

The best-selling, most accurate and most frequently updated book about living in Switzerland

15TH
EDITION



Living and Working in

SWITZERLAND

David Hampshire

Living & Working in **SWITZERLAND**

● A Survival Handbook ●



David Hampshire



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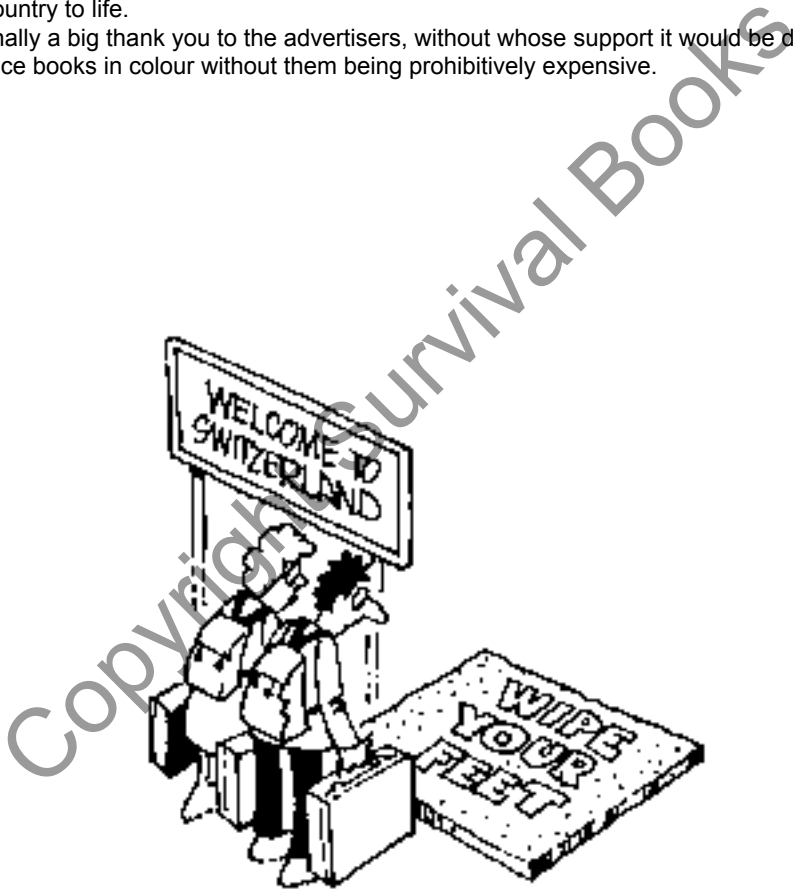
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Finally a big thank you to the advertisers, without whose support it would be difficult to produce books in colour without them being prohibitively expensive.



Swiss News

"Rarely has a 'survival guide' contained such useful advice – This book dispels doubts for first time travellers, yet is also useful for seasoned globetrotters – In a word, if you're planning to move to the US or go there for a long term stay, then buy this book both for general reading and as a ready reference."

Living France Magazine

"If I were to move to France, I would like David Hampshire to be with me, holding my hand every step of the way. This being impractical, I would have to settle for second best and take his books with me instead!"

Reader (Amazon)

"I read most of the books available on this subject before migrating to Australia, so I feel confident enough to say that although this guide is sometimes exhausting... if you pick out the information which is relevant to you the information is golden."

ICI (Switzerland) AG

"We would like to congratulate you on this work: it is really super! We hand it out to our expatriates and they read it with great interest and pleasure."

The Riviera Reporter

"Let's say it at once. David Hampshire's Living and Working in France is the best handbook ever produced for visitors and foreign residents in this country; indeed, my discussion with locals showed that it has much to teach even those born and bred in l'Hexagone. It is Hampshire's meticulous detail which lifts his work way beyond the range of other books with similar titles. This book is absolutely indispensable."

Reader (Amazon)

"I have been travelling to Spain for more than seven years and thought I knew everything - David has done his homework well - Excellent book and very informative! Buy it!"

American Citizens Abroad

"It's everything you always wanted to ask but didn't for fear of the contemptuous put down - The best English language guide - Its pages are stuffed with practical information on everyday subjects and are designed to complement the traditional guidebook."

Reader (Amazon)

"A must for all future expats. I invested in several books but this is the only one you need. Every issue and concern is covered, every daft question you have but are frightened to ask is answered honestly without pulling any punches. Highly recommended."

France in Print

"Covers every conceivable question that might be asked concerning everyday life - I know of no other book that could take the place of this one."

