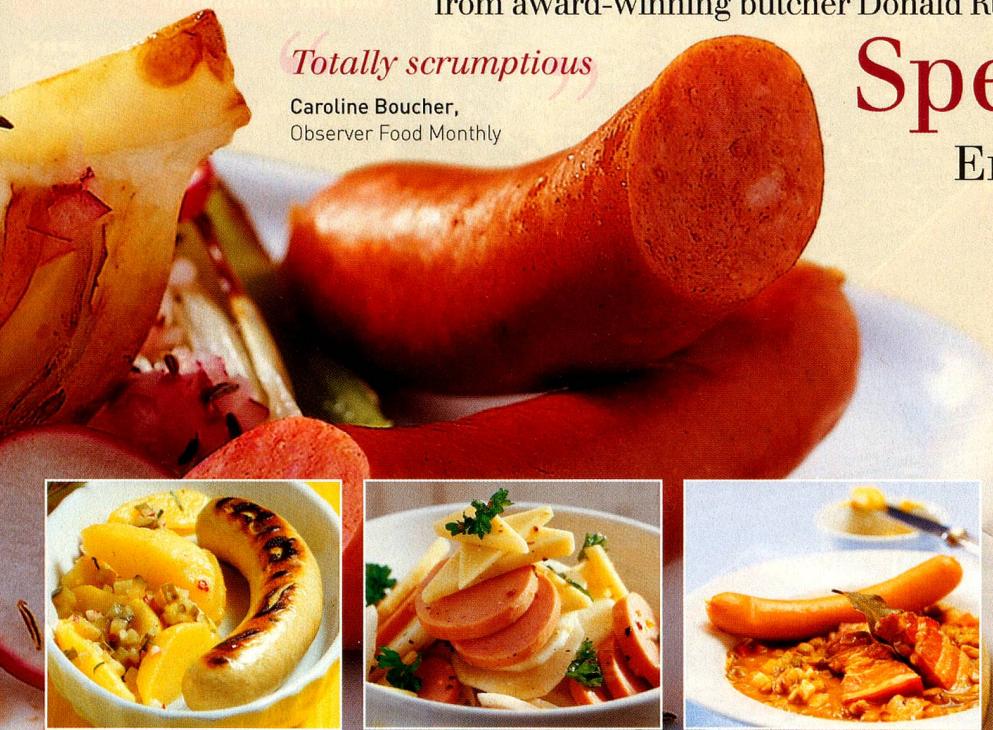
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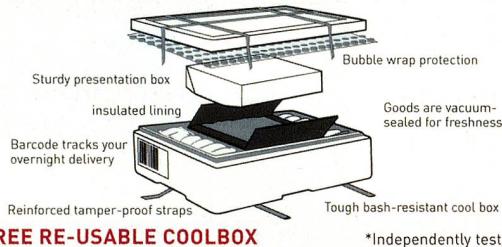
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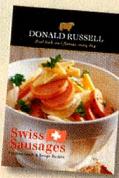
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Swiss pay tribute to the Little Tramp who lived his final years among them in peace

Swiss newspapers and TV have been commemorating the life of the poor boy from a London orphanage who became the cinematic icon of the 20th century.

It was on Christmas Day 30 years ago that Charlie Chaplin died at his home above Lake Geneva, where he had lived for 24 years after being exiled from the USA.

The 30th anniversary of his death has seen a resurgence of interest by

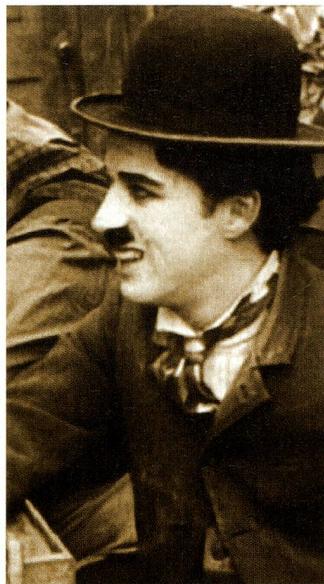
Swiss newspapers and television in the remarkable story of the little tramp who made good, became a multi-millionaire, was vilified by extreme right politicians and ended his final years in the peace and tranquillity of his Swiss home, where he died at the age of 88.

