

The Swiss Way

A TRAIN SPEEDS THROUGH A TUNNEL BENEATH towering snowcapped peaks. Bankers sit around a conference table discussing billion-dollar deals. Young people relax at a café on a narrow cobblestone street. Switzerland is all this, and much more.

Sitting in the mountains of central Europe, Switzerland has a unique history and place in the world today. Switzerland has long had a policy of neutrality, taking no sides and protecting itself while larger, more powerful countries fought and argued around it. In part because of this neutrality, many international organizations are based in Switzerland.

Switzerland itself is made up of twenty-six cantons. These are like U.S. states, except they are much more independent of national control. Each has its own laws, and its own culture. Switzerland is divided in other ways as well; it has four official languages: German, French, Italian, and Rumantsch. Although most Swiss speak at least two languages, communication can sometimes be difficult.

Opposite: A train crosses a bridge over a deep ravine in the Alps. Trains and cars use many tunnels and bridges to travel from Switzerland to Italy.



At Ballenberg, in west-central Switzerland, there are no trillion-dollar banks or great feats of engineering. There are no presidents gathering to make history, or Olympic medals to be won. But there is hard work and ingenuity. There is meticulous craftsmanship. There is diversity and cooperation. These qualities are at the heart of everything that is Swiss, and have been for a very long time.



A worker at the living history village in Ballenberg demonstrates how to weave cloth.

Ballenberg is home to a unique museum—a living history village that brings Switzerland’s rich past to life. And although it may seem like the opposite of today’s Switzerland, Ballenberg actually shows how the values of yesterday have shaped the nation of today.

Visitors step into a village set at the feet of the Alps and find traditional houses, farms, and workshops that represent each of the country’s regions. These buildings show the architectural diversity through various times in history and in different regions. They also show what people did in the past.

Inside one house, workers are busy turning the silk of silkworms into thread, making flax into linen, and weaving these threads into fabric, while others sew the fabrics into clothes. In another, people turn fresh milk from the cows grazing nearby into butter and cheese, while bakers transform freshly harvested grain into loaves of bread. At the center of

the village, a pharmacist sits in his apothecary explaining the science of herbal medicine. Next door, a potter forms bowls on his wheel, while artists paint scenes of farm life on chairs and stools that were trees yesterday.

Outdoors, the farm is worked by hand with simple tools and animal power. Men are chopping wood and separating out the pieces that are perfect for the woodcarvers and shingle makers. In the barn just out back, a woman is shearing a sheep so she can make a wool blanket. Her friend is in the chestnut grove next door, tucking a few of the nuts from the harvest away in her apron to be roasted later on the fire.