Reader (Amazon)

"This book is highly recommended to serious people who are looking for immigrating to Canada. This book is very useful since you will know exactly what all you must do and what all you must not do when you are in Canada. It gives you an OUTLINE of Jobs and many other things which you must know when you want to settle in Canada. A MUST TO READ FOR IMMIGRANTS"

(We want to thank this reader for their enthusiasm!)

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S

Important Note

Switzerland is a diverse country with many faces. It has four national languages, both federal and cantonal laws, a variety of religions and customs, and continuously changing rules and regulations – particularly with regard to foreigners.

Always check with an official and reliable source (not always the same) before making any major decisions or taking an irreversible course of action. Don't, however, believe everything you're told or read, even, dare I say it, herein!

To help you obtain further information and verify data with official sources, useful addresses and websites have been included in all chapters, and in Appendices A to C. Important points have been emphasised throughout the book, some of which it would be expensive or foolish to disregard. **Ignore them at your peril or cost.**

NOTE

Unless specifically stated, the reference to any company, organisation or product in this book doesn't constitute an endorsement or recommendation. None of the businesses, products or individuals listed have paid to be mentioned (apart from the advertisers).

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Author's Notes

- ◆ Frequent references are made in this book to the European Union (EU), which comprises Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK. The European Economic Area (EEA) includes the EU countries plus the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway – plus Switzerland. (Switzerland is a member of EFTA, but isn't a member of the EEA.)
- ◆ All times are shown using the 12-hour clock; times before noon are indicated by the suffix 'am' and times after noon by 'pm'.
- ◆ Unless otherwise stated, all prices quoted are in Swiss francs (CHF) and include VAT (see page 208). They should be taken as estimates only, although they were mostly correct at the time of publication and fortunately don't change overnight in Switzerland. See  www.xe.com for conversion rates.
- ◆ His/he/him also means her/she/her (please forgive me ladies). This is done to make life easier for both the reader and the author, and isn't intended to be sexist.
- ◆ British English and spelling is used throughout the book. Names of Swiss towns and foreign words are generally shown in their English spelling, e.g. Basle (Basel), Berne (Bern), Geneva (Genève), Lucerne (Luzern) and Zurich (Zürich).
- ◆ Warnings and important points are printed in **bold** type.
- ◆ The following symbols are used in this book:  (telephone),  (Internet) and  (email).
- ◆ Lists of **Useful Addresses**, **Further Reading** and **Useful Websites** are contained in **Appendices A, B** and **C** respectively.
- ◆ For those unfamiliar with the metric system of **Weights & Measures**, conversion tables are included in **Appendix D**.
- ◆ Maps showing the cantons, a physical map and communications (airports, rail, road) are included in **Appendix E**.



Introduction

Whether you're already living or working in Switzerland or just thinking about it – this is **THE BOOK** for you. Forget about those glossy guide books, excellent though they are for tourists; this book was written especially with you in mind and is worth its weight in Emmental cheese (and not just the holes!). Furthermore, this fully revised and updated 15th edition is printed in colour. ***Living and Working in Switzerland*** has been written to meet the needs of anyone wishing to know the essentials of Swiss life – however long your intended stay, you'll find the information contained in this book invaluable.

In contrast to the wealth of information provided by Switzerland Tourism, reliable and up-to-date information specifically intended for foreigners living and working in Switzerland isn't so easy to find – particularly in English. Our aim in publishing this book was to help fill this void and provide the comprehensive, practical information necessary for a relatively trouble-free life. You may have visited Switzerland as a tourist, but living and working there is a different matter altogether. Adjusting to a different environment and culture, and making a home in any foreign country can be a traumatic and stressful experience – and Switzerland is no exception.

Living and Working in Switzerland is a comprehensive handbook on a wide range of everyday subjects, and represents the most up-to-date source of general information available to foreigners in Switzerland. It isn't, however, simply a catalogue of dry facts and figures, but a practical and entertaining look at life. Adjusting to life in a new country is a continuous process, and although this book will help reduce your novice phase and minimise the frustrations, it doesn't contain all the answers (most of us don't even know the right questions to ask!). What it will do, however, is help you make informed decisions and calculated judgements, instead of uneducated guesses and costly mistakes. **Most importantly, it will help save you time, trouble and money, and repay your investment many times over.**

Although you may find some of the information a bit daunting, don't be discouraged. Most problems occur only once and fade into insignificance after a short time (as you face the next half a dozen ...). Most foreigners in Switzerland would agree that, all things considered, they love living there. A period spent there is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, and, with any luck (and some hard work) you could even make your fortune. I trust this book will help you avoid the pitfalls of life in Switzerland and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding future in your new home.

