

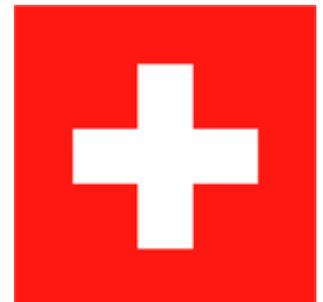
Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft

Did You Know?

- The Alpine region of Switzerland has about 10,000 avalanches a year.
- The death penalty in Switzerland was *abolished* (ended) in 1942.
- Women couldn't vote in national elections until 1971.
- There is almost no poverty in Switzerland.
- All males between the ages of 20 and 34 are required to serve in the Swiss army, which involves three weeks of training every other year or 260 total days of service. *Conscientious objectors* (people who refuse to serve in the military on religious or moral grounds) must serve 290 total days of community service.
- Switzerland is famous for its delicious chocolate. The average Swiss eats around 27 pounds (12 kg) of chocolate each year.
- Built in 1460, the University of Basel is the oldest university in Switzerland.
- Almost half of the population of Switzerland skis regularly.
- Heidi, the beloved story of a girl raised by her grandfather in the Alps, is one of the best-known works of Swiss literature and one of the bestselling novels ever written.
- Saint Bernards, famous for finding people who are lost in fog and snow, are the unofficial national dog of Switzerland.
- In 1999, Ruth Dreifuss became Switzerland's first Jewish and first female president.
- Switzerland is world famous for its watches. Some of the most famous luxury watchmakers are Swiss, including Rolex, Tissot, and Patek Philippe.
- The Swiss invented aluminum foil, cellophane, Velcro, and the electric toothbrush.
- Geneva is home to many major world organization headquarters, including the European headquarters of the United Nations (UN), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Economics Forum (WEF), and the World Wide Web Virtual Library.
- The alpenhorn, which can be up to 12 feet (3.7 m) long, is a Swiss musical instrument that can be heard as far away as 8 miles (13 km). Alpenhorn players often perform with yodeling groups at folk festivals and other celebrations.

Flag

In the 13th century, Swiss soldiers used two strips of white cloth to make a cross that would identify them in battle. This white cross on a red background is the Red Cross symbol reversed.



National Image

The Matterhorn in southern Switzerland is one of the world's most recognized mountains. A dramatically pointed peak, it rises 14,692 feet (4,478 m) high and is one of the most important symbols of Switzerland and the Alps.



People and Places

Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.): 15,937

Area (sq. km.): 41,277

Switzerland is just smaller than Denmark, or about twice the size of the state of New Jersey. The nation is sometimes called the “roof of Europe” because of its towering Alps, which cover more than half of the country, running east to west. The Jura Mountains stretch along the western border. The highest mountain peaks include Monte Rosa, at 15,209 feet (4,635 m), and the Matterhorn, at 14,692 feet (4,478 m). Switzerland also has more than 1,500 lakes and numerous large flat green valleys. It is also home to one of the highest waterfalls in Europe, the Rhine Falls.



The climate varies depending on elevation. Winters tend to be long and snowy in the mountains, while the valleys have fog and rain. Southern Switzerland, in the Italian region called Ticino, even has palm trees. Summers are usually mild throughout Switzerland.

Population

Population: 8,061,516

Switzerland has a variety of ethnic groups. People of German ancestry live mainly in the east and center of the country. People of French ancestry live in the west. In parts of the south, most people are of Italian descent. A small part of the population is Romansch, descendants of an ancient people who lived in the area. To this day, they still speak a Latin *dialect* (way of pronouncing or speaking). Switzerland also has many *immigrants* (people who have come from other countries) from the Middle East, the former Yugoslavia, Spain, Greece, Italy, and other countries. The largest cities are Zürich, Geneva, and Basel. The UNESCO World Heritage city Bern is the capital of Switzerland and the seat of the federal government.

Language

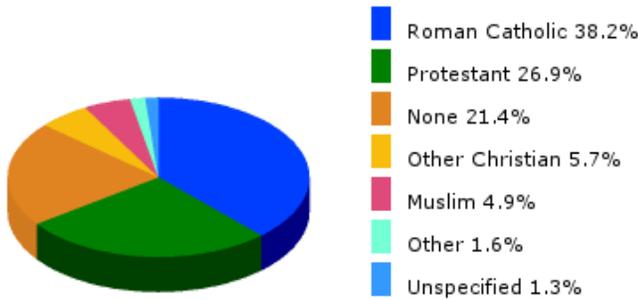
Switzerland has four national languages—German, French, Italian, and Romansch. Each *canton* (a territory similar to a state) has the right to decide which language it will use. Most Swiss can understand at least one official language besides their own, and many speak English, which is also offered in schools. In school, any of the four languages can be studied, but students are taught in the language of the *canton*. The Swiss are some of Europe’s most multilingual people.

