

LIFE & SOUL

With its squeaky-clean reputation, Switzerland's largest city – lauded as one of the world's best places to live – is also a refreshing destination for a quick break.

▲ Zurich's old-world charm meets 21st-century cool.

STORY BY
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It's a fact: Zurich is an enviable place to live. Flick through major international liveability surveys – compiled by the likes of global consulting firm Mercer and luxury lifestyle magazine Monocle – and you will find Switzerland's largest city consistently nestled near the top of the rankings. Yet despite local fortunes, Zurich's tourist credentials are often overlooked; the city is frequently caricatured as squeaky-clean and somewhat clinical, populated with pin-striped bankers and grey-faced financiers.

However, the reality – as is often the case – is rather different: the Swiss city is one of Europe's most enticing destinations. Here's why Zurich scores highly not just for liveability, but also visitability.

NATURE MEETS HISTORY

Sunlight tiptoes across the water as sail boats and row boats drift idly by sunbathers on the shore. This is Lake Zurich (zuerich.com/en/lake-zuerich.html), a vast expanse of freshwater spreading out from the city's centre. This impressive lake is lined with blooming parkland, leafy promenades and fine-dining options. When combined with the surrounding white-tipped mountains and the Sihl Forest – with animals from bears to beavers – it's apparent that nature takes centre stage in Zurich. ➔



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B Stained glass window at the Fraumunster.

C The warmth of sharing a cheese fondue.

D Taking in Zurich's riverside beauty.

E Patrons at a riverside cafe watch swimmers cool off in the Limmat River on a sunny day.

Sightseers can also explore the Fraumunster (*Stadthausquai 19, Tel: 41 44 211 4100*), a millennium-old Gothic church with stained glass windows by renowned artist Marc Chagall. Then there's Niederdorf – a charming enclave in the mediaeval district known as Old Town – with narrow alleyways lined with restaurants and shops.

SWISS FLAVOUR

Swiss cuisine may not enjoy the same international prominence of those from neighbouring France and Italy, but the locals know their food. From healthy breakfasts like bircher muesli to hearty dinners such as fondue, Switzerland – and particularly Zurich – serves up a

host of delicious local dishes.

Follow your nose to the nearest streetside grill. Sample a crunchy rosti (grated potato pancake) or juicy bratwurst (spicy sausage) – the best are from Sternen Grill (*Sechselautenplatz, Tel: 41 44 251 4949*) – as you stroll along the city's riverside boulevards. Or try the delicious geschnetzeltes or veal in creamy mushroom and wine sauce, a staple on the menu of every self-respecting Zurich restaurant.

Alternatively, treat yourself to a unique culinary concoction at one of the city's Michelin-star diners. Relish in divine dishes such as veal tortellini drizzled in black truffle jus at Rico's Kunststuben (*Seestrasse 160, Tel: 41 44* ➔)



F The neo-Baroque Zurich Opera House is the city's most famous cultural venue.



G The iconic trams are a part of Zurich's efficient system of public transportation.

H Cabaret Voltaire, where art movement Dadaism was born.

I Festive lights give Bahnhofstrasse an almost magical feel.



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WHEN IT COMES TO EVENING ENTERTAINMENT, ZURICH REALLY COMES INTO ITS OWN.

910 0715). Or savour the sumptuous caviar and sea urchin at The Dolder Grand restaurant (thedoldergrand.com). Finish your meal with a fine Swiss pinot noir or chasselas at the 200-year-old weinstube or wine room Oepfelchammer (Rindermarkt 12, Tel: 41 44 251 2336).

A CITY FOR ALL SEASONS

During the yuletide season, trails of light bulbs sparkle above the city's Bahnhofstrasse (bahnhofstrasse-zuerich.ch) like diamonds raining from the sky. It's a fitting scene, as this street is the jewellery and haute couture centre of Zurich, and one of the most exclusive (and expensive) shopping avenues in the world. It's the place to buy a wallet-busting Swiss watch – a Breitling or Patek

Philippe. It's also lined with designer fashion boutiques like Chanel, Prada and Hermes. For more affordable shopping, there is Manor department store (manor.ch), which stocks international brands like Mango and Desigual, and Swiss labels like Mammut; and the Zurich Flea Market (flohmarktbuerkliplatz.ch) which runs annually from May to October.

Seasonal events include the annual August's Street Parade (streetparade.ch), one of Europe's largest street parties, famed for its pulsating techno music. In winter, ice-skating rinks and Christmas markets add to the city's charm.