Viel Glück/Bon courage!

David Hampshire

December 2014



1.

FINDING A JOB

Finding a job in Switzerland isn't as difficult as official Swiss policy may lead you to believe, although obtaining a permit can prove a problem if you aren't an EU/EFTA national. The European Union (actually the European Economic Area/EEA, which comprises the EU countries plus the EFTA countries) and Switzerland have a bilateral agreement that allows the free movement of people and removes the need for permits (there are no work permit quotas for most EU nationals).

Switzerland's economic success is largely dependent upon the influx of foreign labour, and foreigners are found in almost every walk of life. Many companies have a sizeable foreign labour force and foreigners fill almost half the top positions at the 25 largest Swiss companies (including two-thirds of the companies quoted on the Swiss stock exchange). Foreign employees in Switzerland number over 1.25m or some 30 per cent of the workforce.

In addition to resident foreigners, over 200,000 people cross the border each day to work in Switzerland.

At the end of 2013, over 85 per cent of Switzerland's permanent resident foreign population was of European origin, with some two-thirds of the foreign workforce from EU-15 or EFTA countries. Italians, Germans and the Balkan countries each comprise around 16 per cent of the foreign workforce, followed by the Portuguese with around 13 per cent. Almost a quarter of foreign residents were born in Switzerland and belong to second (called *Secondos*) or third-generation families. Some 30 per cent of resident Italians but only around 6 per cent of Germans were born in Switzerland. Almost half of the foreign resident population have been in Switzerland for over 15 years and around 90 per cent of Italian and Spanish residents have permanent resident status.

The employment of foreigners, albeit an economic necessity, is something of a political

hot potato. The Swiss generally live and work harmoniously with their foreign 'guests', although there's a vociferous minority who would like to see the number of foreign workers drastically reduced. During the last 30 years they've gained sufficient support to stage a number of national referendums in an attempt to reduce the resident foreign population. All have been defeated but they've served to strain relations between some Swiss and resident foreigners.

Most positions held by foreigners fall into two main categories: seasonal jobs for less than a year and permanent staff positions. Seasonal workers include hotel and catering staff, building and construction workers, factory hands, farm workers, and many people in the tourist industry. Such jobs are available throughout Switzerland and aren't usually difficult to find. Permanent jobs are generally reserved for senior managers, professionals and specialists (e.g. computer experts and engineers), and require annual residence permits. Residence permits are also required by au pairs, students and trainees.

Labour relations in Switzerland are excellent and there are fewer strikes than in any other industrialised country. Increased global competition has meant that a large number of companies have streamlined (i.e. reduced) their workforces over the last few years and many have moved their production and research facilities abroad to reduce costs. However, Switzerland has one of the lowest unemployment rates in Europe – a 'jobless Swiss' used to be an oxymoron – in mid-2014 the rate was around 3 per cent, slightly lower than in the previous few years.



SWITZERLAND & THE EUROPEAN UNION

Despite being surrounded by European Union (EU) countries and being a 'currency island' (all its neighbours use the Euro, except Liechtenstein, which uses the Swiss franc), Switzerland is the only Western European country that isn't a member of the EU or European Economic Area (EEA) – the EU plus the EFTA countries minus Switzerland. The Swiss have twice voted in referenda against joining these entities – the first time in 1992, when they voted against joining the EEA, and in 2001, when they decided not to join the EU by a majority of 77 per cent. The referendum results highlighted a split between the Swiss Germans and Swiss French over Switzerland's future; French-speaking Swiss tend to be in favour of joining the EU, while German-speakers are generally against it.

In 2006, the Swiss Parliament decided to keep open the country's invitation to join the EU, but another referendum isn't expected any time soon. Surveys show that currently around a third of the Swiss population is in favour of EU membership, one-third is against, and the remaining third undecided.

In many ways, Switzerland now has the best of both worlds, enjoying privileged access to the

European single market without being a member. It has concluded over 200 trade treaties with the EU and has bilateral agreements covering the free movement of people, air and road traffic, agriculture, technical trade barriers, science, public procurement, security and cooperation on fraud.

However, for many Swiss the influx of foreign workers has proved too high a price to pay. In a referendum in February 2014 the Swiss narrowly voted to limit the freedom of movement of foreigners in Switzerland, which has serious implications for EU-Swiss relations and will – when enacted – renounce its agreement on the free movement of people with the EU and could trigger a guillotine clause abolishing all bilateral agreements.

