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Little gems

A low-altitude flight over Switzerland

At the end of the 1990s, Switzerland's landscapes were shown for hours on Swiss television during the intermissions. Swissview is what this was and still is called. It is just the media that have changed. The films are now on sale in high resolution on Blu-ray disc and have been available in a very attractive format for several months now as an iPad and iPhone app.

The app is extremely straightforward. Users select the desired region on a map or from a list and purchase indi-

vidual three-minute films from over 1,600 available. These are then stored on the device and are available at any time under "My Films" without an Internet connection. The newer films are available in HD resolution and appear in extremely high quality on an iPad.

The films are produced by Marco Fumasoli. The filmmaker from Zurich has flown over Switzerland thousands of times by helicopter since 1995. Films purchased can also be sent to friends and family throughout the world free of charge with the app.

www.swissview.com



A blank sheet

The Bianca Story, a quintet from Basel, are in the process of conquering Europe. Their unpredictable pop-rock with dance appeal, their stirring English lyrics, the gravely, enchanting voice of male vocalist Elia Rediger and the uplifting vocals of Anna Waibel have everything to appeal to a wide audience. These jack-of-all-trades performers (musical, multimedia, video and even opera) have quickly gone international by signing with a German record label (MotorMusic) and recording their new album at the prestigious Abbey Road studios in London. The full creative dimension to the group's name is made clear on the album "Coming Home". "Bianca" is an Italian reference to a blank sheet of paper on which stories, melodies and adventures are created from scratch. They are producing hit tracks like a string of pearls – "Lazy Boy", "Coming Home", "Afraid Of The World" and "Dancing People Are Never Wrong" are sensational.

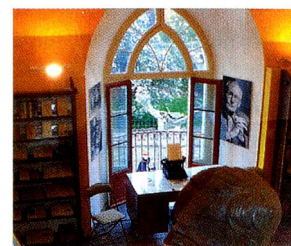
www.thebiancastory.com



À-la-carte culture

Studiosus, the tourist operator that specialises in cultural travel, allows Switzerland to be seen through the eyes of a tourist and focuses on attractions that local people – and certainly many Swiss abroad – pay no attention to because they are so familiar with them. Studiosus' travel portfolio includes Switzerland along with Alaska, New Zealand, Bukhara and other exotic destinations. Trips available between August and December 2012 include, for example, "Bernina and the Glacier Express", "Hermann Hesse in Claw and Montagnola" and "Actively Experience Engadine and Valais". Swiss abroad who spend their holidays at home can also book Studiosus trips, excluding travel to Switzerland. Prices are adjusted accordingly. This, of course, applies not just to trips in Switzerland but to all destinations. This provides Swiss abroad in Spain, the USA or elsewhere with the opportunity to discover their second homeland better.

www.studiosus.com



The Thankless Stranger

Irena Brežná opens her novel "Die undankbare Fremde" (The Thankless Stranger) with the sentence "We left our country behind in familiar darkness and approached the shining distance." Brežná, who was born in Czechoslovakia in 1950, fled to Switzerland with her parents in 1968. Today, she lives in Basel and is a highly acclaimed translator and journalist. Her autobiographical novel is a sad and touching yet, at the same time, amusing book. The young first-person narrator experiences the move to Switzerland as anything but salvation as an 18-year-old. She finds the country, paralysed by the Cold War, an unsettling and very strange place. She observes her own attempts to integrate and vividly portrays the peculiarities of Switzerland and the idiosyncrasies of the Swiss.

Brežná intersperses the episodes from her everyday life

with "minutes" from her job as a translator. This juxtaposition represents the book's strength. It gives a real background to the accounts of the young first-person narrator who lives in a state of constant confrontation and quarrels with almost everyone. Brežná's book is not just an enjoyable read but also an extremely interesting contribution to the debate on integration currently taking place in Switzerland.

