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This and That Corner

The Swiss

Renowned for being efficient, thrifty and staid, the diverse people of this nation also display some uncredited and unexpected characteristics.

Although Switzerland is now one of the world's richest nations, for most of its history this tiny, land-locked country was one of the poorest. With no natural resources, its young men went abroad to earn a living, often serving as mercenaries. At home, the philosophy of "waste not, want not" became part of the national character.

Careful with money, tidy-minded and environmentally conscious, the Swiss have a highly developed attention to detail. No wonder they are good at running banks, hotels and railways, as well as making watches and executing complex engineering projects.

Curse of the stereotype

The Swiss still suffer from the international perception that they are either faceless bankers in grey business suits or bearded farmers, wearing quaint leather shorts. While examples of these stereotypes do exist, the reality is that the population is surprisingly varied. Just think of the innumerable dialects.

Not that the Swiss themselves are free of the curse of stereotyping. Despite its long record of external neutrality, Switzerland suffers considerable inner tension. As relatively recently as 1847 there was a minor civil war, and internal disputes are common. Although women were given the vote only in 1971, its 7 million inhabitants have a degree of independence unknown elsewhere in the world.

Not only does each canton have its own taxraising powers, it also has its own schools, police and courts. Beneath that level are 3,000 communities, each of which has the power to decide everything from utilities to public holidays and road maintenance.

Major decisions are decided by referenda. All this results in considerable, though understated, pride about where you come from. Locals are rarely complimentary about the folks who live over the hill, or, more often, mountain.

Swiss Roles

There are, however, national characteristics that override regional differences. The thriftiest nation on earth, the Swiss abhor the idea of buying on credit, preferring to save up conscientiously for major purchases. At the same time, wealth is never, ever discussed, let alone flaunted. In general, the Swiss are polite, always shaking hands whenever they meet and bid farewell. They raise their glasses to one another with great ceremony before drinking. They also fly national and cantonal flags as often as possible.

Technical Skills

Another essential facet of the Swiss character is ingenuity. Over the centuries, innovation has helped to overcome the lack of natural resources. In the 18th and 19th centuries, skilled watchmakers in the Jura made names like Rolex, Ebel and Rado world-famous. The world's first electric oven was switched on at the Hotel Bernina, St Moritz in 1889.

Source : Insight Guides Switzerland.

Canton Schwyz

Innerschweizer Bohnentopf
(dish in one pot from Central Switzerland)

Fry 400gr lamb or hogget stew in oil.

Add 200gr of bacon (cut in big pieces), 1 kg beans, 300gr carrots and ½ litre of water.

Boil on low heat for ½ hour. Add 1kg potatoes cut in big pieces and salt if needed and cook until tender.

Suuri Sonnengummeli
(Potato dish from Schwyz)

Fry 50gr flour in 50gr butter until light brown. Add ¾ litre bouillon. Stir to a creamy sauce.

Add a garnished onion (onion with bay leaves and whole cloves).

Peel and slice thinly 800gr of potatoes. Add to the sauce with spices (salt, pepper and nutmeg) and cook until tender.

Remove garnished onion and add 3 tbsn of cider or wine vinegar and chives.

This dish is delicious with a cheese tarte.

Bon appetit

Lisette



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