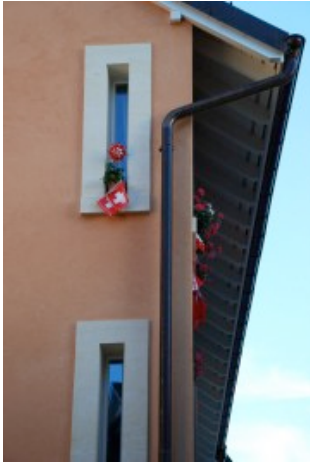


Society ::

First of August: Swiss National Day celebrates 15th birthday



Subtle with the Swiss flags



Expect fireworks

Geneva, Switzerland (GenevaLunch) - Switzerland celebrates its National Day 1 August, a time when families tend to get together and the Swiss return to their "home" towns, which is not necessarily where they grew up, but the town where their family is registered.

Watch those fireworks

Expect bonfires and fireworks: some 1,700 tons of pyrotechnics are sold every year. Keep in mind the federal government's recommendations to avoid these if you have cardiovascular or respiratory system problems because they sharply increase, for a short period, the fine dust particles in the air. And if you're setting off fireworks, remember that they provoke serious stress for animals, Bern says, so don't do it near them.

The annual August holiday provokes on average 250 accidents related to fireworks, and fires cause some CHF4 million in damage. Safety tips, Swiss Bureau for the Prevention of Accidents (Fre)

The bonfires are part of an old Swiss tradition, particularly in the Alps, where one village could warn another of impending attacks by lighting a bonfire, easily visible at a great distance.

Homeward bound, cheaply

The CFF rail company is offering a special "Homecoming days" deal to all Swiss to take the train for CHF15, 1 and 2 August, when they return to their place of origin, as it's known. The deal is good between your home town and your place of residence, as they appear on a Swiss identity card or passport.

The meaning of 1 August, Switzerland's National Day

Go back to 1291 for the source of this holiday that recalls *a day* in early August, over 700 years ago, when three independent republics signed a pact to protect each other. (**Ed. note:** if you're feeling weak on knowledge of Swiss politics, geography, culture and history, a new board game in English will be launched 1 August, Helvetiq, offering 312 question/answer cards to make you an expert. See our

GenevaLunch review of the game)

The Letter of Alliance was signed by Uri, Schwyz and Unterwald (today: cantons Nidwalden and Obwalden) on an unspecified day in early August 1291.

That initial agreement paved the road for 26 additional cantons, or federal states, to join what became the Swiss Confederation in 1848. Forty-three years after the creation of the Confederation the Swiss celebrated for the first time, in Bern in 1891, the signing of the agreement.

It took another 100 years, and a public referendum, before it became a recognized federal holiday in 1994.



Swiss supermarkets prepare their best for the Swiss National Day: here, pastry crosses on oven-ready Swiss chickens

The Swiss celebrate their National Day locally, usually with parades of children carrying red paper lanterns and bonfires, music, speeches, and sometimes fireworks. Large and small family gatherings keep the beaches and parks busy. The Swiss embassy in Berlin has ordered several hundred cervelas sausages, which some consider a national dish, for their 1 August barbecue. And while the white cross on a Swiss background is rarely flown by individuals in this highly decentralized nation, the Swiss government takes the flag very seriously, especially in renewed efforts to protect the "made in Switzerland" label.

Celebrations are mostly organized and celebrated at a local level without major national events, the president of the Confederation or one of the members of the Federal Council generally participate in a celebration at the Ruetli meadow, called Gruetli in French and German, which is considered the birthplace of the Swiss Confederation.

The most complete listing of celebrations across Switzerland can be found at the official website of the Swiss National Tourist Office. Many events are posted in English but you'll find more results if you search in French or German.



Swiss Alps, canton Vaud, from St Saphorin on Lake Geneva

If you're determined to learn more about the country, as part of your holiday celebrations, the federal web site ch.ch has a wealth of additional information and links to Swiss resources.

Enjoy the holiday!

Posted by :: **Laila Rodriguez** on 29 July 2009 at 17:56 | [permalink](#)

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