

le News

WEEKLY SWISS NEWS IN ENGLISH

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A safer way to ski – Put contact and medical information in a bar-code on your ski helmet to be scanned in case of an accident.

The terrible skiing accident that injured Formula One racing driver Michael Schumacher last month has caused a jump in the sale of ski helmets. Now there is a new idea to protect skiers and snowboarders even further. The innova-

tion being tested at the Nendaz (VS) ski resort this winter places a barcode sticker on ski helmets that can be read by smartphone cameras.

The information encoded in a Quick Response (QR) barcode would include all relevant medical data such as allergies, blood type and emergency contact numbers. The information would originally be entered by the helmet's wearer, and can be read by anyone with an App

to read QR codes. An ambulatory surgery clinic in Sion, MV Santé Artemed, came up with the idea following an increase in ski and snowboard accidents in recent years. The lift operator TéléNendaz expressed interest and in early December persuaded about 100 skiers to start putting barcodes on their helmets.

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Next week

IPads at school:

Good, bad, or drive you mad?



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This Week in Switzerland



The long-eared owl has been elected Bird of the Year 2014 by the **Swiss Association for the Protection of Birds** in order to highlight the importance of maintaining biodiversity, especially in semi-open habitats that are being rapidly reduced. The **long-eared owl** thrives in a combination of forest and farmland with meadows, hedges and grass. The orange-eyed bird sleeps in trees during the day, hunts voles at night, and is one of the most common owls in Switzerland.

Canton Vaud has just published its *Annuaire statistique du canton de Vaud*. It has a new structure and provides comprehensive information about the canton's population and economy portrayed in some 530 tables and 380 illustrations.

The arrival of South Korean President **Park Geun-Hye** in Bern at the beginning of the week marked the first visit by a South Korean leader since 1963. Bilateral trade links between Switzerland and South Korea have strengthened in the recent past, with Switzerland **doubling its exports** from CHF 1.1 billion in 2000 to CHF 2.4 billion in 2012. **South Korea** is also interested in learning from Swiss innovation methods – currently 30 Swiss research projects are being supported in South Korea. Park also thanked Switzerland for its peace-keeping role on its border.



In 2014 pharmaceutical giant **Novartis** plans to cut back around 500 jobs currently based at its Basel headquarters, but it also plans to create jobs in the Lake Geneva region. The number of jobs in Switzerland should remain stable at around 15,000. The company employs 133,000 worldwide.

Through research carried out at the molecular life sciences department at the **University of Basel**, scientists have furthered their understanding of how the typhoid fever pathogen survives the body's immune system, and thus how the infection operates. They hope this will help evolve the current treatment, to which the pathogen is becoming increasingly resistant. Typhoid is caused by the bacteria **Salmonella typhi** and is transmitted from human to human, usually by the ingestion of contaminated food or drink.

Swiss President and this year's chairperson-in-office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), **Didier Burkhalter**, presented three areas of focus in Vienna last week: promotion of security and stability, improvement of living conditions and the OSCE's capacity to respond. He noted that he wanted to focus on "incremental progress rather than any grand new designs" and that torture prevention, disaster relief and cyber security will also be prioritized. Furthermore, an **anti-terrorism conference** will be hosted in Interlaken in April.

Thomas Minder, Schaffhauser entrepreneur and conseiller aux États has been elected **European of the Year 2014** by Reader's Digest magazine due to his commitment against unfairly excessive wages in Switzerland. His initiative against fat-cat salaries was voted in by 68% of the Swiss people in March 2013, and gives shareholders a say in remuneration, bonuses and who sits on company boards.

SOS: Safer Out Skiing

Continued from page 1

Thankfully, there have been no serious accidents in Nendaz this season but simulated accidents have impressed participants, whether skiers or rescue workers.

MV Santé decided to adapt their existing system known as Ma Mémoire Médicale, which gives clients an electronic card containing all their medical information, so the client doesn't have to rely on personal memory. MV Santé, working in cooperation with hospitals HUG in Geneva and CHUV in Lausanne, stores the information in a central database, but notes on its website that the data cannot be accessed either by an employer or an insurance company.

Nicole Glassey, the head nurse at MV Santé said that virtually anyone with a smartphone can read the barcode, which will only contain information provided by the person ordering it. "The goal is to save lives and not lose time."

David Kestens of Leukerbad

Tourismus agrees that a barcoded helmet could be a good solution.

Asked if he had any privacy concerns, veteran Verbier mountain guide Bertrand Martenet said, "this is clearly not a problem, since people decide themselves what information they want to provide". According to Martenet, more people are now wearing helmets although guides like himself do not do so.