In elementary school, Swiss German children are taught to read and write in regular “written” German, which sounds very different from the Swiss region *dialects* (ways of pronouncing or speaking) spoken in everyday life. The German Swiss speak a type of German (*Schweizerdeutsch*) that can be difficult for other German-speaking people to understand. There are many varieties of Swiss German, and it is mainly a spoken language.

Can You Say It in Swiss German?

Hello	<i>Grüezi</i>	(GROOT-see)
Good-bye	<i>Uf wiederluege</i>	(oof VID-duh-LOO-ah-guh)
Please	<i>Bitte</i>	(BIT-eh)
Thank you	<i>Danke</i>	(DAHN-keh)
Yes	<i>Ja</i>	(yah)
No	<i>Nei</i>	(nay)

Religion



Source: *The World Factbook 2014. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2014.*

Around a third of the Swiss people are Roman Catholic. The rest belong to various other Christian churches, mostly Protestant, or belong to no religion. There is a small Muslim minority. Switzerland is a *secular* (non-religious) society, and participation in religion is often reserved for special events and holidays. Swiss people pay a small “church tax” to be registered with a specific religious denomination in Switzerland. Similar to many other countries in Europe, religion in Switzerland has more influence in *rural* (countryside) areas than in the cities.

History

Time Line

500 BC	
500 BC	Helvetians, a Celtic tribe, live in the area of what is now Switzerland
15	Romans conquer the area
AD 300	
AD 300s	Various Germanic tribes control parts of Switzerland

800s	Charlemagne rules over parts of Europe, including Switzerland	
1200		
1200s	Switzerland comes under the power of the Hapsburgs, a European royal dynasty	
1291	The Swiss Confederation is founded when three of the <i>cantons</i> (state-like territories) form an alliance to resist outside control	
1300s	Other <i>cantons</i> join the Swiss Confederation	
1500		
1500s	The Swiss Reformation takes place	
Late 1700s	France invades and Napoleon gains control of Switzerland	
1800		
1815	Switzerland's borders, neutrality, and independence are recognized at the Congress of Vienna	
1848	The new federal constitution is adopted, creating a centralized government	
1863	The International Red Cross is founded	
1900		
1914–18	Switzerland remains neutral during World War I, organizing Red Cross units	
1920	Switzerland joins the League of Nations, with headquarters in Geneva	
1939–45	Switzerland remains neutral during World War II, refusing to join the United Nations	
1959	A political agreement known as the “magic formula” creates a four-party government system that will last for decades	
1971	Swiss women gain the right to vote in national elections	
1981	The Equal Rights Amendment is passed	
1994	Racial discrimination and denying the Holocaust are outlawed	
1998	Two Swiss banks agree to pay \$1.25 billion to Holocaust survivors	
2000		

2002	Switzerland joins the United Nations; Swiss voters legalize abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy	
2004	Voters legalize stem cell research	
2005	Major flooding in central Switzerland causes landslides and damages roads and railways	
2006	In a national referendum, Swiss voters back tougher measures to limit immigration	
2008	In response to the global financial crisis, the government reveals its plan to rescue Switzerland's largest bank	
PRESENT		

Roman Rule

Celtic tribes such as the Helvetii, the Vindelici, and the Raetians inhabited what is now Switzerland long before outsiders arrived. In the first century BC, Julius Caesar and the Romans conquered the area, and those tribes lived under Roman rule for five centuries. In exchange for providing soldiers to the Roman army, the people, known as Helvetians, were given some independence and protection from foreign attackers. Under Roman rule, settlements were created, roads were built, and farming techniques improved. The Romans also developed the Great St. Bernard Pass through the Alps, improving it from dirt paths to paved roads. In the fourth century AD, Germanic tribes invaded and conquered the Helvetians.



Swiss Democracy

Switzerland is one of the world's oldest *democracies* (government by the people). The founding of the Swiss Confederation took place on 1 August 1291, when the *cantons* (similar to states) of Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden met to declare independence from the Hapsburg Empire and to claim the right to make their own laws. By joining together, they also hoped to be powerful enough to keep others from attacking them. Over time, other *cantons* joined the confederation. Switzerland now has 26 *cantons*. The first of August is celebrated as Swiss National Day. In 1874, direct *democracy* by the people became an integral part of the constitution.

