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An Appenzeller in Tokyo

After a time one becomes accustomed to finding the Swiss springing up in the strangest places. But the last place one expects to see a man born and bred in the Appenzell is at the manager's desk of the Tokyo Hilton in Japan.

However this is indeed the case and, on a recent trip to Tokyo, my suspicions were aroused when I saw the magic word "Rösti" on one section of the menu. After making a few enquiries, I met *Richard C. Handl*, a 49-year-old who has come a long way since his early days at the collegium in Appenzell.

Now he is in charge of the only foreign-managed hotel in Tokyo — which says something for the high quality of the food and service. The reason why there are no foreign hotels in Japan is that — apart from the differences in food preferences — the Japanese insist on a much higher standard of service than is customary in Europe. So perhaps it takes a Swiss to deliver the goods in what everyone admits to be a highly competitive society. There was also evidence of large numbers of Japanese in the hotel restaurant — not just the usual run of Americans ordering Southern fried chicken and dishes of that ilk.

At the time I was a guest of British Airways, so I had lunch in a private dining room where it was possible for me to put on a *Swiss Observer* hat and ask Mr Handl about his career.

He started out at Hotel school in Zurich and worked at a number of large Swiss hotels include the Grand Hotel at Arosa. But he thought that "Switzerland was pretty much discovered" so far as the hotel business was concerned and in 1953 went to London where he worked at the Connaught hotel and thence to Paris where he was at the Georges Cinq.



Richard C. Handl (centre, standing) is host to a group of British journalists at the Tokyo Hilton.

In 1959 he joined the Hilton since which time he has worked in an amazing variety of places including Cairo, Istanbul, Madrid, New York, Montreal, Trinidad, West Indies, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Berlin, Honolulu and Tokyo. He has been in Tokyo since 1973 and uses it as his base of operations for he is also in overall charge of the Philippine and Korean areas and is currently engaged in opening further hotels.

He frequently sees Swiss visitors at the Tokyo Hilton — including a 12-member tourist mission from the Bernese Oberland and Central Areas last year — and he still "thinks back to the Appenzell".

Indeed he says that "if it were my choice I would retire to the Appenzell" but he admits that it does not seem very likely after a globe-trotting career during which he has put down other roots. His wife is a

Filipino and he has a house in Hawaii. In fact his children regard themselves as Hawaiian — which of course means American in its widest context.

But, there in Tokyo, amid all the traffic and with heavy competition from shark's fin soup, and a host of other Japanese delicacies, it is still possible to order "Gschnätzlets" and "Rösti" which comes up just as it should be.

Christopher Hill

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