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St Gallen – the city of a thousand steps

From whiling away the time on the abbey square and enjoying views over to Lake Constance, to eating in charming taverns and learning about a unique textile heritage – St Gallen is always worth a visit.

JANINA GEHRIG *

Once you have passed Zurich, what comes next? Winterthur. Wil. Then St Gallen. The inhabitants of St Gallen sometimes have to explain themselves in this way to other people in Switzerland – and to themselves. Certainly, the city is a little off the beaten track. Tourists tend to bypass St Gallen, even though the city is eminently worth a trip – as is immediately apparent when you roll into the station and spot the Lokremise on the left-hand side. This building – a pioneering piece of rail infrastructure – is Switzerland's largest surviving circular locomotive depot. The Lokremise is now a multi-genre cultural centre and the venue of Eastern Switzerland's most important arthouse cinema. Leave the train and you will notice the big neon sign hanging over the eastern end of St Gallen's listed station hall. It reads "Chocolat Maestrani" – a reminder that exquisite confectionery used to be produced not far away. On reaching the top of the escalator, you will suddenly catch the aroma of bratwurst wafting in the air. St Gallen is famous in Switzerland for its sausages. The rule for eating St Gallen bratwurst is: no mustard.

An open-air lounge and a thousand steps

What else does this city of 80,000 people have to offer? Certainly the 111 beautifully

The legend behind the city name

An adventurous Irish monk called Gallus stumbled over a thorn bush in 612 AD at the waterfall at Mühleggschlucht gorge, not far from today's Gallusplatz square in the old town. He considered this a sign from God and decided to stay and establish a monastic cell.

(JG)

preserved oriels (bay windows) overlooking the cobblestone streets of an old town endowed with a remarkable concentration of eateries and taverns. The area between Marktplatz and the abbey is a haven for pedestrians and home to the ubiquitous "Erststockbeizli", or "first-floor restaurants", which offer a variety of menus ranging from haute cuisine to more rustic local fare.

St Gallen also boasts an interesting climate and topography – with ski lifts situated just on the outskirts. The city is nestled lengthways between two hills: Rosenberg to the north and Freudenberg to the south. The Drei Weieren recreation area at the foot of Freudenberg in nearby St Georgen offers views of Lake Constance and Germany beyond. Countless steps lead to the top of both these hills, which is why St Gallen is also referred to as the "city of a thousand steps".

St Gallen is easy to explore on foot. From the railway station, you pass the Neumarkt shopping complex before reaching St Gallen's "open-air lounge", Roter Platz. Designed by artist Pipilotti Rist and architect Carlos Martinez, this space in the middle of the city has oversized lighting elements hanging above sofas, chairs, tables, couches and even a Porsche – all of which are covered in a spongy red tennis-court carpet.

UNESCO world heritage site

Now to the abbey district (Stiftsbezirk) – a UNESCO world heritage site that consists of the baroque Abbey Cathedral and the world-famous Abbey Library. The latter is not only Switzerland's oldest library but also one of the oldest and most important libraries in the world. Its valuable book collection documents the history of European culture as well as the cultural role of St Gallen Abbey from the eighth century until secularisation in 1805. The Egyptian mummy Shep-



en-Isis also lies within the library's baroque interior alongside her twin sarcophaguses. Debate is currently raging on whether to return Shep-en-Isis to Egypt (see "Swiss Review" 2/2023).

The white city

St Gallen also used to be called the "white city", says Walter Frei, an 87-year-old theologian known for his guided cultural heritage tours. This is not only because it snows more than in other Swiss cities, due to the higher altitude. It is also a nod to St Gallen's textile past. Local monks began weaving linen in the Middle Ages, laying the basis for prosperity. After cotton displaced linen in the 18th century, embroidery became the speciality instead. By around 1910, embroidery was Switzerland's number one export product, accounting for 18 per cent of the total value of everything sold abroad. Over 50 per cent of the global embroidery output at the time came from St Gallen. The Great Depression of 1929 put an abrupt end to this boom.

Finally, St Gallen has a lot of culture to offer. Apart from the Museum of Textiles, which is dedicated to the textile history of Eastern Switzerland and holds one of Switzerland's



The sumptuous baroque interior of the St Gallen Abbey Library, which belongs to St Gallen's abbey district – a UNESCO world heritage site and a magnet for tourists. Photo provided



Artist Stéphanie Baechler originally comes from the canton of Fribourg but lives and works in Amsterdam. She will be one of the speakers at this year's Congress. Photo Ladina Bischof



St Gallen's "open-air lounge" – designed (and coloured in red) by artist Pipilotti Rist and architect Carlos Martinez. Photo: Keystone

most important textile collections, there is a Museum of Art, a Museum of Culture and a Museum of Natural History, a theatre, and a concert hall – all situated in the city's own museum quarter.

* Janina Gehrig is a journalist based in St Gallen

Exporting Swiss culture

Culture will be the main theme of this year's Congress of the Swiss Abroad, which takes place from 18 to 20 August in St Gallen. The event will be an opportunity for Swiss Abroad to engage with federal parliamentarians.