According to Kestens, "about 80% of skiers in Leukerbad wear helmets".

MV Santé's Glassey believes the barcoded helmet could also be useful for children. "There are cases of children wandering off at a ski school or getting lost. With barcodes a parent can be called if there is any problem."

MV Santé will respond within 48 hours to anyone who gets in contact, and to send them a barcode sticker and a wearable card for as little as CHF 5: <http://mamemoiremedicale.ch/mamemoire-medicale-urgence>

Pamela Taylor

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Regional

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WEEKLY SWISS NEWS IN ENGLISH

Editor's comment

Davos: inspiring ideas, airing frustrations

For the past 44 years, the World Economic Forum has sought to grapple with the planet's key issues, primarily from the point of view of the rich and powerful and some of society's most informed thinkers. Every year, the Forum comes up with a sweeping grand theme, usually a re-versioning of previous ones. Its 2014 aim is to explore the "reshaping of the world" and its consequences for society, politics and business.

Advocacy groups regularly chastise the Forum, which brings together some 2,500 participants – only 15% women – from the private, political, arts and civil society sectors, for ignoring what's really happening. This week Oxfam reported that the world's richest 85 people have the same amount of wealth, some \$1.7 trillion, as the poorest half of the planet's seven billion people. There are also alternative gatherings, but these beckon more to the converted than the movers and shakers networking in one of Switzerland's biggest ski resorts.

The reality is that you can find what you want at Davos, even if its quality and relevance varies. The Forum's founder, Klaus Schwab, a tall, balding professor, who, after all these years, still speaks English with an atrocious but endearing German accent, is the one who had the stroke of genius to create this extraordinary gathering. Whether you like it or not, the Forum's uniqueness has helped engineer profound changes, including peace initiatives in the Middle East. Schwab, too, acts as the public conscience of the corporate world. Earlier this week, he reminded leaders that non-inclusive growth is unsustainable.

As a Forum writer who has attended over a dozen meetings since the mid-1990s, I always found it exhilarating to attend what I considered to be a three-day "super university". There would be panels, workshops and dinner discussions focusing on anything from the challenges of the world's megacities and the war in Afghanistan to coping with jetlag, developing corporate philanthropy or how to reduce pollution in the Mediterranean. Once, I talked for half an hour with the President of Latvia when no one else turned up to her session. "That's the problem of being the president of a small country," she said. Many of these sessions, such as one on conceiving cities with vision, have galvanized exceptional individuals. This particular session brought together academics, designers and entrepreneurs, including Jean-Charles Decaux, a trailblazer in outdoor advertising, and Google's Larry Page. Dressed in his usual jeans and loose sweater, Page insisted that every city be "wired up" so that he could order a tomato at midnight. When asked if he wouldn't enjoy a stroll to the local grocery, he replied archly: "I don't think so." Davos was also where I attended one of Yehudi Menuhin's last concerts.

Of course, Davos can leave you underwhelmed. One moderator introduced his panellists and then, utterly bored, turned to read a newspaper. A further panel on the patenting of traditional medicinal plants lacked any credibility given that four of its five speakers, including the moderator, represented major pharmaceutical companies. Invariably, however, I almost always come away inspired. For me, Davos has always been about ideas. Solutions do not necessarily emerge, but at least it gets the discussion out into the open. Sometimes, that's all that's needed.

Edward Girardet

Syrian talks reviving international Geneva

MONTREUX While this week's second-round Syria talks may have roped in most of the region's police to protect all the high-level delegations, they are doing wonders for Montreux.



The Syrian peace talks in Montreux and Geneva are not enough to refresh the UN's *raison d'être*.

The lakeside town is proving that it is more than just a haven for exiled Iranians, Russian oligarchs and wealthy film producers. The talks, which finish up in Geneva, make the point that this part of Switzerland is ideal for providing geopolitical players with a neutral location to resolve their wars, tribal or ethnic disputes, and humanitarian crises.

However, for "International Geneva" to reaffirm itself, it will need more

than just conferences. The recently appointed Danish head of the United Nations in Geneva, Michael Møller, told the Swiss Press Club that the international community must get its act together if it is to remain in the forefront for dealing with climate change, migration, super-power roles, financial crises and other global themes. With the current system "old and tired," he

said, 20 years of trying to reform the Security Council have failed. The only way to deal with the new realities is to develop "a more inclusive, representative and legitimate" approach. This includes marketing the UN, which is hardly "sexy", in a more vibrant manner. The United Nations, he said, is completely failing to put across its message.

