



BIKE SWITZERLAND

Why Bike in Switzerland ?

Few foreigners come to Switzerland to bike, preferring the well-worn roads of France and Italy. As a result, there is still plenty of room on the paths of Europe's most bike-friendly country.

In some countries "national bike paths" exist more on paper than in reality; not so in Switzerland. Switzerland is crisscrossed by 9 national cycling routes totaling over 1600 miles. The Swiss have invested millions of francs into these routes and the government funds a full-time staff to promote their use and do regular maintenance. These paths are painstakingly signposted at every turn and specially built shelters, fountains and maps can be found along them. The routes normally follow well-maintained tertiary roads that are off limit to regular traffic. Any roads with extra traffic will always have a wide bike lane making for safe cycling. Although these paths stick to the countryside, cyclists will have no problems finding small "bike hotels", supermarkets and bike shops catering to "vélotourists". You can find out more about these routes at www.cycling-in-switzerland.ch

Making things even easier is the Swiss train system. This network is the densest and most efficient in the world and you'll find train stations with hourly departures at roughly 15 mile intervals along each route. Feeling tired ? Want to shave off 15 miles from your day ? For around \$10 you and your bike can travel together. Consider buying the "Swisspass" and purchase ½ train tickets in Switzerland for one month.

Switzerland's reputation as "too expensive" is unmerited: tax in restaurants is 7.6% and hotel tax is 3.6% (compare that to France's 19.6%). True, a hotel in Zurich or Geneva will be expensive, but once in the countryside your francs can carry you far: there are more than 450 bed and breakfasts and 63 youth hostels. Switzerland also has a large "rural tourism" system which allows visitors to stay in the haylofts of working farms throughout the country- a great opportunity to get closer to the culture (www.strohtour.ch).

Make things even easier for yourself by leaving your bike at home. Most train stations rent satisfactory bicycles and a number of cities even loan out free bikes for the day. High quality bikes with panniers and accessories can also be rented in Geneva at www.bikeswitzerland.com

Of course, if you come to Switzerland it's for the scenery: lakes, peaks, rivers, meadows, waterfalls. You'll never be disappointed, regardless your route. And you'll enjoy all of it without constantly looking over your shoulder: unlike its Latin neighbors, the Swiss tradition of peace and tolerance means giving cyclists plenty of room and never honking. The only thing more respected than cyclists, is a pedestrian and you'll experience this change of attitude within your first hour on the road. I hope you'll take the opportunity.

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www.bikeswitzerland.com