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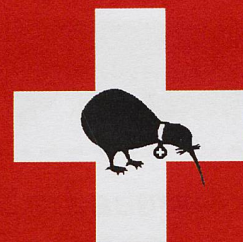
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HELVETIA



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Zürich's Christmas Markets

Highlights

- Oceania Conference
- Nendaz Alphorn Festival
- Coopers in Pakistan

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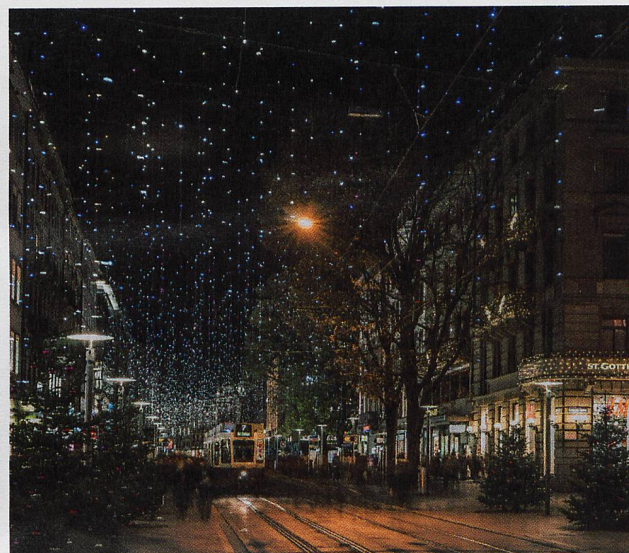


Photo © Switzerland Tourism

Swarovski annually decorates a 50-foot-tall fir tree in Zurich's main train station with more than 7,000 crystals that glitter and flash as the lighting changes colour. Conveniently, a nearby Swarovski booth offers ornaments for sale.

From the minute you step off the train, you know you've come to the right place to wallow in Christmas. The Great Hall in Zürich's Hauptbahnhof (main railway station) is home to a huge Christkindli Markt (Christ-child market), complete with Swarovski-bedazzled tree, little huts featuring hand-made crafts, and the cinnamon scent of mulled wine wafting through the air.

Speaking of glühwein, the nearby Niederdorf Christmas market introduces you to a new drinking game, called Hammerschlagen (literally "hammer hitting," or the "stump game"). It's played like this: contestants gather around a tree stump with nails tacked into it. Each competitor takes a turn trying to hammer in their nail up to the head. Miss, and you take a drink. The last person to sink his/her nail pays for another round of drinks. It's a game best attempted early in the evening — before lots of liquor has impaired your aim — or you risk losing some digits ... and possibly some friends.

Should you need something to soak up all that alcohol, be sure to stop by one of the many raclette huts. We're talking Swiss cheese here, and lots of it, piled atop your choice of potatoes or bread, and garnished with paprika, pepper, gherkins, and pickled onions. Think of raclette

as a poor man's potato gratin, or a rich man's grilled-cheese sammie (it's fancy Swiss cheese, after all.)

By the way, Zürich hosts several *Weihnachtsmärkte* (Christmas markets), all staged in different parts of the city. A favourite is the Niederdorf in the Old Town — it gives you a chance to explore winding medieval streets while drinking and shopping (always a nice combo).

Bahnhofstrasse at Christmas

From November 24, Zurich will shine out more brightly than ever. For then, at 6.00pm precisely, "Lucy" — as the Christmas lights are called — will be switched on. The Christmas illuminations in Zurich's famous shopping street, the Bahnhofstrasse, comprise almost 12,000 crystals containing luminescent white, red and blue LED lights, producing dots of colour of varying intensity in the sky. In the streets and alleys of Zurich's historic centre the sparkling illuminations create a particularly romantic Christmas atmosphere. What's more, on the same evening visitors can enjoy late-night shopping in the inner city until 10.00pm, fortified by the culinary delicacies and mulled wine on sale at any of the numerous food stands.