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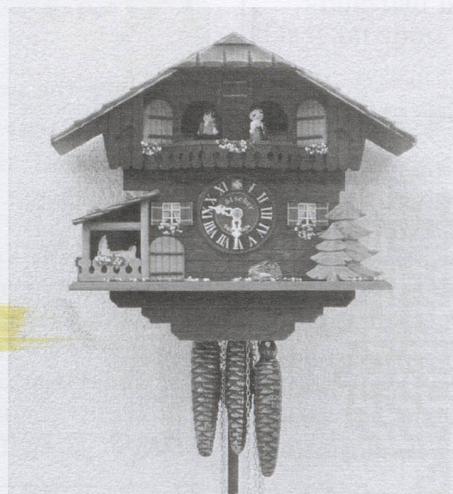
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Going cuckoo about real Swiss cuckoo clocks

For many tourists the ultimate Swiss souvenir is a cuckoo clock, and the number of shops selling them in all the big cities and resorts won't disappoint. What could come as a surprise however is learning that Switzerland is not in fact the home of the cuckoo clock and that many of the cheap quartz clocks on sale are made in China, South Korea and Japan.

The Black Forest region of southern Germany is where cuckoo clocks - mostly depicting a hunting scene - have their real nest, but the Lötscher company, based near Zurich, can boast it makes the only genuine Swiss cuckoo clocks in the world. "The one we make is the chalet type. It's typically Swiss and is a Swiss invention. It's made in two parts, the wooden part and the mechanical part, made out of metal", the company's director says.

The company's clocks are at the top range of the market, requiring much skill to marry the delicately carved wood and the mechanics. The woodcarving is



A Swiss chalet cuckoo clock

carried out in the Bernese Oberland village of Brienz - renowned for the skills of its wood workers - and the clocks are assembled in Fällanden near Zurich.

It might sound un-Swiss that the movement inside Lötscher clocks is German, but there is a very good reason for that: There is only one factory in the world that makes movements for cuckoo clocks, and that is in Germany. Assembly includes adding dancing figurines, waterwheels,

animals and of course the cuckoo sound to the chalets.

The mechanical movement is chain driven for one or eight days with cuckoo-call and gong strike every half and full hour. Those with the one-day movement are more popular because people like the daily ritual of pulling the chain.

Some of the clocks also feature music boxes, produced for Lötscher by the Reuge company in the canton of Vaud. The most popular tunes with the customers have been favourites for years - Edelweiss and Fröhlicher Wanderer (The Happy Wanderer).

Actor Orson Welles took a swipe at the Swiss in the 1949 film *The Third Man*. In a memorable quote, he said: "In Italy, for 30 years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder, bloodshed - they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love, 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did they produce? The cuckoo clock."

from swissinfo

It's all over in a matter of days: Swissinfo ran a story at the beginning of April I'd like to share with you although it is well and truly over by now:

Basel stinker soon to fade

Basel's giant titan arum flower continued to attract visitors, with about 500 visitors an hour passing through the hothouse to see the two-metre high bloom.

However, the sight will soon be over. On Sunday afternoon the huge dark red petal-like structure surrounding the yellow flower began to wilt.

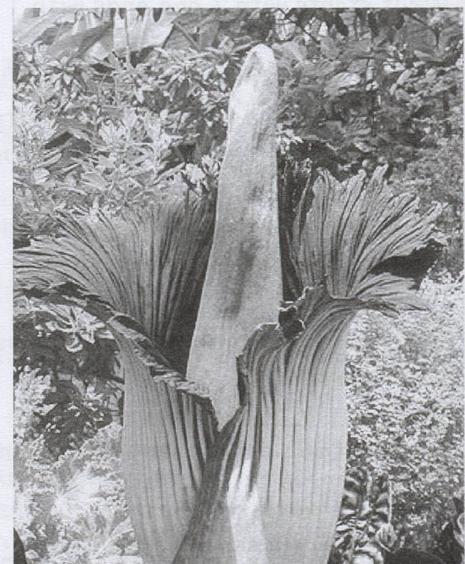
The centre structure itself is likely to collapse on Monday, the custodian of the Botanical Gardens said.

On Saturday alone, more than 10,000 people came to see it. Adults paid SFr10 and were allowed to stay for two minutes before being shepherded out to

make room for the next group. Most of Sunday's visitors had come from out of town. Plant fans from all over Switzerland wanted to see the titan arum.

Those who waited for the weekend did not have to contend with the stink of carrion produced by the flower in the first few hours of blooming. In the first night the stench had been such that visitors had to hold their hands over their mouths. However, the garden's shop has done a roaring trade in "titan arum perfume".

The last time a titan arum came into flower in Switzerland was in 1936.



A titan arum is 2m high - an impressive sight