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GUISANPLATZ IN BERNE

General Guisan, the man who commanded the Swiss army during World War Two and whose name has been given to the plaza in front of the Bernese ice-skating rink, has seen his territory invaded by tourist coaches. Over the past 5 years, Guisanplatz has become the unofficial tourist coach station of Berne. During peak holiday periods, up to 6000 passengers per day leave from Guisanplatz to travel by coach to their holiday destinations. Up to 22 different coach companies with over 130 late model, double-decker coaches use this terminal every day in peak periods.

Many people prefer today to go on holidays by coach rather than take a flight or a train. No lugging of suitcases, no endless waiting at airports. The coaches are fast, extremely comfortable with reclining seats, toilets and bar and food services on board. Many people have also given up on taking their own cars. Increasing petrol costs, high motorway toll charges (particularly in France, Italy and Spain), endless queues on border crossings and nerve-wracking traffic jams have turned private motoring into a nightmare for many. So Guisanplatz is doomed to remain a coach terminal for many years to come.

FEWER DEATHS

For the first time in 40 years has the number of deaths on the Swiss roads slipped back below 900 per year. "Only" 860 people were killed on the roads in 1991, a record low which had not been achieved since 1952. Considering the tremendous increase in traffic since 1952, this result represents quite an achievement. But, although such statistics sound very positive and encouraging, they are nevertheless of little use to you if you happen to be one of the unlucky 860 people in question.

Rows of double-decker coaches waiting for their customers to take them to their holiday destinations on the Costa Brava, the Riviera or the Adriatica.

Even temporary "bistros" have sprung up on Guisanplatz.



ORGAN MUSEUM

Roche, a small railway station between Villeneuve and Aigle (Waadt) near the beginning of Lake Geneva has a new museum for musical organs. The museum is housed in an old barn that looks very much like a church without a steeple. Indeed, in the old days, the barn had been a relais station for the monks of the Grand St Bernard. The curator of the museum, Jean Jacques Gramm, is also its creator, having personally saved many old, unused organs from destruction.

From the replica of an organ dating back to antiquity as described by Heron of Alexandria, and operated by water pressure to the latest electronic organs, the collection also includes amongst others the famous organ of the cathedral (Stadtkirche) of Winterthur, barrel and street organs and harmoniums, which in a way are after all distant cousins of the organs. All instruments are in perfect playing conditions.

Some of our stingier Swiss people may be pleased to learn that the entrance to the museum is free.

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SLIMMING THE EXPENSIVE WAY

The new slimming mecca for the Rich and Famous is called "GRAZIELLA", an establishment situated in Weggis, on the very edge of lake Lucerne with a breathtaking view over the lake and the "Bürgenstock". The special "Ambiance" at this luxury hotel enjoying a mild climate at the foot of the Rigi, together with its tropical fruit diet seems to produce the expected results. The cure also includes bathing, massages, whirlpools, saunas and solariums. The treatment does not come cheap at this establishment but the Rich and Famous do not mind as long as they feel they have regained their youth, at least for a little while longer.

EMERGENCY NUMBER

Switzerland will join Europe in streamlining emergency calls. As from 1993 the telephone number 112 will cover all emergencies (police, fire brigade and ambulances). When all European countries have adopted the new system, 112 will be the only emergency number to call wherever you are in Europe.