Daniel Wermus

Geneva pays CHF 270m to French towns



Geneva's compensation financière genevoise might seem altruistic, but it relies on a historical symbiosis unique to the Lake Geneva region. The bilateral agreement, introduced in the early 1970s, redistributes frontier tax-money to Geneva's bordering French departments, Haute-Savoie and Ain. The former receives 76.7% of the CHF 270 million dividend, the latter 23.3%. The funds are then redistributed according to local communal agreements. In the Ain department, for example, 60% will go towards the communes according to their respective share of frontaliers, and the remaining 40%

towards the department.

The amount paid out by the canton is calculated each year according to the number of people working in Geneva who reside in France. If these figures are anything to go by, the cross-border work force is on the up (this year's sum represents a 12.5% increase). This unique arrangement is a win-win for the French departments and their communes, as well as Geneva: the latter provides the bulk of the employment opportunities, France cheaper and more accessible housing. For many French towns, the money received is essential to meet the increasing demands on public services and infrastructure such as schools or the construction of social housing. The devolution of funds to communes situated beyond the historical frontier zone also emphasizes the strident realities of an ever-expanding economic region.

Christopher Woodburn

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National

Combatting cross-border crime

GENEVA The Geneva and Annemasse authorities signed an agreement on 17 January, to create a joint police task force to facilitate the crackdown on criminal gangs operating cross-border in the Priority Security Zone (ZSP) created in early 2013.



Geneva and Annemasse police cooperation has been agreed to fight cross-border crime.

The ZSP includes Annemasse, Gaillard, Ambilly and the Canton of Geneva. The Geneva government said the new brigade will initially be composed of two officers from each country, who will coordinate existing investigations and act on their own initiative. This is also to counter efforts by criminals to slip across the frontier.

The brigade is expected to be operational on 1 March, eventually

becoming a permanent force. Under the command of an officer from the canton and one from the French police, it will be based in Annemasse, which more or less acts as a Geneva suburb. The 2007 Paris Accords allow mixed Swiss-French patrols. A key activity of the joint brigade will be to coordinate local, customs and frontier police from both countries. Since extra officers were added in the zone last year, burglaries have dropped by 40%. Several

prostitution and begging networks also have been broken up. Local media reported last October that ZSP officers dismantled an extensive cocaine network in Annemasse, parts of which are notoriously insecure. Police also arrested a cross-border gang of young burglars from the Balkans known as the Jovanovics because of the name each gave under interrogation.

Pamela Taylor

Forecast: Better weather forecasting

Most of us reflexively groan upon hearing negative weather forecasts, even though we know the weather cannot be fine and sunny all the time. Planning for bad weather is important, whether remembering an umbrella or deciding not to ski when fog descends and avalanche warnings abound.

Switzerland's national weather service MétéoSuisse has always had a good reputation for accurate forecasting but, in renewing the service's mandate up to 2016, the Federal Council has called for an even greater level of accuracy.

This is good news for tour operators who have complained about inaccuracies in pessimistic forecasts, which they claim have too often needlessly discouraged winter-sports enthusiasts. "Weather is the main influence when planning a day of skiing," said Damian Constantin, director of Valais/Wallis Promotion in Sion. He added that he agrees with the government's assessment that there is room for improvement.

The aim is to reduce the margin of error as much as possible to avoid incidents such as the unexpected violent

hail storm that ravaged an open-air gymnastics festival in Biel/Bienne (BE) last June, injuring 39 people, some seriously.

MétéoSuisse has announced that "additional measuring stations will be constructed and two new weather radar will be commissioned for the cantons of Valais and Grisons. This extension of the radar network will measure rainfall more accurately, especially in the Alpine valleys."

Pamela Taylor

Anti-nuclear tablets, anyone?

LAUSANNE In tune with Switzerland's prevention culture, people living within a 50 km radius of a nuclear plant will now receive iodide tablets to counter the possible effects of nuclear disaster. The majority of people inhabiting the Bern, Fribourg, Neuchâtel and Jura cantons will receive the pills. The measure will also concern a substantial proportion of the Vaud population. Prior to this week's federal resolution, only those living in a 20 km radius of nuclear plants received the pills. If taken correctly, these tablets, due to be introduced next autumn, will help prevent radioactive iodine from being absorbed by the thyroid gland, a consequence that may lead to cancer.

Japan's Fukushima nuclear incident served as a warning to governments and inhabitants alike of the immediate and long-term dangers of civilian nuclear power. The distribution of tablets to approximately 4.6 million people will cost Switzerland's nuclear plant groups an estimated CHF 30 million. The purpose of this measure is both to reassure and to act as a preventative health measure.