Today the links between London and his Swiss resting place are marked by twin bronze statues, one on the promenade at Vevey, where he looks out over the Lake of Geneva, and the other where he stands proudly in Leicester Square, the heart of London's Theatreland.

Soon we shall be hearing much more about Chaplin and his immeasurable gift to the world of entertainment when his last home, the Manoir de Ban outside the village of Corsier-sur-Vevey, reopens as the Chaplin museum.

The magnificent house, built in old English Colonial style with an impressive white colonnade, had been lying derelict for many years before Chaplin, his wife Oona and their eight children moved in.

Now the family are about to sign a deal with a group of Luxembourg investors who plan to spend Sfr.



Charlie Chaplin in *The Immigrant* (1917). Thirty six years later he became an immigrant himself – in Switzerland



How to contact the editor

Reports of Swiss society activities and coming events, and articles and correspondence for the 'Switzerland in the UK' section of the Swiss Review, should go to the editor:

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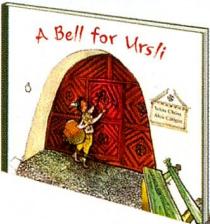
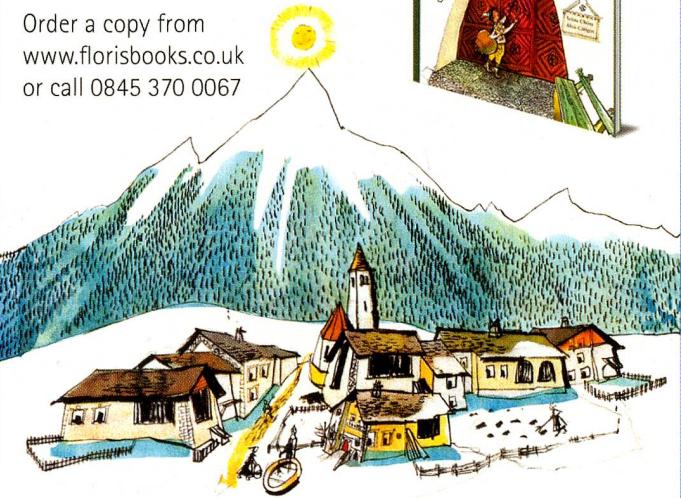
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Fed up with airport chaos?

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The opening of the rejuvenated St Pancras station and the new, 68 mile high-speed rail link between London and Folkestone has brought Switzerland a little closer to the UK. And many Swiss in Britain have been wasting no time in trying out the new service for themselves.

They've found that travelling by train to Switzerland via Paris is not only quicker than ever – but much cheaper than they might have expected.

The first leg of their journey, by Eurostar from London to Paris, now takes only 2 hours 15 minutes. From there dozens of high-speed TGV trains a day go directly to Switzerland.

From the Gare

Paris

du Lyon they can travel to Neuchâtel, Berne, Vallorbe, Lausanne or Geneva, where regional trains can take them on to their final destination.

From the Gare de l'Est they can go to Basle and Zurich, via Strasbourg. And in 2011 a new track – TGV Rhine-Rhone – will take them on an even quicker route via Dijon.

The new Eurostar service from St Pancras to Paris travels at up to 186 mph from London to Folkestone – twice the speed of even Britain's fastest domestic rail service. It drops slightly to 168 mph under the Channel

Tunnel, and then speeds up to 202mph in France.

Eurostar's chief executive, Richard Brown, said: "Britain has now joined the European high-speed rail club." And he added that even for people travelling from Yorkshire journey times were "broadly the same" as for flying, due to the lengthier check-in times at airports.

