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This year you can saunter through Switzerland - and that's official



IF the first breaths of spring air have tempted you to haul on your hiking boots and wander off down the footpaths and byways of Britain, you may also have felt a nostalgic yearning for a walk in the Swiss countryside.

Give in to that urge this year, and you could find yourself anything but alone! The Swiss National Tourist Office has announced that 1982 will be a hiking promotion year, under the motto "Saunter through Switzerland", and at last one writer has been prompted to ask whether or not the effects of this could be detrimental.

Will the landscape be trampled flat by the sturdily-shod feet of platoons of hikers? Will idyllic

spots disappear under a hail of litter? But the risk, compared to the rewards, seems minimal.

Switzerland has a network of nearly 50,000 kilometres of well-tended footpaths, and although there are many keen walkers about there should be plenty of room for everyone.

Walking is a pastime which is becoming increasingly popular in many parts of Western Europe. Perhaps the perils facing our environment are making people more aware of the inspiring beauty of nature, or perhaps the constant exhortations to health and fitness (in Britain at least) are responsible for getting up out of our motorcars and on to our feet.

The Swiss National Tourist Office hopes that the success of its hiking campaign will be based on the former sentiments, rather than on the simple virtues of physical exercise.

A sense of responsibility cannot, it says, be awakened simply by verbal appeals. To realise just how beautiful and precious a truly natural environment can be one must see it, smell it, walk through it.

As soon as the campaign was announced a great deal of interest was expressed by a wide range of organisations. But its successes will not be measured by the number of people who take part, and certainly not be the

number of miles which they cover.

The success of "Sauntering through Switzerland" will be measured by the extent to which it affects attitudes to the countryside and the environment.

It is hoped that hikers who experience the beauty of particular areas will take an interest in them, and will do their best to ensure nothing despoils that particular valley, path or coppice which impressed them. The next generation, says SNTTO, has a right to a living heritage, not just to our memories.

Dr Fritz Honegger, president of the Swiss Federal Council, has agreed to act as patron of the year, endorsing the exhortation to "get out and walk".

Information for strollers

BERNE is the first city in Switzerland to start a strolling information service.

City hostesses, in distinctive bright red uniforms, patrol the ancient streets of the capital to offer tourists help and answer questions.

All-in at Lausanne

THE lakeside city of Lausanne is again offering a range of all-inclu-

sive arrangements this year. The offers include a city sightseeing tour and a welcome gift.

The "Weekend" offer, covering three days, is priced from Sfr. 115, the "Relax", starts at Sfr. 171 for four days and from Sfr. 321 for seven days.

If you're feeling low . . .

THE Swiss spa resort of Baden is again offering three-week "classic cure" arrangements in all the town's spa hotel categories.

The 1982 spa cure catalogue, a three language publication, lists all the spa and town hotels and the facilities they offer.

Three week arrangements are available at from Sfr. 1,255 in winter and Sfr. 2,950 in summer, in two to five-star hotels. Prices include full board, use of thermal swimming pools, three half-day excursions and various other entertainments and facilities.

The Baden arrangement has been taken into the Swissair computer and for the first time can be booked in Swissair offices all over the world.

An innovation in Baden this year is a three-day weekend arrangement starting at Sfr. 98.

Find your way around

A MAP showing all the leisure facilities in Switzerland's Canton Zurich has been published by the Zurich city tourist office.

The 1:50,000 scale map shows sports facilities, footpaths and cycle paths, places and buildings of interest, lookout points and excursion destinations listed by 171 local authorities in the canton.