Christopher Woodburn

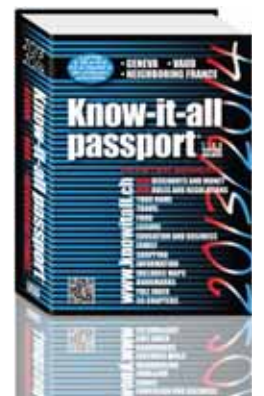


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Business & Economy

Avoid foreign exchange rip-offs

GENEVA If you're going abroad, here are a few tips to help you get the most from your money

No matter how you want to pay for things while overseas, it's always a good idea to have some cash in the local currency to pay for essentials. But get your currency before you go. The Bureaux de change at airports are often the most expensive places to buy. Shop around in Switzerland for the best rates as Swiss banks can offer keener rates than their competitors in other countries.

Many debit and credit cards apply a host of hidden charges when you use your plastic abroad. A cash withdrawal fee is levied when you take money out of an ATM abroad, in addition to foreign exchange and interest charges. Using your maestro card to withdraw cash could incur costs of around CHF



No commission? Beware of extremely expensive exchange rates.

4.75 per withdrawal, plus 0.25 % of the amount. Paying for purchases directly, with a Credit Suisse maestro card for example, costs CHF 1.50 per transaction. Beware of using Swiss francs to settle bills with credit or debit cards instead of the local currency. The entirely legal scam, called dynamic cur-

rency conversion, allows hotels, shops and restaurants to calculate the amount owed according to their own – more favourable to them – currency rates. Cards users should always pay in the local currency because the final bill will invariably be lower.

Moyette Marrett

Finma CEO steps down

BERN Finma CEO Patrick Raaflaub will step down after five years running Switzerland's financial watchdog. Mark Branson, head of banking regulation, will take over on an interim basis.

Immigration – Switzerland can't pick and choose

BERN Switzerland will not be able to renegotiate the Free Movement of Persons Agreement with the European Union if voters back a proposal next month by the right-wing Swiss People's Party (UDC) to re-impose immigrant quotas, the EU justice commissioner, Viviane Reding warned. In an interview with *Schweiz am Sonntag* on Switzerland's bilateral agreements with the EU, Ms Reding said it was "an illusion to think that the free movement of people could be renegotiated individually." The free movement of people is part of the single market. "Switzerland is not able to pick and choose."

Sponsorship restarts Swiss Hockey Cup

LAUSANNE Starting this year, Switzerland will once again have a national ice hockey competition. Zurich Insurance Group has become the official presenting partner of the Swiss Hockey Cup in a four-year deal brokered by InfrontRingier. The tournament was last held in 1965–1966. "With the Swiss Ice Hockey Cup, we are taking the opportunity to mark and connect with a promising project right from the start," Zurich CEO Joachim Masur said. "Here lower-ranked teams play against major ones. I'm curious which teams will manage to put the greatest pressure on the big stars. The Cup will definitely bring us unique sporting moments."

As a nation renowned for its love of outdoor sports and home to prestigious events such as Ski World Cup

Wengen, the Montreux Jazz Festival and the Locarno Film Festival, it should come as no surprise that sponsorship is a multi-million-franc business in Switzerland. Not surprisingly, Swiss International Airlines invests in long-term sponsorship partnerships with events it sees as being quintessentially Swiss. These include the Omega European Masters, the Lucerne Music Festival, White Turf St Moritz and Art Basel. Meanwhile, UBS AG, Switzerland's biggest bank, sponsors the Federal Swiss Wrestling, Alpine Festival and Athletissima Lausanne, among others, as well as the world-renowned Montreux Jazz Festival.

Firms such as Zurich-based ISM Sports & Entertainment Group, Sponsorize, InfrontRingier Sports & Entertainment Switzerland and



The Swiss Hockey Cup tournament was last held in 1965–1966.

MediaCom advise companies on which events might best meet their communication goals and how to build brand awareness. They partner with rights holders and often sell distribution rights to media outlets. "Sponsoring sports and entertainment is key for many Swiss companies," said ISM CEO Pascal Stucki.

Earlier this month, Swiss-Ski, the national governing body for skiing in

Switzerland, announced it has extended its partnership with banking group Raiffeisen. The new deal ensures the partnership will continue until 2017. As part of the agreement, Raiffeisen will sell branded gloves and hats to raise money for regional ski associations in Switzerland and grassroots competitors.

Moyette Marrett



Business Comment

Making the sustainable decision

Companies need to forgo short-term profitability to make sustainable choices.

