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Swiss store seeds in Norway's Noah's Ark

Norway has launched an international seed vault not far from the North Pole to protect crop seeds from being wiped out in wars or natural disasters.

Switzerland is among the 100 countries that are sending their seed banks for safekeeping at the SFr 10.6 million facility, deep inside an Arctic mountain in the remote archipelago of Svalbard.

"Biological diversity is under threat from the forces of nature... and from the actions of man," Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg said at the opening ceremony. "It's the Noah's Ark for securing biological diversity for future generations."

Dubbed a doomsday vault, the Svalbard International Seed Vault, just 1'000km from the North Pole, will serve as a back up for the other 1'400 seed banks around the world in case their deposits are hit by disasters, economic collapse, war or climate change. For example, war wiped out seed banks in Iraq, Afghanistan and Angola, and one in the Philippines was flooded in the wake of a typhoon in 2006.

The vault is designed to house as many as 4.5 million seed samples from gene banks around the globe – twice the number that have so far been identified.

Svalbard is icy cold. Giant air conditioning units have chilled the 120-metre-deep vault further to 18 degrees Celsius below zero, a temperature at which many experts say seeds could last for 1,000 years. And even in the worst-case scenario of global warming and if mechanical refrigeration were to fail, officials say the air-locked vaults would stay frozen for 200 years.

Built by the Norwegian government, it will operate like a bank box. Norway owns the bank, but the countries depositing seeds own the boxes, and can use them as needed free of charge.

Switzerland has followed the Svalbard project very closely and plans to send some 10'000 crop seed samples, mostly cereals such as wheat, spelt, barley, rye and maize, from the national seed bank in Changins, near Nyon in canton Vaud.

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Lingerie lures visitors to St Gallen

Back in their heyday, corsets literally took a woman's breath away. More than a century later, they're doing it again as beholders gasp at their exquisite beauty.

In a revealing new exhibition, the Textile Museum of St Gallen explores the history and significance of ladies' underwear. "Secrets – the Lure of Lingerie"

Spread over three floors, the exhibition covers the time period from 1890 to the present day. Embroidered corsets, delicate slips, silk chemises and ruffled bloomers grace the display cases, along with some nonsense girdles.



Brassieres and bustiers in all shapes and sizes are the stars of the show. Complete with sweat stains, a few items were clearly old

favourites. In contrast, some pieces are so current that they aren't even in the shops yet.

Part boudoir, part boutique window, the show is beautifully presented. Clever "keyholes" transform visitors into "Peeping Toms" while old photographs offer a glimpse of what once was considered sexy.

At "Secrets", a 17-metre wall draped in Swiss lace and embroidery provides colourful evidence of local talent. Indeed, the core business of most textile companies in eastern Switzerland is in the underwear sector.

"As we all know, sensuality is not exactly a characteristic readily associated with us Swiss," said Max R. Hungerbühler, president of the Swiss Textile Association.

"But with 'Secrets' we are showing that - contrary to the common image - we have a lot to offer regarding sensual pleasures."

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