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Canton Vaud

From palm trees to glaciers

Festivals, films, concerts, art exhibitions, museums, castles, country walks, wine tasting. All excellent reasons to visit the Lake Geneva region. The local people are ready for you: this year's Ping Pong scheme is under the aegis of Canton Vaud.

I remember attending a reception in the grounds of Villa Chaplin above Vevey. Beyond the throng of illustrious guests I beheld the beauty of Lake Geneva, but my mind's eye dwelt on the fabulous life of Charlie Chaplin.

Alice Baumann

The International Comic Film Festival brings with it images which are possible only through that ideal combination of tradition and culture.

The remarkable iron statue of the greatest comedian of them all on the lakeside at Vevey, complete with legendary walking stick and bowler hat, is matched in the neighbouring town of Montreux by the fame of America's jazz legend, Miles Davis. The annual Montreux Jazz Festival in July brings practically everyone who has made a name in that particular year to the banks of Lake Geneva. With its classical music festival which follows in September, Montreux is a true metropolis of music.

Also highly prized is a visit to Lausanne, the trade and business pivot of the region, as well as a centre of education and leisure activities. Framed as it is by pastures, woods and vineyards, this is without a doubt one of the greenest cities of Europe.

Mont Blanc always in view

Indeed nature is the main player on the stage of Canton Vaud. It is the fourth biggest canton in Switzerland, and its background is truly as green and gleaming

white as the brilliant colours of its flag. Lakes and mountains make up its charm in equal parts. The Lake Geneva steamers provide one of the best ways of seeing the area. To spend a day feeling the motion of the dulcet waves of this, one of the biggest lakes in central Europe – with a view which extends from Mont Blanc to Les Diablerets to the distant Eiger North Wall of sinister repute. Who would miss such magic?

Switzerland in miniature

Vaud is also worth exploring on foot. Well signed walks and cycle routes, pleasant country hotels, castles and museums await the curious guest, as well as many opportunities for sailing and surfing. Far from the madding crowd is the Vallée de Joux which offers skating, as well as downhill and cross-country skiing. It is not surprising that many see Canton Vaud as Switzerland in miniature.

Visitors based in Geneva like to visit the Vaud village of St. Cergue high in the Jura hills on the old coach route from Paris to the lakeside. Goethe, the great German writer, passed through the village on his way to Italy. He climbed the nearby summit of La Dôle and described the view in pages of glittering prose in his "Letters from Switzerland". In the 1930s, the village was one of the favoured ski resorts of British tourists. Air France organised the first package tours from London and ran a poster campaign in England offering "Breakfast in London – Tea in St. Cergue".

There is a tourist office map which marks all the 116 castles of Canton Vaud, as well as more than 80 museums, churches, abbeys and other historic buildings open to the public. On another map, the visitor receives an overview of the region's culinary delights. Local hospitality includes many fine wines from carefully tended vineyards. Côte de l'Orbe, Bonvillars, Vully, La Côte, Lavaux, Le Chablais – all these are the alluring names of vineyards which were laid down as far back as the 11th century and today produce a total of 63 million litres of wine every year. Restaurant owners and wine retailers make their purchases direct from the cellar doors, and so can anyone who finds the way.

The Ping Pong scheme

Ping Pong, originally known as "Visit Switzerland – See the World", is one of the few projects that survived and even gained in popular appeal after the 700th anniversary year of the Swiss Confederation in 1991. The scheme gives Swiss Abroad an opportunity of getting to know their old homeland more closely by staying with a Swiss family (see Swiss Review 2/94).

They are usually found in the centre of the village, in a municipal wine cellar, the village hall or perhaps the castle. Wine tasting is often accompanied by something more than a snack to eat.

A railroad mecca

You can take a trip through the Bernese Oberland without any effort at all and view the wonders of the Alpine world from near at hand from the panorama coach of the "Golden Pass" railway which crosses the mountains from Montreux to Gstaad and Interlaken and then on to Lucerne. And entirely within the canton there are 14 private railways with a variety of different lengths and track widths. Their operators tell travellers about the best walks, and most carry bicycles free of charge.

This lovely region along Switzerland's northern border with France is permanently inhabited by half a million people, and these are joined by almost a million visitors every year. But Canton Vaud never gives the impression of being overrun, there are so many different ways for people to enjoy themselves. ■

Details may be obtained from:
The Canton Vaud Tourist Office
Avenue d'Ouchy 60
P.O. Box 242, CH-1000 Lausanne 6
Tel: 41 21 617 72 02
Fax: 41 21 617 30 80

(Photo: Archive)