When it comes to evening entertainment, Zurich really comes into its own. The shining light of the city's after-dark culture is the Zurich Opera

House (opernhaus.ch/en), a neo-Baroque theatre that was built in 1891. You can also see the occasional ballet and classical concert here. Other revered city venues include the highly-regarded theatre Schauspielhaus (Ramistrasse 34, Tel: 41 44 265 5858), avant-garde movie house Cinema Arthouse Le Paris (arthouse.ch), and Theater 11 (Thurgauerstrasse 7) with its wide selection of musicals, comedy and dance productions. A varied programme of events and exhibitions can also be found at the iconic cafe, Cabaret Voltaire (Spiegelgasse 1, Tel: 41 43 268 5720), the birthplace of 20th century art movement Dadaism. Hipsters should make a beeline for the city's youth theatre Rote Fabrik (rotefabrik.ch), which hosts a dazzling array of artsy events throughout the year.

Zurich has an abundance of bars and nightclubs. Meet locals with a beer (or two) at Bierhalle Wolf (Limmatquai 132, Tel: 41 44 251 0130), a beer hall with live Alpine-style folk music performances. Then dance the night away in the too-cool-for-school Helsinki Klub (Geroldstrasse 35).

NEAR ESCAPES

Besides offering a host of tourist draws in its own right, Zurich is also known for its proximity to other appealing attractions. Superb day trips within an hour's drive of Zurich include the stunning alpine gateway of Lucerne (luzern.ch). An area of majestic beauty, Lucerne offers a tranquil escape from city life, where stunning peaks plunge into shining lakes, and paragliders silently soar like birds ➔

SWISS STANDOUTS

Contemporary artist and long-time resident **PAMELA GOTANGCO-HUPP** shares her personal favourites in Zurich.

FOOD

Kronenhalle restaurant (kronenhalle.com) has long been a meeting point for actors, painters, and writers like James Joyce. Today with the works of artists including Miro and Picasso hanging on their walls, this spirit lives on. They serve popular dishes like herring with cream, and veal sausage with rosti.

GALLERIES

Kunsthau Museum (kunsthau.ch/en) is the best gallery in Zurich, home to important works by Giacometti, Monet, and contemporary Swiss artists like Peter Fischli. Migros Museum (migrosmuseum.ch/en; below) is known for its large-scale installations.



WINTER WONDER

During winter, the courtyard of Landesmuseum (nationalmuseum.ch), transforms into an outdoor ice skating rink. Bars, lounges and fireplaces are set up around the rink. Enjoy gluhwein (a warm spiced red wine); and Swiss raclette and fondue, must-try winter dishes.



PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES / CORBIS

Fast Facts

CURRENCY
Swiss Francs
US\$1 = 0.94 CHF

VISA
Requirements vary.
Visit www.bfm.admin.ch for details.

BEST TIME TO VISIT
Winter is the ideal time to visit the Christmas markets, enjoy the city's many wellness spas, and hit the surrounding ski slopes.

HOW TO GET THERE
Singapore Airlines flies daily from Singapore to Zurich.

MORE INFORMATION
zuerich.com

J Take a train to farther-flung Swiss alpine attractions.

K The resort town of Engelberg has a laid-back vibe.



overhead. Come during winter and you can snowboard down the surrounding mountains and ice-skate in the surrounding lakes; or visit during summer to hike the same mountains and swim in the same lakes.

World-renowned ski resorts are within easy reach of Zurich, which means you can enjoy all the benefits of a ski break while basing yourself in the city. The nearest major ski resort Flumserberg (flumserberg.ch) – about an hour's drive from Zurich – is ever-popular with Zurichers, even if it is not the highest or toughest of the country's peaks. To experience the heights of Swiss skiing, venture for a day out to the pristine slopes of Engelberg (engelberg.ch) and Andermatt (anderlatt.ch).

FUN WITHOUT FUSS

A destination's "how factor" is just as important as its "wow factor". And Zurich is a master of practicality. The city's main transport system, comprising trams, buses and boats, is clean, efficient and safe. Visitors can easily scale the surrounding hills by funicular, and swiftly reach farther-flung Swiss attractions by train.

As for accommodation, there is everything from "cheap chic" options like Langstars Backpacker-Hostel (langstars.com), all the way up to five-star luxury hotels like The Dolder Grand (thedoldergrand.com).

Visitors can approach the staff at the tourist office and at the railway station for maps and information. Or ask a local for directions or recommendations. After all, this is a cosmopolitan city in which most residents speak English (usually also French and Italian), and it's an overwhelmingly friendly one too.

It's this practicality that allows you to make the most of a short stay in Zurich – and squeeze in as many of the city's unique attractions as possible. So even after a weekend break in Switzerland's largest metropolis, you'll be left with no doubt – Zurich is one of the most visitable cities in the world. ■