

# SWITZERLAND

## ATTRACTS RELIGIOUS TRAVEL GROUPS

*St. Gallen, a town of ecclesiastical treasures and Old World charm, observes a special anniversary*

By Don Heimburger



**F**aith travel groups have a particularly enticing reason to venture to Switzerland in 2012.

That's because one of the country's most important faith destinations is celebrating 1,400 years of religious tradition. St. Gallen's Jubilee this year looks back on more than a millennium of religious heritage and will feature an array of festivities to mark the occasion.

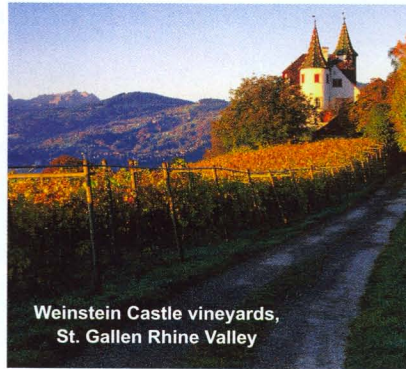
### ST. GALLEN ON DISPLAY IN 2012

St. Gallen, population 70,000, is close to Lake Constance and nearby Mt. Säntis and is a gateway to the towering Appenzell Alps. It is the capital city of the canton of the same name. An economic center and railway hub for Eastern Switzerland, St. Gallen is internationally renowned for its textile industry, which dates to the 15th century.

The town's most famous landmark is its Baroque cathedral and the Abbey Library, which houses thousands of precious historical documents, some handwritten and some more than 1,000 years old. The library, open for tours, is one of the most important monastic libraries in the world and has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its col-

lection of books reveals the development of European culture and documents the Abbey of St. Gall from the 8th century to the monastery's dissolution in 1805.

During its first few centuries, the abbey grew rapidly, becoming a flourishing spiritual and cultural center, famous for its writings and the illumination of manuscripts. A number of the abbey's



Weinstein Castle vineyards,  
St. Gallen Rhine Valley

creative monks made important contributions to the cultural history of Europe.

Between 1758 and 1767, abbots Cölestin Gugger von Staudach and Beda Angehrn commissioned building of the library's magnificent Baroque hall, which was decorated and furnished by master craftsmen from the Lake Constance region. The hall is considered to be one of the finest of its kind.

The Abbey Library contains 150,000 volumes, but its true treasure lies in the manuscript collection. Roughly 2,000 manuscripts are archived, and some 400 are more than 1,000 years old. Particularly significant are the Irish-Celtic manuscripts. Although many of them were lost, the collection is one of the most important in the world. Also invaluable is the Latin-German dictionary that originated in 790; it is the oldest German book known to exist.

History shows that around 612 AD an Irish monk from Belfast named Gallus built a hermitage and a house of prayer in the Steinbach Valley here. It is said that Saint Gallus, upon first walking through the area toward Rome with other monks, became ill and was left on the shores of nearby Lake Constance to recuperate. When Gallus was better, he came to a clearing near the Steinbach River, and approached by a hungry bear, offered the bear some food. In return, the bear brought Gallus wood for a fire, and Gallus took that as a sign he should build a church, which was the Monastery of St. Gallus. Today, many icons of the monk and the bear can be located in town.

View towards Mt. Kronberg  
and Mt. Saentis, Canton Appenzell

*Switzerland Tourism Photos*



A Baroque jewel: The magnificent hall of St. Gallen's Abbey Library

Gallus' Irish ancestry forms an important part of this tradition, which has been handed down through generations, says St. Gallen Tourism Director Boris Tschirky. "The 2012 Gallus Anniversary will draw on this. The bond with Ireland has always been an important part of the remembrance of Gallus; within the framework of the anniversary, this bond is both maintained and deepened."

#### JUBILEE EVENTS

Between April and October, the

region of St. Gallen will celebrate with tours, theater performances, a variety of outings, art exhibitions and culinary specialties in city-center restaurants.

"The 2012 Gallus Anniversary is intended to astonish, delight and touch people, to encourage them to reflect and to inspire them," St. Gallen Mayor Thomas Scheitlin says.

The main focus of Jubilee 2012 will be in the Abbey District, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the surrounding Old Town. A newly-created Visitors

Center will make the Abbey District more welcoming, and new signage will make it easier to navigate.