SEASONAL JOBS

The majority of seasonal jobs in Switzerland are in the tourist industry, most lasting for the duration of the summer or winter tourist seasons, i.e. April to October and December to April respectively. To work in a seasonal job you need to obtain a (non-renewable) L permit, which are usually issued for a maximum of 12 months.

Although salaries are higher in Switzerland than in most other countries, you're expected to work hard and for long hours, particularly in hotels and restaurants in winter resorts (summer is generally more relaxed). Many businesses must survive for a whole year primarily on their winter earnings and employers expect everyone to earn their keep. Language fluency is required for all but the most menial and worst paid jobs, and is at least as important as experience and qualifications (not that language proficiency alone will get you a well paid job). The local language in Switzerland may be French, German or Italian, depending on the area (see **Languages** on page 29). Fortunately, there's a great sense of camaraderie among seasonal workers, which goes a long way towards compensating for the often boring and hard work (the Swiss francs also help).

If accommodation isn't provided with a job, it can be expensive and difficult to find. Ensure that your salary is sufficient to pay for accommodation, food and other living expenses, and hopefully also allow you to save some money (see **Cost of Living** on page 189). Seasonal jobs include the following:

Seasonal Jobs

Year Round

Hotels & Restaurants
Bars & Clubs
Couriers or Resort
Representatives
Sports Instructors
Manual Workers
Voluntary Workers

Winter Only

Chalet Girls
Ski Technicians
Ski Instructors or
Guides

Year Round Jobs

Bars & Clubs

Jobs in bars and clubs are available throughout Switzerland. English- and Irish-style pubs in many towns often hire native English-speaking bartenders and waiters to add a touch of authenticity (although they're often married to a Swiss, unless it's a seasonal job). Winter resorts have clubs and discotheques requiring disc jockeys, particularly those with a collection of up-to-date dance music. Jobs for disc jockeys are also advertised in British music newspapers. Casino staff, including croupiers, are also required in casinos throughout Switzerland.

Couriers & Resort Representatives

A courier's or resort representative's duties include ferrying tourist groups back and forth from airports, organising excursions and social events, arranging ski passes and equipment rental, and generally playing the role of Jack (or Jill) of all trades. A job as a courier is demanding and requires resilience and resourcefulness to deal with the chaos associated with the package holiday business. The necessary requirements include the ability to answer many questions simultaneously (often in different languages), and to remain calm, charming and humorous under extreme pressure. Lost passengers, tickets, passports and tempers are everyday occurrences. It's an excellent training ground for managerial and leadership skills, pays well, and often provides opportunities to supplement your earnings.

Couriers are required by many local and foreign tour companies in both winter and summer resorts. Competition for jobs is fierce and local language ability is always required, even for employment with British tour operators. Most companies have age requirements, the minimum usually being 21, although many companies

prefer employees to be a few years older. The majority of courier jobs in Switzerland are available during the winter ski season with British ski-tour companies and school ski-party organisers.

A good source of information is ski magazines, which contain regular listings of tour companies showing who operates in which resorts. It's wise to find out the type of clients you're likely to be dealing with, particularly if you're allergic to children or yuppies (young urban professionals – similar to children but more immature). To survive winter in a ski resort, it helps if you're a keen skier or a dedicated learner, otherwise you risk being bored to death by

ski bums.

Some companies, such as Club Méditerranée (Club Med), operate both summer and winter hotels and camps in French-speaking Switzerland (employees are required to speak good French). For information, contact Club Méditerranée, France (☐ www.clubmedjobs.com). A variety of staff are required for summer and winter camps, which are organised for both adults and children. One such organisation is My Swiss Camp (☐ www.myswisscamp.com, ✉ jobs@haut-lac.com), which hires seasonal workers year-round, including chalet girls, cooks, kitchen staff, ski instructors, sports supervisors, English teachers, etc. An excellent website for winter jobs is Snowsports (☐ www.snowsports.ch – choose the French or German language at the top-right of the page then Services and *offres d'emploi/jobbörse*).

See also **Voluntary Workers** and **Chalet Girls** below.

Hotels & Restaurants

Hotels and restaurants are the largest employers of seasonal workers, with jobs available at all levels from managers to kitchen hands. Experience, qualifications and language fluency are required for all the best and highest paid positions, but a variety of jobs are available for the untrained and inexperienced. These include chambermaids, waiters and waitresses, cleaners, dishwashers, handymen, porters, messengers, drivers, kitchen assistants and MBOs (muscle-bound oafs).

