

What Makes Switzerland Tick

Every country has its own customs. In Switzerland there are several unwritten rules which should be observed.

Different Cultures

Switzerland is a culturally diverse country due in particular to the four language regions. It is not surprising that regional mentalities vary. The customs of German-speaking Switzerland need not apply to French-speaking Switzerland. Differences between urban and rural regions may also be vast. And yet, some commonalities do apply.

Greetings

A Swiss greeting involves shaking hands and eye-contact. This also applies to greetings between men and women. The common greeting is "grüezi" (friends use different greetings, such as "hallo" or "hoi"). In rural regions it is common to greet passersby even when one doesn't know them. Saying "thank-you" and "please" is very important: For example, saying "thank-you" and "please" multiple times in shops or restaurants is almost a ritual.

Punctuality

The famous Swiss punctuality is not just a cliché. If one is more than 5 minutes late one should telephone. In the professional world punctuality is particularly important. Meetings are generally planned ahead of time. Unannounced social visits are not common either.

Indirect Communication

Uncomfortable matters are often addressed indirectly in Switzerland. Many conversation partners will only use disguised criticism. Nonetheless they will expect the criticism to be taken seriously. This is not easy when one is still learning German. Direct confrontation is avoided in order to preserve harmony when conflicts do arise. For example, one may receive a letter from an irritated neighbour. If a situation is unclear it is better to ask again than not to be sure.

Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

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