

Squiz the World goes to... Switzerland

Each fortnight, we give the world globe a spin, and see where we land. Then we take the kids of Australia on an audio excursion to visit that country and its people.

I'm Christie Kijurina, and today on Squiz the World we're visiting a country where the most famous mountain looks just like a giant Toblerone triangle, it has four national languages, and it's home to the Red Cross, the World Health Organisation... and lots and lots of cows wearing bells.

Can you guess? Strap yourselves in to the Squiz Kids Super Fast Supersonic Jetliner as we take off and take a squiz at Switzerland.

JUST THE FACTS

Switzerland is a small, landlocked country in the middle of Europe, surrounded by France, Germany, Italy, Austria and the tiny country of Liechtenstein.

Its capital city is Bern... not Zurich, even though lots of tourists get that wrong! Around 9 million people live in Switzerland and the landscape is spectacular. The mountain range called the Alps covers about 60 percent of the whole country. There are around 4,000 mountains, including the famous Matterhorn and the Eiger, and more than 7,000 lakes, including Lake Geneva and Lake Lucerne, which are so clean you can drink from fountains fed by them.

Switzerland has a very unusual government. Instead of one president running everything, the country is led by a team of seven people, called the Federal Council, who make decisions together. Each year, one of them gets to be president — but only for twelve months. It's a bit like taking turns being team captain.

"Switzerland is also divided into 26 regions called cantons. Think of them like states or territories, but with even more independence. Each canton has its own parliament, laws, education system, traditions and sometimes its own official language!

Some cantons speak Swiss German, some speak French, some Italian, and one even has Romansh as an official language.

It's a little bit like driving from NSW into Queensland... and suddenly the road signs change language!"

Switzerland is also famous for something called neutrality — meaning it hasn't taken sides in wars for more than 500 years. Which is probably wise... because while their Swiss Army knives are brilliant for camping, I'm not sure the teensy-tiny tweezers would scare off many enemies.

Because the country is neutral, lots of international organisations have their headquarters there, including the World Health Organization, the International Olympic Committee, and the Red Cross.

It's not just the landscape and the government that are super interesting... the Swiss people are pretty interesting to so...

LET'S GET CULTURAL

If you've ever had a creamy Swiss chocolate... you've tasted one of the country's proudest inventions. Switzerland is famous for chocolate thanks to two clever men: Daniel Peter, who invented milk chocolate by mixing cocoa with condensed milk, and Henri Nestlé, who helped perfect the recipe. Another chocolatier, Rodolphe Lindt, invented "conching", a smoothing process that makes chocolate melt in your mouth.

Switzerland is also known for some very unique music. There's yodelling, the echoing singing style used in mountain valleys. And there's the alphorn, a long wooden horn, sometimes taller than the person playing it, used to send signals across the Alps.

Sport is a huge part of Swiss life. People grow up skiing and snowboarding, and ice hockey matches are LOUD, because fans often ring cowbells in the crowd. And on the beautiful Rotsee lake in Lucerne, rowing competitions attract athletes from all over the world.

When it comes to celebrations, one of the most colourful is the Cow Festival, also called the Alpine Descent, where cows come down from the mountains as the summer draws to a close, wearing giant flower crowns and beautifully decorated bells.

After all that culture, I think it's time to speak to some locals. Lets...

LEARN THE LINGO

"Switzerland has four national languages:

German, French, Italian, and Romansh.

Which one you hear depends on where you are. Most people speak a version of German called Swiss German, which sounds quite different to the German spoken in Germany. In the west, people speak French. In the south, they speak Italian. And in one mountainous region, a small group of people speak Romansh, a language that comes from Latin"

Today, we're extremely lucky to have a couple of native Swiss kids Louis and Robin, here to teach us a few words in Swiss German...

[INSERT AUDIO]

Merci Louis and Robin... and in case you were wondering the translation of that tongue twister into English means "The Pope ordered bacon cutlery too late in Spiez"

We've learned so much already but I think it's still...

TIME FOR SCHOOL

Swiss kids start school around the same age as Australian kids, but their school days can look a little different.

For starters, most Swiss schools don't have uniforms — kids just wear their regular clothes. And many have a long lunch break, sometimes two hours or more, when students walk home to eat with their families before heading back for the afternoon.

School is free and compulsory, and learning takes place in whichever language the region speaks — Swiss German, French, Italian or Romansh.

Outdoor learning is really popular too. Many children take part in forest kindergartens, where they explore nature, climb trees and learn outside, even in snowy weather.

When students get older, they can choose different pathways: academic high school, vocational school, or an apprenticeship, which is a really popular way to learn a job while still studying.

Now that we've worked hard at school... let's discover some of Switzerland's amazing surprises.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

"Switzerland might be small, but it's responsible for some pretty big inventions.

Have you ever used Velcro? It was invented by a Swiss engineer who noticed how burrs from plants stuck to his dog's fur and thought, "Hmm... this could be useful!" Today it's used in shoes, jackets, astronauts' suits and even in hospitals."

Wayy back in the 1890s The Swiss Army needed a tool that could help soldiers fix equipment, open cans, and stay prepared in the mountains. A clever cutlery maker created the Swiss Army Knife... a small tool packed with scissors, screwdrivers, tweezers, toothpicks, can openers and sometimes even a corkscrew. Handy!

Here's something that you see EVERYWHERE that was designed by the Swiss...Helvetica font. It's simple, clean and easy to read and you'll find it on Apple computers, on Coles and Woolies product labels, on logos like Target, Sony and Cotton On and on signs in airports around the world.

After all those clever ideas... let's taste something delicious. It's...

DINNER TIME

Swiss food is warm, hearty and perfect after a long day in the mountains. Bread is a big part of meals... crusty loaves, braided buns, and pretzel-style rolls. Dairy is everywhere too: fresh milk, yoghurt, butter... and lots of cheese.

Popular dishes in Switzerland include rösti — crispy shredded potato — and raclette, where melted cheese is scraped over potatoes. My tummy is growling now and we haven't even reached the best bit yet...

"Fondue! It's a pot of bubbling melted cheese placed in the middle of the table, and everyone dips pieces of bread into it using long forks. It's often eaten in winter... and there's a fun rule: if you drop your bread into the pot, you might have to do a silly challenge chosen by your friends.

Yum!"

THE S'QUIZ

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening.

Question 1 How many official languages does Switzerland have? Four

Question 2 What is the name of the musical instrument that's a long wooden horn used in the Alps? Alphorn

Question 3 What melted cheese dish do Swiss families enjoy dipping bread into?
Fondue

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for staying curious about the world, and joining me on this incredible trip to Switzerland.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day. Over and out.