The standards required by Swiss employers are high, and hard work and long hours are demanded, although the pay is usually good. The minimum monthly wage for employees in the hotel/restaurant industry is around CHF 3,400 (less in mountain regions and during the probation period) and a 13th month's salary (see page 34) is paid to most full-time employees – but not

to seasonal workers. Employees in hotels are usually provided with full board and you should avoid any job that doesn't include it, as the cost can be prohibitive. Reductions from gross salaries for board and lodging and compulsory insurance amount to some 50 per cent.

Official working hours vary between 44 and 48 per week depending on the job, or around nine to nine-and-a-half hours per day. Your contract will state the maximum number of working hours per week; normal working hours should be a maximum of 45 per week, although in reality this may be the minimum. You're entitled to two free days each week and four weeks' paid holiday per year (around one-and-a-half days per month). Between Christmas and New Year you may be expected to work 12 hours a day, seven days a week, for which you'll usually receive time off in January. Most jobs include a two-week trial period with a notice period of three days, after which the notice period is one month.

Waiters and waitresses are expected to provide their own 'uniform' and wallet and a cash float of around CHF 200. The salary is often on a commission basis, where you're paid a percentage of your takings (plus tips – unless all your customers are Swiss!). Aprons, hats and oven gloves are normally provided for kitchen staff, plus a free laundry service for working clothes and uniforms. Other dress requirements vary according to the job; for example waiters require black trousers and shoes, white shirts and possibly jackets, while waitresses require black skirts, shoes and stockings, white blouses and possibly small aprons.

In addition to jobs in Swiss hotels and restaurants, jobs are also available in hotels and chalets operated by British and other foreign tour operators, where local language ability may be

unnecessary. Work is generally easier and the atmosphere more relaxed, but salaries are usually lower than those paid by Swiss-run hotels, and may even be less than the minimum wage.

Many agencies and a number of trade newspapers are available in Switzerland to help you find a job in a hotel or restaurant. Union Helvetia is the official Swiss union for hotel and restaurant staff, and anyone who has training or qualifications in the hotel and catering trades can become a member. Union Helvetia publishes an official rule book (*Obligationenrecht, droit des obligations*) for employers and employees and a list of official minimum salaries for all jobs, plus a weekly newspaper, *Expresso*, listing job vacancies. It's available from news kiosks in Switzerland or on subscription from the Hotel & Gastro Union (☎ 041-418 22 22, 🌐 www.hotelgastrounion.ch).

The Swiss Hotel Association (*Schweizer Hotelier-Verein, Société Suisse des Hôteliers*) publishes a newspaper, *Hotel + Tourismus Revue*, which usually contains more job vacancies than the *Expresso* newspaper. It's also available from news kiosks (on Thursdays) or on subscription from *Hotel + Tourismus Revue* (☎ 031-370 41 11, 🌐 www.htr.ch). Both *Expresso* and *Hotel + Tourismus Revue* contain articles in French and German. Like Union Helvetia, the Swiss Hotel Association has its own employment agency and publishes a standard employment contract for hotel and restaurant staff, in use throughout the country. Another weekly newspaper advertising job vacancies for hotel and restaurant staff is *Schweizer Gastronomie* (🌐 www.gilde.ch – French/German only).

Besides answering advertisements and visiting agencies, you could try contacting Swiss hotel and restaurant chains directly.

Manual Workers

Jobs for manual workers are usually available throughout Switzerland, mostly in the construction and farming industries. The minimum salary in the construction industry for an unskilled worker is around CHF 4,000 per month, but can be higher depending on the actual job and your experience. Jobs are also available for cleaners and general labourers in hospitals, factories, warehouses and large hotels. Farmers often require extra labourers, particularly in the spring and autumn to help with the fruit, vegetable and grape harvests. Farming jobs entail hard physical work, usually for around 12 hours a day, six days a week, for a low salary.

One of the most popular jobs is grape picking, e.g. in the cantons of Valais and Vaud. Lasting



for around eight to ten days in early October, the work is hard and the salary is around CHF 50 per day plus accommodation and meals. Even for this kind of work it may be important to have some knowledge of the local language.-

Unfortunately the worst abuses of seasonal workers' rights occur in the farming industry, particularly in the Geneva area, where complaints include low pay, long hours, inadequate living conditions and unpaid social benefits. If you're a seasonal worker from a country with a bilateral insurance agreement with Switzerland, the Swiss government doesn't repay federal social security payments (OASI/DI) when you leave Switzerland. Therefore there's a temptation for dishonest employers to deduct the OASI/DI payment from your salary and not declare it, particularly as you're unlikely ever to claim a Swiss pension.

