

# Holiday abroad - Switzerland in May

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**HOLIDAY ABROAD — SWITZERLAND IN MAY.**

By MARY COLIN.

To the question, where are you going this year for your holiday, I reply triumphantly "I've been, can't you see I'm sunburned?" The explanation is — Switzerland, in spite of devaluation. The flood of questions which has followed — where did you go? How did the money pan out — prompts me to describe the trip, giving not the Baedeker slant, but the experience of a free lance traveller.

There are, of course, the initial hurdles of passport, currency and travel tickets to be surmounted. Once you're all set for going, make up your mind, is it to be an eating holiday, an educational holiday — museums, history, and all that — or a going places holiday with a judicious sprinkling of what Lord Woolton used to describe as "idle eating." Next, decide whether you are going to travel soft, by air, or the hard way, third class carriages and night journeys; lastly, are you going to seek the company of your fellow countrymen, or put to the test your inadequate German and halting French. Like everything else, the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it: I chose the hard way, and succeeded in not meeting any English people from the time I left London until I got back to Folkestone again.

As usual, everybody pelted for the Customs at Folkestone. And here is where travelling light is an advantage — even so, you are likely to go aboard with both hands occupied with luggage, passport, tickets, etc., and your embarkation card between your teeth. The boat won't go without you, so don't rush: in any case the Customs are getting a bit bored by the end of the queue and are more likely to pass you through.

On the boat — well, it depends on the weather and whether or not you are a good sailor. Like good Generals who always keep open a line of retreat, I usually begin by reconnoitring the quickest route below just in case, but if you take your "Kwells" before you start you'll probably be all right. Listen to the announcements which are made over the ship's broadcast, in English, and in French comfortingly slow: You will be told to have your passport stamped on board, will be given a landing ticket, and will be told which platform your train will be at on reaching Calais. You will be given a form to fill up stating how many francs of various currencies you are carrying.

Incidentally, it is as well to count your hoard before you start rather than attempt to do so in a high wind in mid-Channel (I once saw a ticket blow overboard). Encumbered by luggage, embarkation and landing tickets, you stagger ashore and make your way through the Customs Shed, getting many knocks in the knees from other people's luggage in the process. A porter (talking real French this time and much faster) wants to carry your stuff. I declined as I had nothing smaller than a 1000 franc note, but with a cherry "ça ne fait rien" he grabbed my case and found me my place in a clean 3rd class compartment smelling strongly of new rexine leather.

Dinner was served soon after we left Calais, and it is to meet such expenses that you are as well to have some French money.

I had the company of two Austrian girls to begin with, a young very talkative Frenchman joined us for a couple of hours, and gave place to two soldiers going on leave. Eventually we had the carriage to ourselves and stretched out quite comfortably. Outside a low rolling mist enveloped the fields; the full moon gave the scene an eerie unreal look, cattle loomed dimly from what looked like drifts of snow: it was pretty cold.

It was glorious sunshine when we passed through the Customs at Basle and entered sunny Switzerland at last.

It is very easy to find one's way about at Swiss stations: the timetables are printed large enough to be



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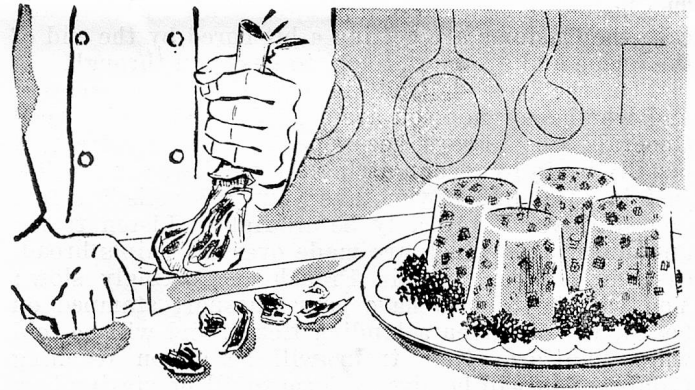
read at a height that neither involves standing on toptoe, nor knees bend; the platforms are clearly numbered and a clock indicator shows departure time. By the way there is a fixed scale of charges for porters, varying according to the number of packages you have, whether it is day or night, and how long you detain your porter — the initial charge is 80 centimes: once again, be warned and travel light. The hardy Commercial avoids this expense by hooking his baggage on to a kind of shooting-stick-cum-scooter which folds up when not in use; as there are level crossings to reach the platforms instead of bridges he wheels his luggage along quite easily.

Swiss trains, being electric, are very clean. The first and second class carriages are luxuriously fitted out, but are, I think, rather over upholstered for hot weather. The thirds, which are used by almost all who are not having their fares paid for them, have streamlined wooden seats which are surprisingly comfortable. The carriages are of the Pullman type with bulkhead luggage racks. Spacious windows, easily opened, afford an excellent view and plenty of air, and although you are warned in three languages not to *pencher* yourself *au dehors*, it can be done very pleasantly, and no smuts in your eye either. The toilet arrangements would not shame a hospital: even in rural districts cans of water were taken aboard and liquid soap and paper towels were provided. The sounds of a Swiss station are quite different from ours. You have a sporting chance of hearing the broadcast information, as no terrific hiss of steam coincides with the announcement that the train now standing at platform 11, etc., and our famous two hoots are replaced by a high pitched whistle that might have come out of a cracker, the guard waves a kind of wooden bat instead of a flag and the train slips silently away.