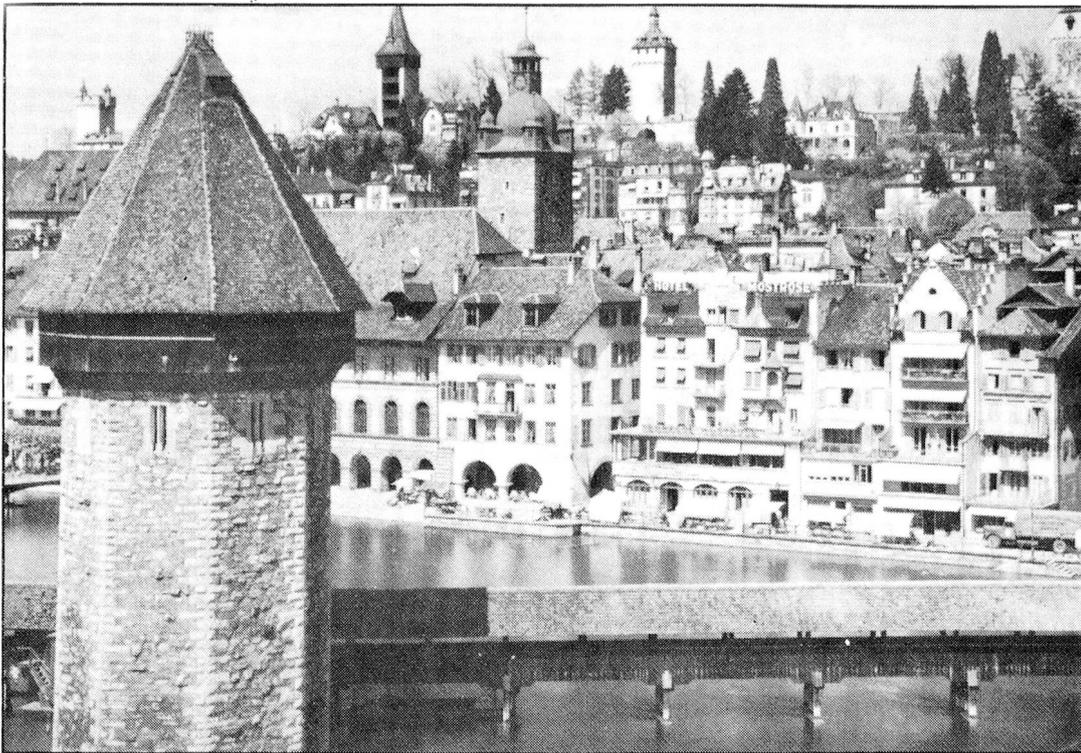
It has been issued to coincide with this year's "Saunter through Switzerland" campaign run by the Swiss National Tourist Office to encourage people to use Switzerland's 30,000 miles of marked footpaths.

Canton Zurich last year achieved more than three million overnight stays - more than nine per cent of the national total.

Concern at homes boom

A SWISS ecological organisation has expressed concern over the continued boom in the construction of holiday homes in





Lucerne goes cashless

LUCERNE, in Central Switzerland, has become what is claimed to be the first "cashless" city in the world following an agreement for American Express credit cards to be accepted for practically all goods and services.

This follows the introduction of similar arrangements between Amexco and four Swiss resorts - Savognino, Engelberg, Flims

and St. Moritz - in the last five years.

Rolf J. Lüthy, Zurich-based director of Amexco's card division, says the arrangement with Lucerne means that the company's credit card is now accepted not only for "traditional" payments and purchases but also for excursion tickets bought at travel agencies, tickets for the Lucerne international music festival, purchases in pharmacies, car repairs, dentists' and doctors' services and treatment in a local hospital.

favourite resort areas, and has warned that the trend will lead to "self destruction of tourism."

The Foundation for the Care and Protection of the Landscape said a new study showed that while most vacationers were in search of calm and uncrowdedness, the boom had led to conditions sometimes worse than in the cities where they come from.

It said in a statement that the trend, spurred by foreigners who invested about Sfr. 1,000 million in holiday flats in 1980 alone, had sent real estate prices soaring. In some resorts, it said, land has

gone up by 2,000 per cent in five years.

On average, holiday houses and flats stand empty on 320 to 330 days per year, according to the study. The Foundation called on authorities to check the "ruinous exploitation".

13th century hotel expands

ONE of Switzerland's oldest and most historic hotels - the Chalavaina in Müstair - has been enlarged at a cost of Sfr. 1 million (about £300,000). The hotel has

now been doubled in size - from eight to 16 rooms.

The Chalavaina is known to have existed as a place of lodging for travellers as early as the 13th century, although the actual premises are believed to date back even earlier. It was designated as a protected monument in 1967.

The hotel - owned and operated for generations by the Fasser family - has now been extended by the transformation of adjoining stables and other outbuildings.

The two-year extension project could have been completed in half the time and at almost half the cost had the Fasser family not insisted on incorporating as much as possible of the original centuries-old structure into the enlarged premises.

The village of Müstair, in the Grisons, is situated in the easternmost valley of Switzerland on the fringe of the Swiss National Park, and is an ideal location for walking holidays. The village is only a few minutes' walk from the Italian border and is also close to the Austrian frontier.

The Hotel Chalavaina is open throughout the year, with half-pension rates from Sfr. 55 per person and reductions for children.



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