MAYA ROBERT-NICOUD

This 2023 Congress of the Swiss Abroad promises to cover a whole range of pressing issues. Participants will talk politics on the morning of 19 August, focusing specifically on the federal elections in the autumn and the question of e-voting. Representatives of the St Gallen cantonal government and Switzerland's biggest political parties will attend. They will provide an update on progress and developments in policy areas relevant to the "Fifth Switzerland". Guests will include the National Council President, federal parliamentarians, and figures from Swiss cultural life.

Swiss culture and its role beyond our borders will be the hot topic after lunch on the same day. The starting premise is that Swiss culture extends beyond Switzerland and deserves to be nurtured and enhanced both inside and outside our country. International cultural dialogue has a major influ-

ence on shaping our identity, on the way that Switzerland is viewed abroad, on the economy, and on technological progress. The Congress will look at how Swiss cultural exports can help to build bridges with other countries and consolidate Switzerland's international image. It will cover important questions, including whether culture is an export commodity like any other product, and what the costs and benefits are.

The Congress will be a unique opportunity for participants to learn more about these interesting issues, consider the political and cultural challenges of our time, meet experts and key stakeholders, and share valuable ideas and insights.

Register now

Attend this year's Congress for a new, meaningful take on Swiss culture and the cultural role of the "Fifth Switzerland". To view the full schedule and sign up for the event, visit:

swisscommunity.link/kongress2023



Join the conversation

Before the Congress begins, you can discuss e-voting and this year's federal elections by joining the online conversation with other Swiss Abroad:

members.swisscommunity.org



Election manifesto for the “Fifth Switzerland”

At the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) meeting on 17 March 2023, delegates from around the world unanimously approved an election manifesto for the “Fifth Switzerland”, calling for political action in seven key areas during the forthcoming legislative period.

SMILLA SCHÄR

Due to increased international mobility, the number of Swiss Abroad entered on the electoral register of a specific canton and able to participate in the federal elections has been growing for years. However, geographical distance from the relevant authorities and politicians in Switzerland makes it harder for Swiss Abroad to be politically engaged. Through its highest body, the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) acts as an interface defending the interests of the “Fifth Switzerland” in Switzerland. The CSA, referred to as the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”, has submitted an election manifesto to Switzerland’s political parties,



The OSA Executive Board at the CSA meeting in Berne. In the foreground: Lucas Metzger, President Filippo Lombardi, and Ariane Rustichelli. Photo: Alexandra Jäggi

authorities, and election candidates, setting out key demands on behalf of the Swiss Abroad for the 2023–27 legislative period.

Promoting international mobility

In its election manifesto, the CSA calls for a concerted effort to remove unnecessary obstacles to international mobility for Swiss nationals. It wants a clear commitment to developing and driving e-government, which will provide the Swiss Abroad with easy access to government services – regardless of time zone or the geographical distance from Switzerland. Quick and easy access to consular services must also continue for Swiss Abroad in their country of domicile.

To prevent new restrictions on international mobility, the CSA is a strong supporter of continued freedom of movement that allows Swiss citizens to live and work in EU/EFTA countries.

The CSA also advocates removing barriers for Swiss Abroad in relation to social security.

The ongoing issue of e-voting

Voter turnout among the Swiss Abroad plummeted at the last federal elections in 2019, because e-voting was not available. The CSA – as it did before the last legislative period – therefore calls on politicians to introduce

Winter holiday camps for children aged eight to 14

Whether they are skiers or snowboarders, beginners or advanced, young Swiss Abroad between the ages of eight and 14 can have a great time at our winter holiday camp.

Winter holiday camp in Valbella (canton of Grisons),

Date: Wednesday, 27 December 2023 to Friday, 5 January 2024

Number of participants: 42

Cost: CHF 950 (contribution to the camp)

Ski or snowboard hire: approx. CHF 150

Registration

Full details of the winter holiday camp, including the registration form, will be available from Tuesday, 22 August 2023 at sjas.ch/en/winter-camp/.

Registration deadline: 30 September 2023

We offer price reductions whenever these are justified. An application form for financial support is available to download from our website: revue.link/application

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e-voting quickly and across the board. When voting papers fail to arrive in time by post, e-voting is the only way for the Swiss Abroad to exercise their right to vote as enshrined in the constitution. An election manifesto on its own is not enough to ensure that Swiss politicians take the concerns of the “Fifth Switzerland” into account. The Swiss Abroad should actually be able to have a say on the future composition of parliament itself and deserve to be adequately represented.

The OSA 2023 election manifesto in full (in German and French): revue.link/manifest



Volunteering for young people

Young Swiss Abroad aged between 15 and 25 should mark 24 June 2023, the date of the 3rd Congress of Young Swiss Abroad, in their diary. Held online and organised in collaboration with the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad (YPSA), the 2023 Congress will revolve around the theme of volunteering and the opportunities that it offers. Join the conversation as young people from all corners of the globe share their views and listen to a range of interesting presentations. Visit our website at revue.link/youthcongress for details of the schedule and for everything else you need to know about the Congress. You can sign up for the event from 15 May 2023.

FABIENNE STOCKER, OSA YOUTH SERVICE



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