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## Swiss Christmas & New Year Traditions By Tanja Latham-Zurbrugg



### Klausjagen

The "Klausjagen" in Küsnacht am Rigi is one of the most imposing St. Nicholas customs in Europe. The procession with around 200 lffele (illuminated ornaments), followed by St. Nicholas and archaic noise from over a thousand chasers is watched every year by up to 20,000 spectators.

On the evening before St. Nicholas' Day, at eight o'clock, over a thousand chasers gather in the village by Lake Lucerne. Each wears a white herdsman's shirt. At 20.15, a small cannon is fired and the street lights go out all over Küsnacht. The "Geislechlepfer" crack their whips and lead the procession. Behind them dance the lffele carriers quietly. The lffele are made of card and tissue paper and look like church windows. The builders can give their creativity almost free rein with the motifs and colours,

and the size can also vary from half a metre to over two metres. The traditional images are the figure of St. Nicholas on the front side and a cross on the back and the letters JHS as another Christian symbol. Rosettes, ribbons and garlands complete the picture.

The streets echo with the ringing of heavy bells, carried by hand by strong men, the sound of horns and above all by strange triad rhythms of the brass music, to which the words "Mänz, Mänz, Mänz, Bodefridimänz" are sung. In the twenties, Clemenz (Mänz) Ulrich tried in vain to turn the custom of his times, which consisted of a wild chase after St. Nicholas by the village's young people, into something more civilised. Success was only achieved, however, by those who came after him, who in 1928 founded a society for the fostering and preservation of the Nicholas Chase.

Source: <http://www.luzern.com>



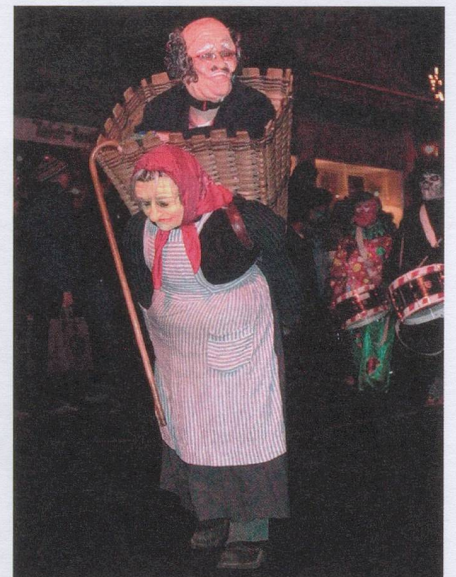
### Sternsinger

The procession of the Rapperswil Sternsingers departs on the last Sunday in Advent through the dark alleys of the Old Town onto the main square and stages the nativity play. The long procession with small and large angels, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the three holy kings together with sheep, horses, donkeys and camels - which are provided by Knies Children's Zoo - makes its way to the illuminated steps of the castle.

### Uebersitz in Meiringen

Midnight on 25 December heralds the start of a rambunctious procession through Meiringen and neighbouring villages in the Bernese Oberland, which will take place every evening up to and including New Year's Eve. With large cowbells ("Trychler") strapped to their chest or carrying drums, masked locals march through the streets trying to make as much noise as possible in a bid to ward off evil spirits.

On Christmas day, at nightfall, school boys begin with Treichlen, walking through the villages in small troops, sounding giant cow-bells. The following nights, the boys are joined, and later replaced, by adult men. The Trychling reaches its climax on 30 December with the Uebersitz in Meiringen. On this day, the Treichler carry frightening masks (except for the people of Unterbach and Hasliberg who remain unmasked). The people of Willigen and Husen are accompanied by a "Huttfroueli" (an effigy of an old woman) and a "Schnabelgeiss" (a tall monster with goat's horns and a beak), while the people of Meiringen have just a "Huttfroueli", and those of Innertkirchen just a "Schnabelgeiss".



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