"It's as quick, and more frequent," he said. "And we will be matching airline prices."

There had been fears that

unless passengers started their journey from London, the cost of rail travel to get to St Pancras would be prohibitive. But he said that train companies operating north of London were now playing their part in introducing attractive through fares from Yorkshire, Scotland and the Midlands.

A deal between Eurostar and the UK's major train operators means return fares from UK cities to Paris are as low as £59. Return

fares for the second leg, from Paris to destinations in Switzerland start at £40 second class and £80 first class.

There are 17 Eurostar trains a day going from London to Paris, from where a constant stream of TGVs take them directly to major Swiss cities for connection to regional or local trains.

The table below shows the total number of trains going via Paris to

Switzerland, with total journey times from London as little as six and a half hours.

We also show the total return fare, starting at £89 from London to Geneva or Basle and at £111 from London to Zurich. But note that the railways have adopted the same variable pricing structure as the budget airlines, which means that the earlier you book the cheaper it will be. Sometimes the difference can be quite substantial. Through fares can now be purchased up to 84 days in advance.

Virgin Trains, which travel to London Euston from cities like Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool and Birmingham, point out one other advantage of their new arrangement with operators on the Continent.

From now on you pay only one fare to go from your local station to your destination in Switzerland.

Before you had to buy three different tickets – from your home

station to Euston, another ticket from London to Paris, and a third from Paris to Switzerland.

"What's more," they add, "your fare will also cover the transfer

between London Euston and St Pancras International."

To find the actual times of trains

between the UK and Switzerland

use the interactive Swiss timetable

at: www.swissreview.co.uk

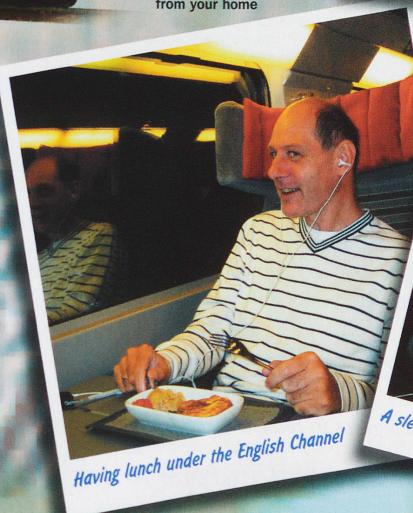
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St Pancras to...	Trains daily	Journey times, from	Return fares, from
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Berne	15	8h.11	£97
Basle	12	6h.19	£89
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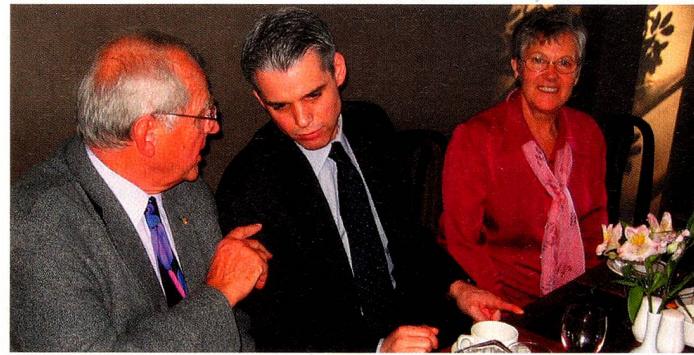
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Ursula Ross takes the helm in Edinburgh

Edinburgh Swiss Club has a new president. At the recent AGM Ursula Ross took over from Freddie Wyser, who had been combining the role with the presidency of FOSSUK, the



Newly arrived Consul General Reto Renggli (centre) with FOSSUK president Freddie Wyser and new president of Edinburgh Swiss Club, Ursula Ross

Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK. Under its new president Scotland's biggest Swiss club has planned a wide range of events to

take place during 2008. Full details can be obtained from the club's secretary, Pam Smart, whose email address is pam@tweedside.co.uk.

