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# ROMAINMÔTIER – A HAVEN FOR ARTISTS IN THE SWISS JURA MOUNTAINS

A vision out of the Middle Ages, Romainmôtier is tucked into a small valley in the Jura mountains. The hurried travellers, the passengers of express trains, whiz through its tiny railway station unsuspecting. As if time had stood still. Romainmôtier has remained an island of peace and tranquility, welcoming the visitor with a penchant for contemplation.

More than fifteen hundred years ago, St. Romanus and his companions had come to Romainmôtier, fighting their way through vast jungle-like thickets and woods. They had cleared the site to build

what is now the oldest monastery in Switzerland. Around its Romanesque church, erected around the year one thousand, the monastery and the little community prospered. The abbey was handed over to the monks of Cluny in the Xth century and it controlled seven priories, 20 parish churches, 30 villages and 50 fiefs. In 1536, the year of the Reformation, the high bailiffs of Berne came to take over the monastery. The buildings were used for rather worldly purposes: the church became in turn a cave and a granary. Deprived of its centre, the

little town began to crumble and the buildings fell into neglect.

But today, Romainmôtier is full of life again. The church has been restored, mass is read or concerts are given. The Priory has also been saved from decay and may be rented for festive occasions. But the particular charm comes from the people who have fallen under the spell of this medieval site. Painters, potters, weavers and wood carvers have come here to stay and perpetuate the spirit of St. Romanus in new and creative ways.



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