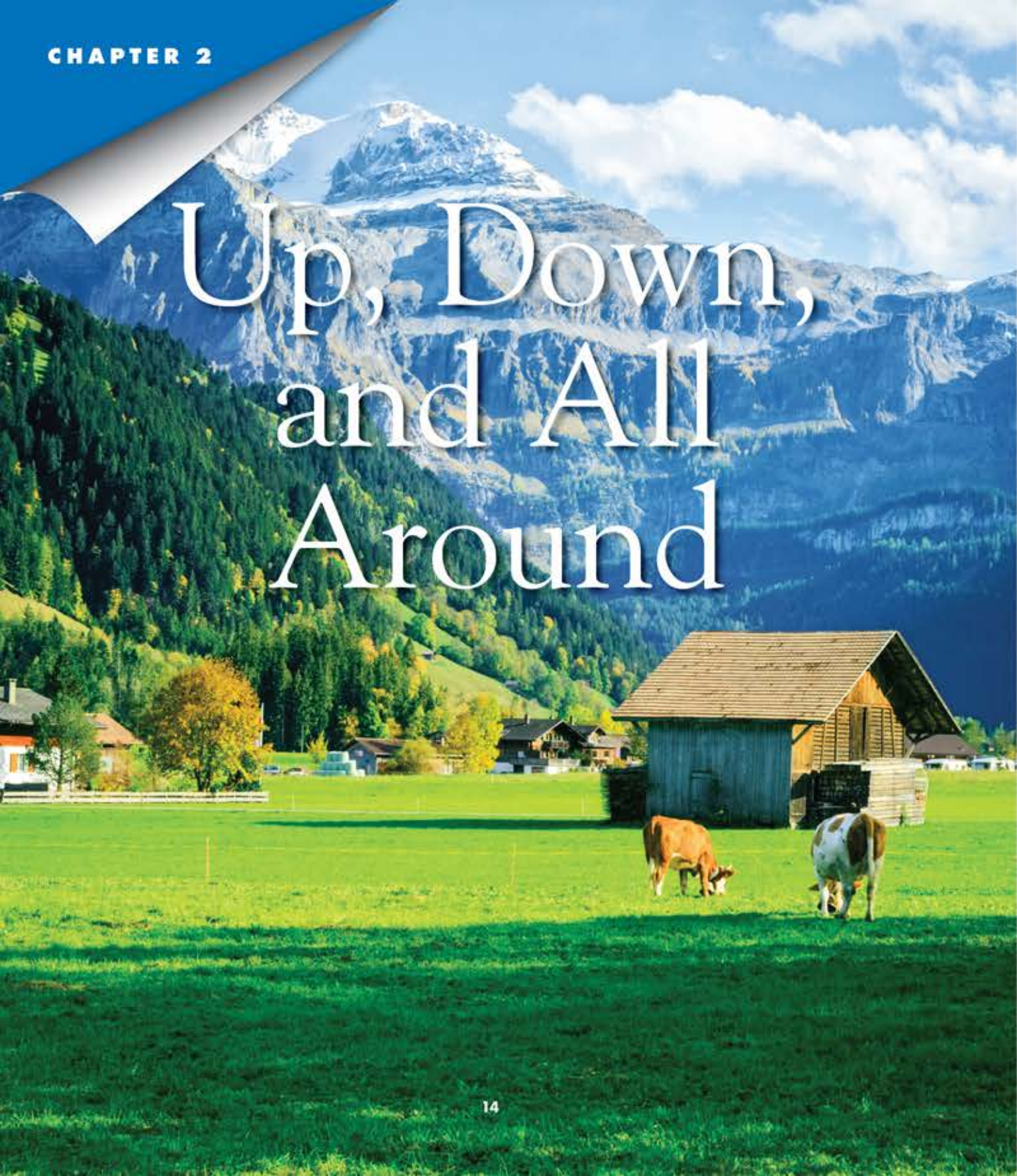
Visitors at Ballenberg watch as the wool is sheared off a sheep.



Like any country, Switzerland's past had its good times and its troubles, and Ballenberg reminds visitors that although the simple life of yesterday had some appeal, progress is a good thing, too. An exhibit about the *Verdingkinder*, or "contract children," recalls the time not so long ago when children were taken from their homes and forced into a life of hard labor on farms far from their families. Until the 1970s, children of poor families, especially of single mothers, were taken by the state and placed in this "foster care" system, and parents could do nothing to stop it.

Ballenberg doesn't varnish Switzerland's long history into an ideal theme-park world. Instead, it reminds the families, tourists, and schoolchildren who visit today that the good life they have in modern Switzerland comes from a long heritage of hard work and cooperation. And that the basic values that molded the country are just as important today as they were a hundred years ago.

Businesspeople talk on the street in Zürich, one of the most expensive cities in the world.

A scenic view of a Swiss valley. In the foreground, a lush green field is dotted with two cows, one brown and one white. A large, rustic wooden barn with a steep roof stands in the middle ground. In the background, a small village with traditional houses is nestled at the foot of a steep, forested hillside. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, and a majestic, snow-capped mountain peak rises in the distance under a clear blue sky.

Up, Down, and All Around

SWITZERLAND IS A SMALL COUNTRY THAT LIES IN the middle of Europe. It is bordered by Germany to the north, France to the west, Italy to the south, and Austria and Liechtenstein to the east. The country covers a total area of 15,940 square miles (41,285 square kilometers), which is a little more than the size of the U.S. states of New Hampshire and Connecticut combined.