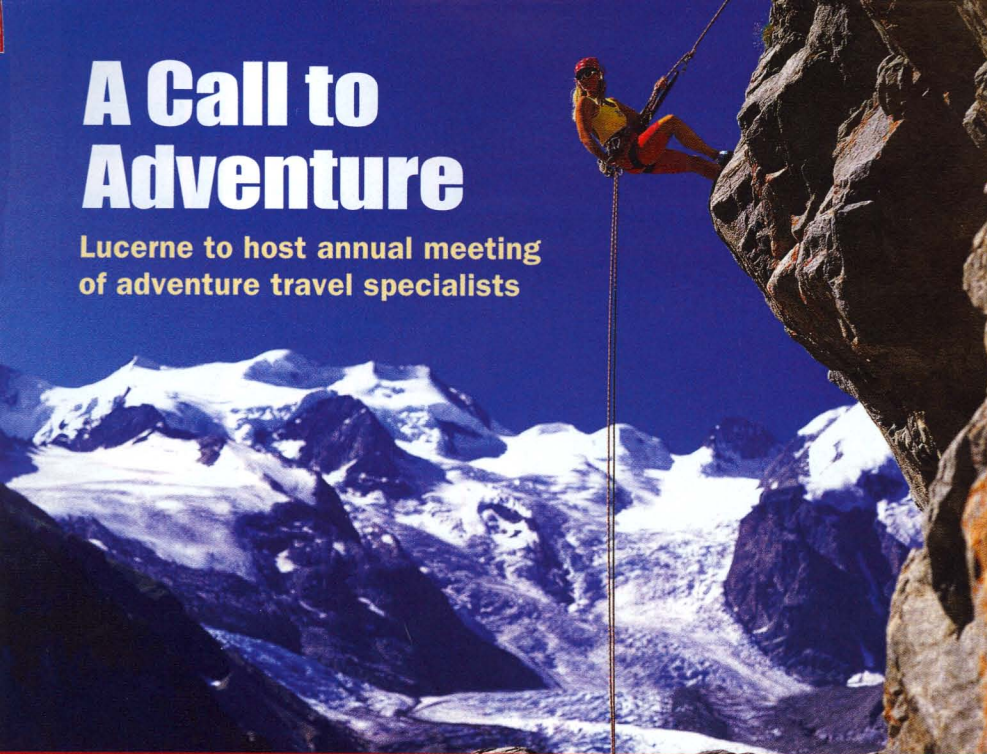
An opening-day ceremony in the Cathedral and inauguration of the Visitors Center, opening of residents' homes in the Abbey District for small events, a culinary market, street artists and musicians in more than 22 locations, and a festival in the Old Town will be part of the anniversary celebration. The Abbey Library will display manuscripts and prints that document life in the area.



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# A Call to Adventure

Lucerne to host annual meeting of adventure travel specialists



If your group is like a lot of adventure travelers, cutting-edge sports and stimulating outdoor activities are the name of the game.

Switzerland has been at the forefront of exciting travel quests for decades. With glaciers, lush forests and nature parks, extensive hiking paths and mountain huts, resplendent lakes and rushing streams, this eye-popping country rates high on the adventure charts.

In addition to the many adventure activities, the Swiss Alps' jagged peaks, gushing waterfalls and postcard-worthy alpine villages are a visual delight.

The diversity of climates, moreover, gives outdoor lovers a wealth of choices. In one day you can go from snow-capped summits to lakes lined with palm trees in the Italian-speaking Ticino region, known for its Mediterranean lifestyle.

The list of activities for the serious adventurer is long. You can go parasailing on the many exquisite lakes, or mountain climbing or hiking in the regions of Lucerne, Zermatt or the Bernese Oberland, all spectacularly beautiful areas. You can go boating, hang gliding, kayaking or sailing in the central part of the country, or snowboarding, skiing, swimming or bicycling in the Jura Mountains. These mountains are dotted with caves—some of the largest in Switzerland—and covered with forests and unique geological formations. The area also has the longest hiking season of any of the country's mountain regions, so it's great for a spring or fall trip.

Numerous groups come to Switzerland each year to inhale the fresh air, test their endurance and soak in the sights. You can go from level plateaus to mid-range

mountains to on-top-of-the-world views in a short period of time. An interconnected, well-planned transportation system, from trains and cable cars to chairlifts and funiculars, can easily handle groups who want to get to their jumping-off point quickly and easily. Conveniently, major cities are in close proximity to mountain resorts.

At the end of an active day you'll find some of the best cheese (like Vacherin Mont d'O), chocolates and hospitality awaiting you at the many hotels, bed and breakfasts, and pensions. To carb-up for the next day's adventure, Swiss fondue, raclette and rosti dishes await the hungry adventurer, along with a good glass of wine or beer. And the Swiss are known also for their excellent spa facilities that treat the weary traveler after a long, hard day.