Swiss Neutrality

Since the 19th century, Switzerland has followed a policy of *neutrality*, which means that it hasn't gotten involved in wars between other nations. But following this policy hasn't always been easy. During both world wars, hundreds of thousands of Swiss soldiers guarded the borders against enemy invasions. The Swiss built up their army and were prepared to destroy roads and rail lines through the mountains if the country were attacked. Luckily, the plan worked. Switzerland wasn't invaded during either world war. Switzerland serves the world by sponsoring the International Red Cross, hosting some UN offices, and acting as an impartial location for peace conferences and summits.

Holocaust Fund

Many people have admired Switzerland's policy of neutrality, but the country sometimes has been criticized for not doing enough. Especially in the last few years, Jewish groups have complained that Swiss banks kept millions of dollars belonging to European Jews who were killed by the Nazis during World War II. After years of discussion, the two largest Swiss banks admitted to secretly hiding Nazi money and finally agreed to pay \$1.25 billion to the descendants of Holocaust survivors. This included not just Jews but all types of Holocaust victims, including the Roma (Gypsies), Jehovah's Witnesses, the disabled, and homosexuals. The campaign was launched in 108 different countries in 29 languages.



Swiss Reformation

In the 1500s the *Protestant Reformation* (Christian reform movement) came to Switzerland. Up until then, the nation had been firmly Roman Catholic. The Church ran everything from schools to taxes, but things were not always fair. There was a large gap between the comfortable way many of the priests lived and the way the rest of the population lived. In many ways, the Reformation was a natural development, as the individual *cantons* had been trying for some time to limit the Church's power in politics. A religious leader by the name of Huldrych Zwingli came to fame in Zurich for his support of the Reformation. He preached about reforming the Catholic Church and led an alliance of *cantons* (similar to states) in favor of reform.

Switzerland Today

Today, Switzerland still values its traditional independence, but it is adapting to everyday global changes. In 1999, the Swiss voted in favor of a brand-new federal constitution. This new constitution outlines the fundamental individual rights and responsibilities of the people, the *cantons* (similar to states), and the federal government. In 2002, Switzerland joined the United Nations (UN), and though it is not a member of the European Union (EU), the Swiss government is adjusting its laws to stay in line with neighboring EU nations.

Lifestyle

Games and Sports

It probably isn't a big surprise that in a land of beautiful mountains and lakes, the Swiss enjoy the outdoors. Hiking, skiing (both cross-country and downhill), mountain climbing, and other such activities fit with the mountainous environment. Many people also like to play *football* (soccer) and go cycling. Ice hockey is popular in the winter. They also love going on vacations, both in Switzerland and to other countries. Some Swiss enjoy traditional Swiss games, such as *Schwingen*, a type of wrestling that is similar to Greco-Roman wrestling but without weight classifications. The Swiss also enjoy taking walks, having cookouts, watching movies, and attending cultural events such as concerts, plays, and traditional folk festivals.



Holidays

In Switzerland, the region where you live determines which word you use for Christmas: *Weihnachten* (German), *Noël* (French), *Natale* (Italian), or *Nadel* (Romansch). There are also different Christmas traditions depending on the region. In some places, the Christmas tree is decorated in secret and hidden until Christmas Eve. In other places, the *Christkind* (Christ child), rather than Santa Claus, brings presents on Christmas. Some families exchange presents on Christmas Day. Others wait until January to open presents.



Every year on the first day of August, the Swiss celebrate Swiss National Day. This important national holiday is celebrated with outdoor grilling, fireworks, and ringing church bells.

Food

Switzerland has a very unique cuisine, incorporating influences from each of its neighboring countries, especially Italy, France, and Germany. Meat, potatoes, and dairy products are popular in Switzerland. Grilled sausage, known as *Bratwurst* (in German) or *saucisse* (in French), is also popular. Each region has its own specialties, which include various sausages or other meats, cheeses, breads, soups, and wines. A well-known Swiss food is *fondue* (small pieces of bread dipped into a pot bubbling with warm cheese sauce). *Raclette* (melted cheese with potatoes, pickles, and marinated vegetables) is another popular cheese dish. Potatoes are prepared in a variety of ways, such as *Rösti* (grated, pan-fried potatoes similar to hash browns), *Gratin* (potatoes sliced and baked with white sauce and cream), french fries, or boiled potatoes.



Breakfast is usually light and might include fresh bread, cheese, yogurt, and coffee, hot milk with Ovaltine, or hot chocolate. Lunch usually consists of a main dish with meat, potatoes, and a salad. Open-faced sandwiches are often eaten at dinner. Lunch is usually eaten at noon, and dinner is eaten around 6 or 6:30 p.m. Many Swiss at offices and schools also take short coffee or snack breaks at 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Before eating, the Swiss usually wish everyone at the table a good meal by saying *E guete* in Swiss German, *Bon appétit* in French, or *Buon appetito* in Italian. The best compliment you can give the cook is to ask for second helpings.