Seventy percent of the area of Switzerland is mountain. It is so mountainous that the American author Mark Twain once joked, “Switzerland would be a mighty big place if it were ironed flat.”

The Jura mountain range extends along part of the border with France. The Swiss section of the Alps runs along the entire border with Italy and the borders with France, Liechtenstein, and Austria. The only part of the country that is not mountainous is the Swiss Plateau, also known as the Mittelland. Occupying north-central Switzerland, it is where most of the population lives.

Opposite: Rich green valleys separate the rocky mountain peaks in Switzerland.

Timeline

SWISS HISTORY

Modern humans arrive in what is now Switzerland.	12,000 years ago
The Helvetians arrive in the region.	ca. 100 BCE
The Romans take control of Helvetia.	58 BCE
The Romans lose control of Helvetia to Germanic tribes.	400 CE
The monastery of St. Maurice d'Augune is founded in Valais Canton.	515
The city of Bern is founded.	1191
The cantons of Schwyz, Uri, and Unterwalden agree to the Oath of Rütli, creating the Swiss Confederation.	1291
The Swiss fight the Swabian War.	1499
Huldrych Zwingli leads the Protestant Reformation in Zürich.	1520s
John Calvin settles in Switzerland and becomes a leader in the Reformation.	1533
The Watchmakers Guild of Geneva is established.	1601
The Helvetic Republic is established in an attempt to unify the cantons.	1798

WORLD HISTORY

ca. 2500BCE	The Egyptians build the pyramids and the Sphinx in Giza.
ca. 563 BCE	The Buddha is born in India.
313 CE	The Roman emperor Constantine legalizes Christianity.
610	The Prophet Muhammad begins preaching a new religion called Islam.
1054	The Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Roman Catholic) Churches break apart.
1095	The Crusades begin.
1215	King John seals the Magna Carta.
1300s	The Renaissance begins in Italy.
1347	The plague sweeps through Europe.
1453	Ottoman Turks capture Constantinople, conquering the Byzantine Empire.
1492	Columbus arrives in North America.
1500s	Reformers break away from the Catholic Church, and Protestantism is born.
1776	The U.S. Declaration of Independence is signed.
1789	The French Revolution begins.

SWISS HISTORY

The Swiss Confederation is recognized as an independent country.	1815
A brief civil war called the Sonderbund War erupts.	1847
The first Swiss Federal Constitution is approved by the people; Bern is named the country's capital.	1848
A new constitution is approved, increasing federal influence over the cantons; purchasing the service of Swiss soldiers as mercenaries is outlawed.	1874
Switzerland, Germany, and Italy accomplish the massive engineering feat of the St. Gotthard Pass, the first rail pass through the Alps.	1880
The International Olympic Committee is founded by a Swiss man named Pierre de Coubertin.	1894
The Swiss National Park is established.	1914
The Swiss government agrees to stop accepting Jewish refugees.	1938
Swiss residents vote to grant women the right to vote.	1971
Switzerland's most recent constitution takes effect.	2000
Switzerland joins the United Nations.	2002
The right to paid maternity leave is guaranteed by federal law.	2004
Voters approve police and immigration cooperation with the European Union.	2005
Voters approve a ban on minarets.	2009

WORLD HISTORY

1865	The American Civil War ends.
1879	The first practical lightbulb is invented.
1914	World War I begins.
1917	The Bolshevik Revolution brings communism to Russia.
1929	A worldwide economic depression begins.
1939	World War II begins.
1945	World War II ends.
1969	Humans land on the Moon.
1975	The Vietnam War ends.
1989	The Berlin Wall is torn down as communism crumbles in Eastern Europe.
1991	The Soviet Union breaks into separate states.
2001	Terrorists attack the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon near Washington, D.C.
2004	A tsunami in the Indian Ocean destroys coastlines in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia.
2008	The United States elects its first African American president.