It's no wonder then that the Adventure Travel Trade Association has scheduled its ninth annual Adventure Travel World Summit for Oct. 8-11 at the Culture and Congress Center in Lucerne. As many as 600 adventure tourism professionals from more than 50 nations will gather in this supreme adventure travel destination.

As Mark Twain once said, "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."

Switzerland is ready for the adventurer in all of us. From rails to sails to trails, from hikes to bikes, from skiing to snowshoeing, this small country is the essence of big adventure.

## ZURICH AND LUCERNE

For many groups, Zurich's airport will be the gateway to Switzerland. Christianity in Zurich, home of the Swiss Reformation, began in the 4th century. Zurich made a significant mark in Christian history in the 16th century when the city council voted to become a Protestant city. Catching a train or other convenient transportation from Zurich to other historical faith sites is easy.

Lucerne, one hour by train from Zurich, traces its roots to the St. Leodegar monastery, a small 8th century Benedictine cloister on the Reuss River. For centuries people and goods have passed this way to and from the Gotthard Pass, and pilgrims have followed St. Jacob's Way to Santiago through Lucerne. The stretch between Schwarzenburg and Fribourg includes the 600-year-old Frybourgstrass, a path that leads through forests and over streams, past castle ruins, chapels and shrines.

Lucerne is the springboard for trips to numerous lakeside communities and attractions, all accessible via Lake Lucerne Navigation Company's 20 boats. Since 1837 these boats have been a vital link in the area's transportation system, carrying passengers in style and offering delicious meals and snacks on board. The boats are available for group charters.

Lucerne-area attractions accessible by lake boats, trains or buses include:

- 6,995-foot-high Mt. Pilatus, home of the world's steepest cogwheel railway, where you can get a 360-degree view of Switzerland. A day excursion to the "Dragon Mountain" can include a spectacular ride down by aerial cableway and panorama gondola.

- Mt. Rigi, "Queen of the Mountains," offers breathtaking views of the Swiss Alps, 13 lakes and views as far away as Germany and France. The railway to the top features old-fashioned



Lucerne's trademark covered bridge on Lake Lucerne

steam trains, which can be chartered. Numerous hiking paths thread the mountainside.

### SO MANY OPTIONS

Switzerland offers many other faith travel options, such as a monastery or abbey stay; the convent of St. Muestair offers an overnight in a mountain hut. The Abbey of Einsiedeln, an hour east of Lucerne, is the home of the Black Madonna and has attracted the devout for 1,000 years.

In the Jura region west of Lucerne is the Anabaptist Trail where Anabaptists fled in the 17th century. Here you can visit secret meeting places with early

inscriptions, an Anabaptists Bridge and even the Anabaptists Archives with unpublished documents.

The Museum of the Reformation is a must-see in Geneva. The building once served as an apartment complex for Huguenot refugees; it in turn is built on the ruins of St. Peter's cloister. Some of the oldest French language Bibles in the world, plus Calvin's biblical commentaries, are found here, as are caricatures and pamphlets used to argue Protestant or Catholic perspectives.

Switzerland provides numerous religious travel possibilities, and the main question will be: When does your group want to go?

For information on the 2012 Gallus Anniversary and heritage tourism in Switzerland, visit [gallusjubilaem.ch](http://gallusjubilaem.ch) or [myswitzerland.com/heritage](http://myswitzerland.com/heritage).

### GETTING AROUND SWITZERLAND

Faith-based travel planners have a number of good reasons to bring their groups to St. Gallen and other historic Swiss religious sites:

Zurich's location in the heart of Europe makes it a convenient entry point (70 airlines fly into the airport). The Zurich airport has been named on numerous occasions as "Europe's Leading Airport." Zurich offers easy access to a number of Swiss attractions and other countries.

The Swiss travel system is one of the most advanced in the world, from swift cross-country trains, to buses that connect major cities with rural areas, to lake boats, aerial cableways and mountain railways that further make travel so convenient in this country of eight million people. Surprisingly, 97% of the Swiss people live within two miles walking distance of public transportation. A Swiss Pass entitles groups to unlimited travel on numerous modes of transport and offers free entrance to 450 museums (including the Abbey Library in St. Gallen).

The Swiss, while having four official languages (German, French, Italian and Romansch), for the most part also speak English. **LGT**



The world's steepest cogwheel railway climbs to the top of Mt. Pilatus.