The Swiss are continually digging tunnels, building and repairing bridges and roads, and constructing office blocks and shopping centres – and it's mostly foreigners who do the manual work. Enquire at building sites in Switzerland – the bigger the site, the better your chance of success. In summer, jobs may be available in ski resorts installing new ski lifts, snow-making machinery, and building chalets and hotels. Enquire at local lift operating companies, estate agents and construction companies.

If you have experience or training in the building industry, e.g. as a bricklayer or carpenter, you should be able to command a higher salary, even without local language fluency.

Outdoor jobs in the building and construction industries are usually restricted to the warmer months, as trying to find your shovel under two metres of snow can be a handicap in winter.

Sports Instructors

Instructors are required for a variety of sports, including canoeing, diving, golf, gymnastics, hang-gliding, horse riding, mountaineering, parachuting, rock-climbing, sailing, squash, subaquatic sports, swimming, tennis and windsurfing. Whatever the sport, it's probably played and taught somewhere in Switzerland. Most jobs for sports instructors are available in summer, as winter sports vacancies are generally filled by the Swiss (for information regarding **Ski Instructors & Guides**, see below). However, if you're a qualified winter sports instructor, you can contact Swiss resorts or sports organisations

for information about vacancies. You may require an officially recognised qualification to teach some sports, for example a life-saving certificate to teach swimming or a sailing instructor's certificate to teach sailing.

Voluntary Work

Voluntary work is primarily to enable students and young people to visit Switzerland for a few weeks or months to learn about the country and its people at first hand. Voluntary work is, of course, unpaid, although meals and accommodation are normally provided and a small amount of pocket money may be paid. This, however, may be insufficient for expenses such as entertainment and drinks, therefore you need to ensure that you bring enough money with you. The usual visa regulations apply to voluntary workers and your passport must be valid for at least a year. You'll be informed whether you need a visa when you apply (a work or residence permit isn't required).

Various kinds of voluntary work are available, including those listed below.

Farm Work

Voluntary farm work is usually available from March to October (mainly in German-speaking areas) and is organised by the Swiss Farm Work Association. You must be aged between 16 and 25 with a basic knowledge of German or French (depending on the area) and be prepared to work for a minimum of two weeks and a maximum of eight. It certainly isn't a holiday, as the work is usually strenuous and the hours long, for six days a week (Sundays are free!). Officially the maximum hours are 48 hours per week, although more may be expected. Work may be in the fields, farmyard, farmhouse or farm garden. For this you're paid at least CHF 20 a day (those aged over 18), plus board and lodging, and are insured against accidents. You must have your own medical insurance, carry a European Insurance card, and must pay for your own journey to and from the farm.

Many farms are in remote mountain areas, where living and working conditions may be primitive and there's little social life. If you enjoy a hectic social life and companionship, this isn't the job for you. Friends applying together aren't usually placed with the same farmer, as most farms are small and farms cannot usually accommodate more than one person. Application forms are available from Agriviva (☎ 052-264 00 30, 🌐 www.agriviva.ch). Registration (the fee is CHF 40/25 Euro) should be made at least four

weeks before you wish to start work (you can apply online).

Farm jobs include work on organically run farms, in return for which you receive free meals and accommodation (but no expenses). A year's membership and a list of participating farms costs CHF 20 from WWOOF Switzerland, Postfach 59, CH-8124 Maur (☎ <http://zapfig.com/wwof>). You must send a copy of your passport with your payment and a letter explaining why you want to become a WWOOF volunteer.

General

There are organisations that require volunteer workers such as camp counsellors or to help on projects such as restoring hiking trails. Workcamps Switzerland (☎ 043-317 19 30, 🌐 www.workcamp.ch) offers volunteers assignments, mostly in the summer months, but their website also lists international projects. There's a registration fee for Swiss workcamps of around CHF 150.

Winter Jobs

A seasonal job in a ski resort can be a lot of fun and very satisfying. You'll get fit, learn or improve a language and make friends, and may even save some money; all in addition to living in one of the most beautiful countries in the world. However, although a winter job may be a working holiday to you (with lots of skiing and little work), to your employer it's exactly the opposite! In general, hotel and restaurant staff work much harder in ski resorts during winter than in summer, when life is more relaxed. Some hotel and restaurant employers even forbid their employees to ski (although this is rare), particularly key personnel (e.g. chefs) over the Christmas and New Year period.

