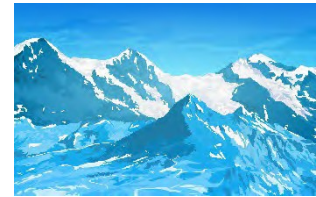


Switzerland History

Switzerland is a country situated in the confluence of Western, Central, and Southern Europe. It is a federal republic composed of 26 cantons, with federal authorities seated in Bern. Switzerland is a landlocked country bordered by Italy to the south, France to the west, Germany to the north, and Austria and Liechtenstein to the east. It is geographically divided among the Swiss Plateau, the Alps, and the Jura, spanning a total area of 15,940 square miles. While the Alps occupy the greater part of the territory, the Swiss population of approximately 8.5 million is concentrated mostly on the plateau, where the largest cities are located, among them the two global cities and economic centers of Zürich and Geneva.



The establishment of the Old Swiss Confederacy dates to the late medieval period, resulting from a series of military successes against Austria and Burgundy. Swiss independence from the Holy Roman Empire was formally recognized in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The Federal Charter of 1291 is considered the founding document of Switzerland which is celebrated on Swiss National Day.

Since the Reformation of the 16th century, Switzerland has maintained a strong policy of armed neutrality; it has not fought an international war since 1815 and did not join the United Nations until 2002. Nevertheless, it pursues an active foreign policy and is frequently involved in peace-building processes around the world. Switzerland is the birthplace of the Red Cross, one of the world's oldest and best-known humanitarian organizations, and is home to numerous international organizations.



Switzerland occupies the crossroads of Germanic and Romance Europe, as reflected in its four main linguistic and cultural regions: German, French, Italian and Romansh. Although most of the population are German-speaking, Swiss national identity is rooted in a common historical background, shared values such as federalism and direct democracy, and Alpine symbolism. Due to its linguistic diversity, Switzerland is known by a variety of native names: Schweiz (German);

Suisse (French); Svizzera (Italian); and Svizra (Romansh). On coins and stamps, the Latin name, Confoederatio Helvetica – frequently shortened to "Helvetia" – is used instead of the four national languages.



The sovereign state is one of the most developed countries in the world, with the highest nominal wealth per adult and the eighth-highest per capita gross domestic product. It ranks at or near the top in several international metrics, including economic competitiveness and human development. Zürich, Geneva and Basel have been ranked among the top ten cities in the world in terms of quality of life, with Zürich ranked second globally.

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