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Autor: Cooper, Gordon
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SWITZERLAND AS SEEN BY HER VISITORS

The well-known travel-writer, Gordon Cooper, describes in this article which was first published in the London weekly, THE SPHERE, some of the little known, all the more lovely corners — away from the beaten track — of Switzerland.

OUT-OF-THE-WAY IN SWITZERLAND BY GORDON COOPER

Although Switzerland covers only half the area of Scotland and is famed world-wide for holidays, it has some lovely regions that are little known in Britain. The British traveller has displayed a tendency to conservatism in his choice of holiday resorts there; and travel agents have quite understandably catered for this demand. I suggest, however, that there may well be some readers who would like to venture away from the well-beaten track, and for such persons I offer my own special selections. Naturally, I have taken into account that suitable accommodation is available in the places I name.

FAMOUS SPAS IN PLEASANT SURROUNDINGS

In Northern Switzerland, to the east of Basle and lying beside the Rhine, is the spa of Rheinfelden. The medieval walls and buildings provide a pleasant environment, while there is the usual range of entertainments. Fine walks can be enjoyed in the nearby forests, Schinznach-Bad, west of Zurich, is another attractive spa. Located in an extensive natural park, the resort has a social tradition, and its buildings have considerable dignity, a quality which also pervades its gardens. The broad River Aare brings coolness, while the town is a good centre for interesting excursions.

PICTURESQUE TOWNS AND A NEARBY SUMMER-PARADISE

North-East Switzerland is a part of the country of which I am very fond. St. Gallen, the largest town, is a most civilised place and a good base for excursions, including one to Lake Constance. Two recommended holiday spots are Steckborn and Stein-am-Rhein, perhaps the loveliest medieval town in Switzerland. Both places lie beside the Upper-Rhine. In this corner of the country there is the long valley of Toggenburg. Opportunities exist for walking, fishing and bathing; there are mountain lakes and rivers and the summer climate is ideal. The area is well known, too, for the excellence of its cuisine. Wildhaus is the largest of the Toggenburg resorts, while smaller villages are Unterwasser and Neu St. Johann, both recommended for a quiet and restful holiday.

THE LONELY JURA — A STIMULANT FOR WALKING AND HORSE-RIDING

At the other side of Switzerland — the north-west — there is Murten, one of the best preserved wall-towns in Europe. Farther west is Neuchâtel, a good base from which to explore the Swiss Jura Mountains, while the town itself, lying beside its lake, is very pleasing. The landscape in the Jura is often rather bare and windswept, but there are forests of dark pines, while torrents splash noisily through rocky ravines. It is a good district for the walker and also for horse-riding — Saignelégier offers good facilities for the latter. Porrentruy, St. Ursanne and Delémont are other pleasant towns in which to stay.

THE GRISONS — "SWITZERLAND IN MINIATURE"

The canton of the Grisons encompasses the lovely Engadine and the Swiss National Park. The area contains such a diversity of geographic and climatic possibilities that the description of the Grisons as "Switzerland in miniature" is a very appropriate one. I feel sure no visitor will be disappointed by its beauties. Three selected

off-the-beaten-track places are Tschierschen, a pleasant village surrounded by flowered meadows and larch and pine woods with magnificent views of the Rhaetian Alps; Samnaun, a remote village near the Austro-Swiss border at the eastern end of the Engadine valley. It is surrounded by mountains and woods, and it has also the odd advantage of duty-free prices for tobacco and drinks; S-chanfs, a charming village situated on the banks of the River Inn, eleven miles from St. Moritz. It is a sunny spot and is very close to the Swiss National Park, where delightful walks in unspoiled natural surroundings can be made.

COLOURFUL MOSAIC OF FASHIONABLE RESORTS AND UNSPOILED VILLAGES

The Valais area is distinctive in Switzerland not only by virtue of the hardy and individual character of its inhabitants but also because of the nature of the scenery. The deep furrow cut by the Rhône right across the south-western Swiss Alps has resulted in the creation of many side-valleys above which tower the mountains. The scenery is unsurpassed and with its renowned tradition of hospitality and excellent hotels — many of them family-run — this sunny area is ideal for most types of holidaymakers.

Among the larger resorts are Crans (excellent for golfers) and Saas-Fee, while I cannot omit mention of Zermatt, with its constant thrill of looking up at the Matterhorn, surely the most impressive of all European mountains. Among the smaller places, there are many which are satisfying. Take Evolène, for instance, in the beautiful Val d'Hérens; it is an unspoiled mountain village where national costumes are still worn daily by the women. The district abounds in fine walks and climbing possibilities.

At the farthest end of another valley, the Val d'Anniviers, there is Zinal, which is surrounded by green meadows with the Zinal Glacier beyond. I often dream of returning there one day — for a real rest. But I also have fancy for Isérable, an eagle's eyrie not far from Sion. The only practical means of approach is by an aerial cable-car. The villagers are quite different from any other community in the Valais, and it is claimed that they are descendants of the Saracenic hordes who, after the Battle of Poitiers, late in the ninth century, over-ran some of the high Alpine valleys.

At the western end of the Valais, Finhaut, the highest village in the Trient valley, is surrounded by larch and pine woods. It has a sunny situation and is restful and quiet. Then, at the other side of this part of Switzerland, north of the railway between Brigue and Gletsch, there is that wonderful escapist spot: Riederalp (over 6,000 feet altitude). It lies on a high plateau commanding a wide view of the Alps and overlooks the famous Aletsch glacier. There is bathing in the Blausee, and there are exceptionally fine woods around the tiny village. It offers a selection of exhilarating walks and the climate is healthy and restful.

Finally, should you go to Switzerland be sure you obtain through your travel agent a Swiss Holiday Ticket, for it enables you to make five round-trip excursions at greatly reduced prices.

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