A new face at club events is the newly appointed Swiss Consul General in Scotland, 38 year old Reto Renggli, who has now replaced Consul General Bruno Widrig.

Mr Renggli has been in the Swiss foreign service since 1991. Following postings in Vancouver, Stuttgart and Bonn, he returned to Switzerland to work on promoting Swiss exports with the OSEC Business Network in Zurich.

Armed with this experience he joined the Swiss Embassy in Warsaw as head of the Swiss Business Hub in Poland, where he stayed until taking up his current post in Edinburgh.



The Swiss passport and ID card: Only the passport may be recognised as an ID card in the UK in the future

not be sufficient for identification purposes in the UK.

They added that, despite this, the card remains a valid travel document for entry into the UK.

The Embassy assured us that as soon as they are informed officially of the scope and timetable of the proposed ID scheme they will ensure that all Swiss citizens are given all the necessary information.

Swiss Review put the question to the UK Identity and Passport Service. This is what they said:

"Although the Identity Cards Act provides for ID cards to be issued to all those legally resident in the UK, the exact timetable for the roll out has yet to be finalised.

"Consequently the roll out to foreign nationals has yet to be defined."

At the Swiss Embassy we were told that while it is expected that eventually a biometric ID card will be necessary for all foreigners in Britain, whether Swiss or EU nationals, a valid national passport will be acceptable for ID purposes.

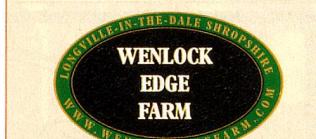
It was pointed out however that the small plastic card is not a passport but is really a Swiss Identity Card, which means it may

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Edgar Studer: 'I'll fight on to get the Swiss Abroad into Parliament'

He may have failed in his second attempt to become a Swiss MP. And he says he'll be too old to be a candidate in 2011. But the sprightly pensioner from the sleepy Berkshire village of Finchampstead is determined to do all he can to ensure the Swiss Abroad will eventually be represented in the Swiss Parliament.

There were 32 candidates from outside Switzerland who fought the latest federal elections. None of them got anywhere near winning.

Two of them stood in canton Schaffhausen – Edgar and Rolf Schudel from South Africa. They managed to achieve 1.1 per cent of the vote.

"We didn't really stand a chance," said Edgar, who before coming to England was a civil servant in Bülach, Canton Zurich.

"Everything was against us. The main candidates didn't want us to take part, and the voters made clear they didn't want someone from abroad to represent them in the national Parliament."

The problem first came home to them when a press conference was called to introduce the candidates, and the organisers told them straight they only wanted the main candidates to be there.

One reason they gave was that the media would concentrate on the novelty factor of two 'foreigners' taking part and would ignore the main issues.

So how can the Swiss Abroad overcome such obstacles? Edgar is convinced the only answer is for the Swiss Abroad to have its own candidates.

He explained: "In October there were 165,000 Swiss overseas with the right to vote. But their votes were divided among all the cantons. The Swiss Abroad candidates had no chance of being elected.

"The Swiss Abroad should be considered as a separate canton, with its own candidates. Only when we have our own seat in Parliament will we be able to have a say on the



'Now we have got to keep up the momentum,' says Edgar Studer

many issues that affect the Swiss Abroad.

"The Swiss Abroad have the right to vote, but no representation in Parliament. That cannot be right. Rudolf Wyder, the director of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, agrees with me that we've got to move forward. We have to keep up the momentum."

Edgar Studer admits there are a lot of hurdles to jump over. The main one being to persuade MPs to change the Swiss constitution to make this possible. And for that it will mean getting the support of politicians.

He's going to start by lobbying officers of his own party. And he'll be doing the same in Berne at the next meeting of the OSA in April, where he is a deputy delegate representing the UK.

Golf day

Plans are now underway to hold another Swiss Golf Day in the spring.

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