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Returning to Switzerland

A Story of Appreciation and Insight

This article has been prepared by Balz Schärer, who spent three years in New Zealand with his wife Jenny Herzog, and who returned to Switzerland in June 2015. Both worked here and became actively involved with the Auckland Swiss Club, made friends and hence had a good insight into what it is to be a Swiss-Kiwi. We thank Balz very much for this article and wish both Balz and Jenny all the best with their renewed life in Switzerland.

My wife Jenny and I are two Swiss nationals who emigrated to New Zealand in June 2012, and returned to Switzerland after three (fantastic) years of living in Auckland. Through this experience we have discovered twice what it means to establish our life from scratch - even if the second time it was in our country of birth. Our old Swiss mates in Auckland have asked us whether we wouldn't mind writing about our experiences and share our story in the Helvetia magazine.

A return to Switzerland after three years in New Zealand was not quite as straight forward as you might imagine, but it also had many amazing moments. We returned in June 2015 to the summer of a century, followed by an equally beautiful autumn. Hardly any rain, temperatures up to 39 degrees Celsius and we were still just wearing pullovers by the end of November! We were graciously received back in Switzerland and naturally enjoyed our picture-book summer. We relished the wheat fields in the brilliant yellow sunshine, watched as farmers

harvested their crops, and admired the freshly ploughed and harrowed fields. We had fun in public swimming pools, were overtaken by summer tempests, barbequed over open fires at the edges of forests and went on beautiful walks across the countryside from any village we could think of. We appreciated the privilege to see sights such as a beautiful old Bernese farm house or the old town of Murten - such sights cannot be found in New Zealand or any other country.

However, we soon also realised how densely populated Switzerland is in comparison to New Zealand. Wherever there are beautiful landscapes - for example such as those surrounding the town of Thun - you can literally see how the villages are bursting beyond old boundaries and how the valleys fill with new housing.

I grew up in the 'Worbental' - a valley close to the City of Berne - and have not lived there for over 20 years. This valley is now filling up with new houses, with little space left on the valley floor. Of course, there is growth also in New Zealand, but there are still many untouched places. In Switzerland, those places are now quite rare and often small. And even if you have found one, it is usually still in sight of the nearest house, village, restaurant or another form of civilisation.

Many might think it is joyful to meet up with old friends and family after a prolonged absence from Switzerland. However, for us this joy was perhaps not as great as expected, and harder

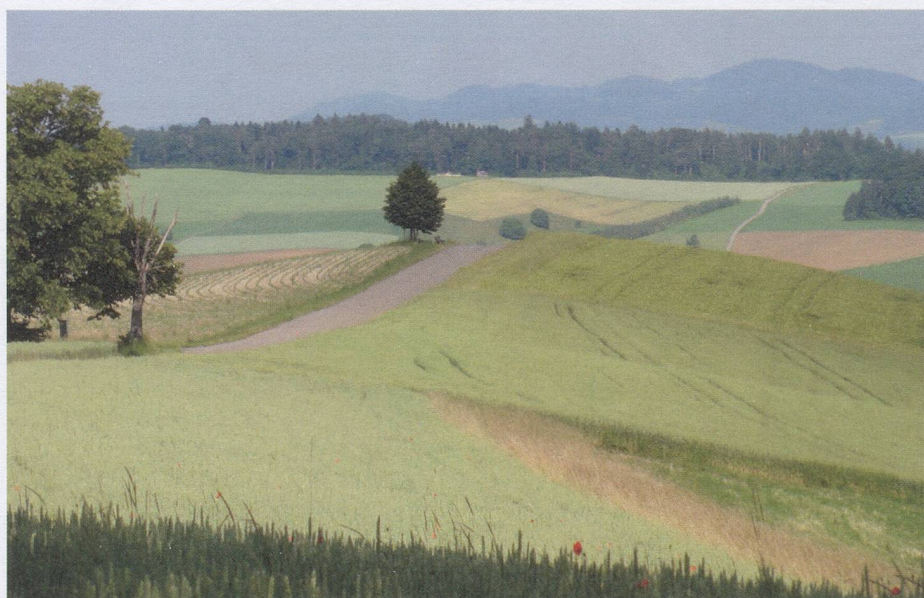


than anticipated. We faced many expectations we found we could not meet. Everyone wanted us to visit them „soon“, and after a couple of months this turned into what we perceived as considerable emotional pressure. But it was rare that someone offered to come and see us.

After three action-packed and memory-filled years abroad, it seemed that life had stagnated for our colleagues in Switzerland. They had the same hobbies, lived in the same place and worked with the same employer. Of course, some had bought a new house or founded a family - but we were not yet into „baby-talk“. We were still dealing with the fact that we had no job nor fixed abode, or indeed any clear plans about the future! This made it more difficult for us to visit people in their beautifully appointed homes they wanted to show us. Their questions focused on „so what are you going to do now?“ rather than „how was your time in New Zealand?“ We found these questions quite stressful as we simply did not have any ready-made answers yet. The fact that we had just spent three wonderful years in New Zealand, and had left behind new friends and beloved places was not of great interest to anyone. But then we realised that everyone is only human - and mainly interested in the current activities of the day.