Irena Brežná, "Die undankbare Fremde" (in German); Verlag Galiani Berlin; ISBN 978-3-86971-052-5; CHF 24



Bulletins

Further population growth

Switzerland's population stood at 7,952,600 at the end of 2011. This is 82,400 people more than in the previous year, according to the latest federal government statistics. The 2011 increase of around 1% is almost exactly in line with the rise in the resident population recorded in the previous year. Other European countries, including France, Italy and Austria, also recorded population growth, while the size of Germany's population is decreasing. Switzerland's population is made up of 4 million women and 3.9 million men. 1,400 people are over 100 years of age.

More people with no religious affiliation

The Federal Statistical Office's most recent population census revealed more and more Swiss people have no religious affiliation and do not belong to a church. 20.1% of the population belong to this group, which is almost 9% more than ten years ago. 38.8% of Switzerland's resident population indicated that they are Roman Catholic, 30.9% Reformed/Evangelical, 4.5% Muslim and 0.2% Jewish.

Much fewer hours worked

Working hours have fallen by a third in Switzerland since 1950. In 1950, the figure stood at 2,400 hours per year on average, whereas today it is just 1,600 hours according to a study by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the KOF Swiss Economic Institute. In addition to fewer working hours and more holidays – five weeks on average today compared with two weeks in 1950 – the reduction

in average working hours is also explained by high numbers of part-time employees. Around 31% of those in employment work less than 90%.

Opposition to tax agreements

AUNS (Campaign for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland), a group closely associated with the Swiss People's Party (SVP), and the Young Swiss Social Democratic Party (Juso) are calling for a referendum on the tax agreements with Germany, Austria and the UK. AUNS President and SVP National Councillor Primin Schwander justifies this on the grounds that it is not acceptable for Switzerland to collect taxes for other countries and that the agreements may result in job losses at the banks. David Roth, President of the Young Social Democrats said: "This agreement is another desperate attempt to save parts of the Swiss banks' parasitic business models and to provide another reprieve for banking confidentiality."

Fitness for parliamentarians

49 parliamentarians took part in the "Paralmotion" parliamentary run on 14 June. The 11 women and 38 men covered over 160 kilometres in 20 minutes on a course around the Federal Palace. They ran or walked depending on their mood and fitness level. A league table revealing the athletic prowess of the various factions was also produced based on the number of parliamentarians taking part. The BDP came first with 30%, the Greens second with 29.4%, CVP third with 27.27%, SP fourth with 24.56%, SVP fifth with 19.35%, FDP sixth with 9.7% and GLP seventh with 7.69%.

Quotations

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."

Heracitus, Greek philosopher, around 500 B.C.

"As politicians, we are expected to provide an answer to everything. As quickly as possible. As definitively as possible. But we sometimes forget that probably the worst politicians are those who already know the answer before they have understood the question."

Federal Councillor Alain Berset at the "Swiss Youth in Science" Award Ceremony

"As tourism developed, it became economically lucrative to present a nation to the Europeans who lived under glaciers, did not disturb anyone, did not want to be disturbed and yodelled softly when milking their cows."

Peter von Matt, Emeritus Professor of Literature, Zurich

"Democracy is the art of disciplining oneself so that one need not be disciplined by others."

Georges Clemenceau (1841–1929), French politician

"Democracy is like sex. When it's good, it's very good. When it's bad, it's still good."

John Kenneth Galbraith (1908–2006), US economist

"Our heads are round so that our thoughts can change direction."

Francis Picabia (1897–1953), French author and artist

"Man – a creature made at the end of the week's work when God was tired."

Mark Twain (1835–1910), US author



Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner, chose Switzerland as her first destination on a trip to Europe. The 66-year-old politician met with Foreign Minister Didier Burkhalter on 14 June. She could not leave her country for almost 24 years, spending over 15 years in prison or under house arrest. During their meeting, Federal Councillor Burkhalter told her that Switzerland would support Burma on the road to democracy. This would not just be moral support, but would also take the form of projects. Development programmes worth 25 million Swiss francs a year are planned. Switzerland will also open an embassy in Burma in November. The dinner with Swiss President Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, Justice Minister Simonetta Sommaruga and Federal Councillor Burkhalter was cancelled because Suu Kyi suffered a bout of faintness.