The hotels I stayed at had this in common — all were scrupulously clean, food was good, and service was courteous and willing. It's rather nice to have one's meal placed in front of one with a smiling "guten appetit." Hotels can be found that give a night's accommodation for 5 francs — commercial and temperance ones mostly (it occurs to me that it must be very uphill work in Switzerland trying to get converts to the Temperance League). The Swiss themselves have a kind of holiday hotel scheme where charges are accepted as paid in advance by yielding up cards with holiday savings stamps affixed: they also have Volks-haus Hotels where charges are kept within the means

of modest incomes. In estimating your expenses, do not forget that a bath is an extra and will cost you F2.50 (about 4/-) and to all bills will be added a 10% charge for service and sometimes a Tourist Tax as well.

Food is expensive no matter how you buy it; breakfast of rolls and coffee cost from F1.60 to F2, table d'hôte lunches at an average restaurant will run at F3.50, F4.50, F5.50 or more, and usually do not include the cost of the sweet or coffee. A bottle of light ale will cost F.1 — to all of these you must add 10% for service. If you have a repast at the top of a mountain it will, quite reasonably, cost you more. Your evening meal will half ruin you if you let yourself go; F.5 a portion is nothing out of the common, have a glass of wine, and a liqueur with your coffee and you'll easily knock holes in your currency with F.1 equal to 1/8d. One thing, however, helpings will be lavish and quality first class — "garniert" really means something. As I said earlier, you must decide whether it is to be an eating holiday or a going places holiday: if you like to fritter away your francs on ices, cakes and drinks, why not, it's your holiday and you are entitled to enjoy it your own way. But if that is your choice, and an easy mind is to accompany a full stomach, go somewhere on pension terms, otherwise you won't last out financially, and here I would like to refute the suggestion that the Swiss have two prices, one for the resident and one for the tourist. The margin of commission



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retained by the tourist agencies seems quite moderate when you compare the cost of free lance travel: you won't do it cheaper on your own, though you may see more places, gain more experience and have fun.

Our solution of the food problem was to lunch off beer, rolls, sausages that were sausages, or cheese and fruit which we bought wherever we happened to be. This introduced us to cervolas, salami, St. Galler Schublig, Landjager, and bundnerfleisch (a salted smoked dried beef which is excellent and keeps indefinitely). Butter is expensive, F.4.70 per  $\frac{1}{2}$ Kg. (approx. 5/4d. per lb.), and is messy to carry so we substituted soft cheeses such as Tilsiter, Tomme, Bel Suisse or Brie: Limburger, humorously nicknamed "fromage facteur" for a reason that can be guessed, is rather too "high" to carry well; it is a cheese that wants to be alone. "Abendessen" was usually taken in a restaurant of the Taverne type where the speciality of the locality could be sampled — e.g., Fondue, made of cheese boiled with white wine, into which one dips pieces of bread on the end of a long pronged fork, the penalty for dropping a piece being to pay for the wine.

For a "going places" holiday you can get your holiday runabout ticket made out pretty much to your own specification. If possible, save your currency by getting it through a Travel Agency before leaving Great Britain. Attached to this ticket will be vouchers allowing you to go five excursions at half price. A holiday ticket costing F.40 from Thalwil on the Lake of Zurich, permitted us to break our journey as often as we wished on a circular tour, Zurich, Lucerne, Thun, Spietz, Kandersteg, Lötschberg, Brigue, Sion, Montreux, Lausanne, Fribourg, Berne, Langenthal, Zurich.

How did we get around? We walked, climbed, cycled, sailed, rowed and went by tram, train and bus.

What did we see? So much, it is difficult to know what to mention specially. Cycling round the Lake of Zurich was fun, and rowing in the evening; the chair lift from Beatenberg up the Niederhorn was a new experience to be remembered. In Thun, wandering up the Hauptgasse, that street that looks more

musical comedy than any musical comedy, was a never failing entertainment. The journey through the nine miles of the Lötschberg, climbing up to 4,000 feet by a zigzagging mountain railway, glimpsing the incredible blue of the Blausee — the quaint old buildings in the town of Brigue — watching Jersey bulls arriving for the cattle market — picnicking on the Castle heights at Sion — rambling about the Castle of Chillon — the miles of Poplars in the Valais — vineyards with the young vines staked in geometric rows — coloured beehives, — flowering trees, magnolias, lilac, chestnut, apple and pear blossom whitening the landscape — mountains with snowy peaks — green valleys — busy towns with alarmingly fast traffic — the white habit of the monks at Fribourg, the riot of colour and mounds of foodstuffs in Berne market — arcades and fountains — the brilliancy of stained glass in churches — reflection of lights on the lake at night — missing the last boat in pouring rain — the glare and heat of the sun on Lake Lemau — Swiss hospitality, so warm and generous — clocks and embroidery — polished floors, smiling maids — these all make up a kaleidoscope of happy memories, and experiences which will not soon be forgotten.

Yes, go to Switzerland, you'll enjoy it, and it will be worth going broke for.

#### NOUVELLE SOCIETE HELVETIQUE.

Lecture by Dr. A. Laett.

A large gathering of members and friends, amongst them the Swiss Minister and Madame de Torrenté, attended the lecture of our old friend, Dr. A. Laett (Zurich), who, at the Vienna Café, Berkeley Arcade, Baker Street, N.W.1, spoke on the subject: "Some chapters from the history of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain."

With rapt attention the audience followed the speaker, who gave a very interesting and extensive compte rendu of the rôle which some of our compatriots played in this country and the British Empire during the last few centuries.

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The recently published Report gives an outline of last year's activities and on application the Secretary would be pleased to send a copy to anyone interested in the Society's affairs.

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