Ski resorts require an army of temporary workers to cater for the annual invasion of winter sports enthusiasts. Besides jobs in the hotel and restaurant trades already described, a variety of generally well paid winter jobs are available, some of which are described below. Usually the better paid the job, the longer the working hours and the less time off there is for skiing. Employment in a winter resort may entitle employees to reduced public transport fares and a discounted ski pass.

Seasonal workers in the tourist industry aren't covered by unemployment insurance, unlike, for example, workers in the construction industry. In a bad season, with little or no snow, you can therefore find yourself without work or money. Ski lift operators and others directly dependent

on snow conditions for a living, should watch the weather forecast closely and pray for lots of snow. Even if you work in a hotel or restaurant, your contract can be cancelled or cut short when business is bad.

Chalet Staff

Hundreds of chalet workers (most are female, but males are also eligible) are required each winter to look after the everyday comforts of guests in holiday chalets and private hotels, many formerly run by British (see box) and other foreign tour operators. The job of a chalet worker entails hard work, generally offers low pay (as little as half the rate paid by Swiss hotels) and requires a variety of skills and experience. You must usually be able to cook to a high standard or have experience of catering for parties; do shopping, housekeeping and laundry; deal with obstreperous clients; and generally be a Jill of all trades.

Nevertheless, once you get over the initial

In 2014 there was a mass exodus of UK chalet operators due to the Swiss imposing a minimum wage of CHF 3,407 per month, which is around 25 per cent more than previously paid by UK employers.

shock, you'll probably find the job satisfying and challenging, and it allows plenty of time off for skiing. One thing for sure, you won't have time to be bored. You'll also have to fight off the attentions of hordes of men and survive numerous late-night parties – it's a tough job but someone has to do it! A limited number of chalet workers are required in summer.

Ski Instructors & Guides

Jobs as ski instructors in Switzerland are almost impossible to obtain unless you've passed the Swiss ski instructors' examinations, although some resorts accept foreign qualifications, e.g. the advanced British Association of Ski Instructors (BASI) qualification or equivalent. Experience and local language fluency are also required. Jobs as ski companions, ski instructors for children and ski guides with foreign tour operators are easier to find. However, in some resorts local ski instructors are hostile towards ski guides, particularly as there's often only a thin dividing line between guiding and instructing, and as a result guide jobs have been reduced.

The Ski Club of Great Britain (SCGB, 🌐 www.skiclub.co.uk) has representatives in many resorts, whose job is to take members on skiing excursions but not to teach them. Swiss



resorts usually (wisely) allow British and other foreign school parties to be taught by qualified foreign instructors. To teach children, the lowest BASI qualification or equivalent may be sufficient.

If you work as a ski guide or instructor and an accident occurs through your negligence (for example one of your customers falls down a precipice), you may be liable for damages, therefore you should ensure that you have liability insurance.

An excellent website for skiing jobs is Snowsports (www.snowsports.ch – choose French or German at the top-right of the page then 'Services' and 'offres d'emploi/jobbörse'). You must speak a minimum of two languages, e.g. French or German and English.

▲ Caution

Working as an unofficial instructor without a permit or qualifications is strictly illegal.

Ski Technicians

A ski technician's job entails fitting and maintaining skis, bindings and boots. Although some employers require previous experience, many ski rental shops provide training, and courses are available in some countries. Besides doing the round of resort shops, contact tour companies and large luxury hotels, as they often have their own ski hire and service shops. Local language ability is usually required, although it may depend on the employer and his clientele.

PERMANENT POSITIONS

Permanent positions in Switzerland require an annual residence permit (see **B Permit** on page 48). Most permanent positions require special skills, qualifications and experience, which are usually more important than the ability to speak fluent French, German or Italian. In fact, you may not be expected to speak the local language at all if your mother tongue is English. This is often the case when you're employed by an American or British company, or work in a high-tech field where English is an important language spoken fluently by your colleagues. If you need to speak (or learn) the local language, you'll be informed at your interview, and when necessary, language tuition may be subsidised or paid for by your employer.

There's often a huge difference between working for a Swiss or foreign company employing many other English-speaking foreigners, and working for a company where you have few or no English-speaking colleagues. You will, of course, learn the local language much more quickly working with colleagues who don't speak English. However, you may find – as many other foreigners do – that the working environment and general lack of camaraderie, warmth and friendliness, isn't to your liking. The Swiss don't generally mix socially with their colleagues and this may even exclude the occasional drink after work.

