



LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

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TOUTING TOURISM

IN THE BIRTHPLACE OF WATCHMAKING

Switzerland is a tiny country, geographically about the size of Vermont and New Hampshire combined with a population of only about 8 million. In the context of the worldwide watch industry, however, Switzerland is a giant.

The bulk of the watchmaking industry in Switzerland is found along the spine of the Jura Mountains, starting near Geneva in the south and stretching to Basel in the north. This area is a maze of peaks, valleys, charming villages and forbidding precipices. It is this part of the world—which used to be more or less closed off from the rest of civilization once winter set in—that is home to hundreds and hundreds of watch companies, suppliers and small ateliers.

In the Jura region, you can't throw a stone without hitting someone involved in the watch industry. I remember I was lost in a small village, looking for a certain watch company, and I stopped to ask the first person I saw on the street. Turns out he worked for the very company I was looking for, and he told me exactly how to get there.

It's a small country, a small industry, but one with a huge global impact. Swiss watches are advertised and sought after around the world. Every country has its own crop of watch magazines, and people everywhere are wearing the latest timepieces from Swiss companies. I recently flew to Hong Kong to attend a watch fair there, and the first images to greet me once I stepped off the plane in the Hong Kong airport were the familiar (watch) faces of Vacheron Constantin, TAG Heuer and Ulysse Nardin.

Now, there is an effort from the Jura Canton to promote the Route de l'Horlogerie (the Watchmaking Route). The government initiative is intended to attract watch lovers to the Jura Mountains by offering exclusive visits to workshops and ateliers as well as more tourist-oriented adventures. "Lots of brands have settled in Geneva or the Vallee de Joux, but they all work with the companies here in Jura, and these companies are less well-known. They deserve to be recognized as another face of Swiss watchmaking, and a true one," says H el ene Fima, a watch historian with the Fondation Horlog ere, which helps to organize visits to small manufactures.

So, come to Switzerland for the beautiful mountains, valleys and lakes, stay for the fondue and leave with a renewed appreciation for the birthplace of watchmaking.



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—Keith W. Strandberg

INTERNATIONAL EDITOR