Schools

Adult Literacy: 99%

Because education is the responsibility of the individual *cantons* (similar to states), schools vary from area to area. Children usually start school when they are six, and education is free until students are fifteen years old. There are three basic levels: primary, secondary, and *gymnasium* (high school). The high schools provide preparation for a university education. Some students choose to go to schools where they can learn trades after their secondary education. Switzerland has excellent universities, including the University of Basel, which was built in 1460 and is the oldest university in Switzerland.



Life as a Kid

Swiss families tend to be small, with one or two children. They are more likely to live in apartments rather than houses, but houses are more common in the countryside. In many ways, Swiss kids probably live much like you do. They go to school, spend time with their friends and families, help with chores, participate in sports, read, and play computer games.



Society

Government

Capital: Bern

Head of State: Pres. Didier Burkhalter

Head of Government: Pres. Didier Burkhalter

The Swiss government has three main levels. The first level is the federal government, which is responsible for issues affecting the entire country. At this level, a seven-member Federal Council is in charge. The council picks one of its members to be Switzerland's new president each year. The office of president is mostly ceremonial. Also at the federal level is a parliament, called the Federal Assembly. This body includes the 200-seat National Council and the 46-seat Council of States. At the second level of government, each of the 26 *cantons* (territories) has its own government. The *cantons* each have their own constitution and are responsible for such things as education, law enforcement, and welfare. At the third level, each city or town has its own government to take care of local matters. The voting age is 18.

Money and Economy

Currency: Swiss franc

Despite its small size, Switzerland has one of the strongest economies in the world. It is known as a banking and finance capital. Tourism also brings in a lot of money. The Swiss enjoy a high standard of living and there is virtually no poverty. Because of the mountainous landscape, only one-fourth of the land can be used for farming. The Swiss make clocks and watches, which are known for their fine quality and craftsmanship. They also make cheese, machinery, chemicals, textiles, and various tools.



Getting Around

Switzerland has an excellent public transportation system. With its relatively small size and high population density, the nation is perfectly designed for public transportation. Though most families have cars, Swiss city buses, streetcars, lake steamers, and trains also help people get to where they need to go and are known for being on time. Postal buses, which transport both mail and passengers to remote villages, are another link in the national transportation system. A high-speed rail link operates between Geneva and Brussels. In some cases, the Swiss have had to build tunnels for their highways to go through the mountains. The Saint Gotthard Tunnel (in south-central Switzerland), which is more than 10 miles long (almost 17 km), is the third longest tunnel in the world. It has



greatly improved road transportation between Switzerland and Italy.

Culture Facts & Contacts

The Red Cross

When Henri Dunant saw the horrors of war firsthand, he decided that something needed to be done to help relieve the suffering. So Dunant started the International Red Cross in 1863. Although at first the Red Cross was intended to help the victims of war, its mission has since expanded to helping people in crises of all kinds—earthquakes, fires, floods, and disease, in addition to war. For his efforts, Dunant won the first-ever Nobel Peace Prize, in 1901. The International Committee of the Red Cross headquarters is in Geneva, and the organization has around 100 million volunteers worldwide.



Learn More

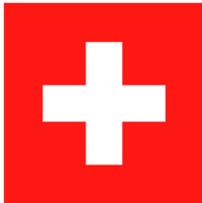
Contact the Embassy of Switzerland, 2900 Cathedral Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 745-7900; web site www.eda.admin.ch. Or contact Switzerland Tourism, phone (877) 794-7795; web site www.myswitzerland.com.

© 2015 ProQuest LLC and Brigham Young University. It is against the law to copy, reprint, store, or transmit any part of this publication in any form by any means without strict written permission from ProQuest.

CultureGrams™

ProQuest
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106 USA
Toll Free: 1.800.521.3042
Fax: 1.800.864.0019
www.culturegrams.com

Switzerland



Water drains from Switzerland into five major European rivers: the Rhine, Rhône, Po, Adige, and Danube.

In both area and population, Switzerland is one of the smallest countries in Europe.

Switzerland sometimes is called "the roof of Europe" because of its tall mountains.



Most of Switzerland's population lives in the area between the Alps and the Jura Mountains.

The highest point in the country is the Dufourspitze at 15,203 feet (4,634 m).

Switzerland covers 15,942 square miles (41,290 sq km), about twice the size of New Jersey.