Foreign qualifications are recognised in many trades and professions, provided the length of training and syllabus was similar to those required for the equivalent Swiss qualification. Under bilateral treaties between Switzerland and the EU, Switzerland now recognises most EU-based diplomas and qualifications – even for formerly excluded professions such as teachers, barristers, lawyers, doctors, dentists, pharmacists and veterinarians. For non-EU citizens, restrictions remain but a non-EU foreigner entitled to live in Switzerland – for example as a result of long-term residence or marriage to a Swiss citizen – may be able to study or pass a Swiss examination entitling him to work in a restricted field. Regulations may also be relaxed by individual cantons when there's a shortage of qualified Swiss staff.

JOB APPLICATIONS

How you apply for a job depends largely on whether it's a seasonal or permanent position:

Seasonal Jobs

Apply for jobs as early as possible, for example March for summer jobs and June or July for winter

jobs. For summer jobs in mountain resorts, you should apply in March or April. If you apply too early, the worst that can happen is that you'll be told to apply again later. The latest dates for applications are usually the end of September for winter jobs and the end of April for summer jobs. In some resorts, the summer season starts in spring (April), with staff being recruited in January. Don't put all your eggs in one basket – the more job applications you make, the better your chances of success.

Many jobs require local language fluency (see **Languages** on page 29); therefore if you apply for a job in writing, it's best to write in the local language – but obtain help if you aren't fluent. You can brush up your language ability after you've secured a job, but it isn't advisable to exaggerate your language ability, experience or qualifications in a letter. If you're offered a job on the basis of non-existent qualifications, you'll soon be found out and risk being fired. A good knowledge of the local language helps when dealing with local officials. For seasonal jobs, German is more advantageous than French, as the majority of jobs are in German-speaking resorts.

When applying for a job requiring experience, don't forget to provide your CV/resumé and copies of qualifications and references (see **Job Applications** below).

SURVIVAL TIP

Always ask for a written job offer and a contract, and steer clear of employers who won't provide them (see **Illegal Working** on page 28). An official job entitles you to accident insurance, unemployment benefits, and in particular, official protection from exploitation.

Writing unsolicited letters for jobs is a hit-and-miss affair and is usually the least successful method of securing employment. An employer who doesn't know you from Adam (or Eve) may be unwilling to risk employing you because if you don't turn up he's left in the lurch. If you're really serious and can afford the journey, it may be worthwhile visiting prospective employers for an interview before the season starts.

Your best chance of obtaining a seasonal job may be to apply in person, particularly when looking for a winter job close to the start of the ski season. Success is often simply a matter of being in the right place at the right time, although

you can give lady luck a helping hand by your persistence and enterprise. Make an effort to look presentable, as Swiss employers expect a high standard of dress and cleanliness; hair must usually be short (except for women) and tidy, and beards aren't usually permitted. When looking for a job in person, try the following methods:

- ◆ Call on prospective employers, but avoid calling at hotels and restaurants during meal times.
- ◆ Ask prospective employers if they know of anyone looking for staff and leave your name and an address and a telephone number (if possible) where you can be contacted (a mobile phone is handy).
- ◆ Check wanted boards or place an advertisement on local notice boards, for example in a Migros or Co-op supermarket, or on the notice boards of expatriate clubs, churches and other organisations.
- ◆ Look in local newspapers or place an advertisement in the 'Jobs Wanted' section.
- ◆ Ask at tourist offices as many keep lists of job vacancies from September onwards for the coming winter season. Lists are regularly updated and the service is free.
- ◆ Ask other foreign workers.

If you're an English speaker, the best winter resorts to try are those with a large number of American and British skiers, which include Arosa, Champéry, Crans-Montana, Davos, Engelberg, Grindelwald, Gstaad, Klosters, Les Diablerets, Leysin, Saas Fee, St. Moritz, Verbier, Villars, Wengen and Zermatt. However, don't neglect the many smaller resorts; although jobs may be scarcer, there's less competition from other job hunters, who tend to focus on the major resorts.

Don't worry if you miss the start of the season, as jobs often become vacant at short notice to replace those who become sick or homesick, are injured or sacked – or who run off with a ski instructor. Don't forget to take enough money to see you through the job-hunting period. Allow at least two weeks and bear in mind that the cost of living (see page 189) is high in Switzerland.

Depending on your nationality, after you've found a job you may need to return to the nearest border point with your 'assurance of a residence permit' for a health check. When leaving a job at the end of the season, it's advisable to ask for a reference if one isn't provided automatically,