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Helvetia Survey on Love, Life, Cheese and Chocolate

More Helvetia survey responses

Three questions in the recent survey were rather personal. Nearly all of the 64 participants replied. Thank you for your input! Here is a summary of the opinions, very interesting. Contact me please if you like further details of the responses.

What brought you to New Zealand?

The most common reply was – a man. Be it husband, fiancé, ex-husband. 11 women volunteered. One man found a rather good looking Kiwi girl. And one person mentioned a partner, not sure whether this was male or female. Four Swiss Kiwis came because family or friends were here. Ten readers were either born here, or came in childhood.

Seven of you consciously selected the New Zealand lifestyle and / or opportunities. Work brought seven people here – two were to work on a farm, one started his own business straight away. Study in NZ made another six people or families stay, some were here to learn English, others had opportunities at universities.

Comment: Of course I realise it is often a combination of factors, not just one. Still interesting that women seem to follow their men more than men follow the women! Mind you, I think more women completed the questionnaire; there may be a bias.

What do you miss most from Switzerland?

Many of you are missing more than one thing! Not surprisingly, family came very much at the top of the list. 23 respondents mentioned family, most were not specific about who in the family. Two said parents. One brother and one sister figured. Seven are missing friends and mates.

This was followed by food – whereas 10 people commented on food in general, there were many specific answers: five would love some affordable Swiss cheese, from Raclette, Fondue cheese to Appenzeller and Alpine cheese.

Three have cravings for chocolate, one for Ragusa bars, and one for Torino bars. Even liquids figured – wine, Rivella grün and Kafi Lutz. Then came Wernli biscuits, sausages, bread as well as yoghurt.

The thought of mountains and scenery makes 17 of us homesick, too. Six of those particularly like to walk or cycle. Culture, tradition, language took a high place also, with another 16 commenting. Languages, church bells, history and historical buildings, closeness to Europe, music including yodeling were mentioned. Switzerland has amazing possibilities for travel, 12 respondents are missing them, with six particularly liking the trains.

Then comes the proverbial Swiss reliability. Five readers made observations on the quality of services and products, organisation, punctuality of public transport, cleanliness, as well as order and efficiency. One person talks about the security of retirement in Switzerland.

A few people miss the shops, Migros was mentioned twice, also Ikea, good shoes and good kitchen stuff.

Comment: Having just had yet another tearful farewell from my family, I very much relate to the replies. Friends are mentioned much less than family. Of course they are important, but family is so unique. And it seems to get even more important the older we get. I find it particularly hard that I could not help my father and cannot help my mother in their last years. This is one thing I had never thought about when I emigrated.

Funny about the foods, aren't we all so individualistic, with particular tastes and likes. In a way, I was surprised and somewhat relieved that the traditional Swiss exactness was not emphasized more.

What do you particularly like about living in New Zealand that's different from Switzerland?

What a joy to go through these replies. Aren't we lucky to live in Gods-own!

Grouping all the positive comments was a bit of a challenge.

30 of the respondents commented on lifestyle and attitudes in one way or another – be it as 'freedom' (9), lifestyle (4), way of life (2), relaxed (4), easy (2), casual (2), not worrying (2). Honesty, tolerance, open-mindedness and friendliness were other positive remarks. And simplicity, less regulated and less conservative. It's also a good place to bring up children, one reader commented.

But that's not all; Open spaces, less people and no crowds were praised by 15 respondents. Nobody was particularly keen on the New Zealand Alps – but 10 of us adore the sea, the beaches, one person likes the water sports.

Six respondents found the opportunities in New Zealand special – two were specific about owning your own business, two others really like owning their own home, while one of them likes owning animals, too.

We moan about the weather at times – and yet six of you find the Auckland weather / climate good, from wind to long summers, to frequent changes.

Three people mentioned nature/ palm trees/ vegetation. Some like the fishing, the fact that the stores are open on nights and weekends, and the outdoors.

Comment: Reading through these replies, I identify with most of the positive comments myself. Especially the 'bringing up children' bit strikes a cord. I find the 'freedom' hard to further define, but each time I return to New Zealand I feel just so at ease, appreciative of the tolerance and acceptance from others. It proves to me once more how fortunate I am to live here. I do hope you feel the same!

Organising the questionnaire and collating the answers was a very rewarding exercise. Our Helvetia readers like to find out about experiences of other Swiss immigrants to New Zealand. We hope that this survey gives you a little insight, and look forward to more detailed stories in future.

By Nelly Steinemann