On the upside, a return to Switzerland from overseas also presents the wonderful opportunity of a new start. You can live anywhere you want, get a brand new job, find a new apartment and decorate it, go and buy furniture, etc. But it's not quite as easy as it sounds to bring all these factors together harmoniously. Do we want to live in a city? In the countryside? In the canton of Grisons where the sun shines for

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longer hours? Close to family or friends? And can we find a job and a place to live there? Do we adjust our place of living to our place of work or do we dare to do the opposite? Well: what exactly DO we want? ... So many questions. The only thing we knew for sure was that we did not want to live the same way as before our departure to New Zealand. That would have given us the feeling of never having left Switzerland.

Looking for a new job also highlighted some of the differences between Switzerland and New Zealand. In many professions there are more jobs on offer than in New Zealand, but they are also far more specialised. Especially with non-management related positions, the queries are often very specific in terms of the experience and knowledge sought. If you cannot tick all the boxes exactly just so, or if you lack experience in something relatively simple and insignificant, the interest in you may wane quickly as there are many other people who have „exactly that right knowledge and experience“. Jobs seem to be much more tightly prescribed and filled.

We observed a similar level of saturation in other areas. For example, we found that offers on „Ricardo“ are much more fiercely competed over than on New Zealand's equivalent „TradeMe“ and that the good deals are much harder to come by. Of course, these are just our personal observations and may not be representative on a wider scale.

As we know both countries quite well now, the key differences are starting to emerge in sharper contrast. These country comparisons may be somewhat futile but still rather interesting!

There's so much to appreciate in Switzerland. For example, the falling snow during winter, or the festive Christmas season and the opportunity to visit a lovely Christmas market across Switzerland's nearby borders, the many mountain funiculars and gondolas, the mountain restaurants and indeed any restaurants that offer a beautiful view.



Brilliant are also the many signs that limit local traffic such as „Zubringerdienst“ or the „Fahrverbot“. We hardly ever saw this in New Zealand. As much as these signs annoy drivers in Switzerland, they enable local residents to walk safely and without constraint in their own neighbourhoods and further afar. What a difference to New Zealand, where outside of cities there is mostly only a main road where cars drive at 100km/hr, with few side roads branching off. Here, you find selected entries and gateways, often labelled as „private, no entry“. If you want to walk freely in New Zealand, you have to do this within city, on a beach, in a park, or a marked-out track. In contrast, the ability to go criss-cross tramping anywhere Switzerland is a wonderful thing.

From a culinary viewpoint, Switzerland has been somewhat disappointing after three years in New Zealand. We certainly miss the diversity of food in New

Zealand, the delicious salads, sushis, sashimis, the excellent Thai food, and the many creative and comfortable cafes, producing their beautifully decorated „flat whites“, and last but not least the delicious hamburgers with beetroot. We also miss the sea, the comfortable cabins on camping grounds, stopping work at 5pm, the untouched nature, Air New Zealand with its hilarious safety videos, Auckland, fishing at sea, the beautiful beaches ... I could go on!

Overall, I can say with a clear conscience that both Switzerland and New Zealand are great countries, with all their many advantages and few downsides.

After just eight months back in Switzerland we have settled down, although in some ways we have not fully arrived yet. Progress can be a bit slow at times in Switzerland but we are now living in Berne. As for the most part our lives are now on a good track, we can say that our return to Switzerland has been a successful one.

Ä schönä Gruess (many regards)
Balz und Jenny

Photos by Balz Schärer. Translated by SW

Looking for a House Sitter?

Trudi Fill-Weidmann will be back in New Zealand in September and is available for house sitting (this includes cats, dogs, birds, gardens etc., Numbers negotiable).

Preferably in the Wellington region but anywhere will be considered.
I have references if needed.

If interested please contact me on
weidfill@gmail.com

chuderwälsch by Tanja Latham-Zurbrugg

I hope you enjoyed our bi-monthly lessons of Swiss „Mundart“ (even though most of it was „Bärndütsch“) – the timing was perfect: 4 years just got us through the A-Z:

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 wääger | rely, surely |
| 2 Wank | movement |
| 3 Wasgiischwashäsch | super quick |
| 4 Wischiwaschi | dodgy |
| 5 Zainä | wicker basket |
| 6 Zanggä | to quarrel / fight |
| 7 Zeuslä | to play with fire (literally) |
| 8 Zunderobsi | upside down |
| 9 Zwängälä | to be stubborn |

Consigli della Nonna

To clean stainless steel appliances doors

Use a little baby oil on a soft rag and wipe. All fingerprints and marks disappear, even on the glass.
Works like a charm!

Contributed by Edith Hess