Companies increasingly talk about sustainability, but what exactly do they mean? Although many people would define sustainable practices as those that improve society, corporate sustainability is frequently reduced to minimizing harm to the environment. Firms have therefore taken measures such as reducing energy usage, minimizing materials, and using recycled goods.

Changing practices to become more socially responsible has not been too difficult for firms. Reducing the amount of energy and materials that they use in making a product generates significant cost savings. As a result, the vast majority of companies have altered their supply and operations chain to take advantage of this "low-hanging fruit."

General Electric's "ecomagination" initiative is a good example of how a firm can make itself and its consumers more sustainable while driving economic growth. Such innovations include natural gas engines, sodium batteries, and carbon capture systems, which all minimize impacts on the environment while increasing efficiency.

Another example is Aquafina's "Eco-Fina" plastic water bottle, which is made from 50% less plastic and consequently weighs half as much.



Solar power: one "low hanging fruit" for sustainability.

Aquafina realized savings not only in material costs but also in transportation costs, thereby further curbing CO2 emissions.

Sustainability goes beyond profitability

Firms take the profitability of sustainable practices for granted and have begun to view sustainability as synonymous with profitability. But what happens when they need to reach a little higher? Will they be willing when necessary to make the difficult, and more costly, decisions that improve society? The signs are not promising, if J.P. Morgan Chase & Co's recent decision to exit the U.S. student loan market is any indicator.

Earlier this year, a FICO report highlighted the increasing number of loans and rising default rates in the U.S. student loan market. According to Andrew Jennings, FICO's chief analytics officer and head of FICO labs, "this situation is simply unsustainable." While this statement may not be striking at first, it represents a growing trend in corporate messaging to equate sustainability with profitability. If something that is critical to improving society, such as financing education, stops being profitable, does that mean the private sector should just abandon it?

Thasunda Duckett, the chief executive for student loans at J.P. Morgan

Chase, said the largest U.S. bank is getting out of the U.S. student loan sector because "we just don't see this as a market that we can significantly grow." While the market itself is growing, as the latest FICO report highlights, its profitability is decreasing. Similarly, US Bancorp stopped accepting student loan applications in March of this year while smaller American banks are also getting out of the market.

The rise in student loans can be attributed to the state of the U.S. economy and increasing tuition costs. But with federal Stafford loans capped at \$31,000 and tuition costs rising with increased demand, where will students get additional loans to cover their education needs if not from private banks? As lower-income families face a harder time financing their homes and now their children's education, is getting out of these markets the "sustainable" choice for banks, or merely the more profitable one? And over what time horizon is profitability being assessed?

Taking the longer view

Some companies, and industries as a whole, are forced to expand their time horizons for profitability. The pharmaceutical sector is a good example. Its products require a significant upfront cost and face high risks of failure, but result in solutions that significantly improve society. Although the drug

industry has its critics, it does offer insights on how short-term gains can be sacrificed for long-term profitability in order to promote sustainability.

The notion of "patient capital" is prominent in the field of international development, where investments are made with a 10-, 20- or even 50-year outlook, and in the emerging field of sustainable banking. These banks, which emerged from the microfinance and socially responsible investing movements, focus on investing in companies and organizations that aim to improve society. Netherlands-based Triodos Bank only invests in sustainable initiatives, assessing how they will improve society before determining their financial viability. The bank has also abolished bonuses to ensure that employees (or "co-workers" as they are called at Triodos) are not financially incentivized to make unsustainable decisions.

From profit first to society first

The shift from a profit-first perspective to a society-first one requires longer time horizons, as well as innovation in companies' products and business models. Companies are quick to innovate if this increases short-term profitability, as we saw with the development of mortgage bonds and derivatives that led to the global financial crisis. But now firms need to start focusing on innovations that actually improve society. By extending the timeframe for returns on investment and prioritizing sustainability over profitability, firms can help promote a flourishing future for themselves and the societies around them.

Francisco Szekely is the Sandoz Family Foundation Professor of Leadership and Sustainability and Director of the Global Center



Insight

Absinthe: the green muse

GENEVA For centuries, poets and artists lauded the strong liqueur, known as the “green fairy”, for its inspirational powers, while authorities banned it as a cause of madness, murder and moral degeneracy.

There should be no concerns, however, about the drink’s 21st-century comeback. Legal in Switzerland since 2005, it was sanctioned in European Union countries in 1988, except for France. There is no evidence absinthe is more intoxicating than other alcoholic beverages consumed in excess. According to popular legend, absinthe was created in the Swiss town of Couvet in the Val-de-Travers (NE) in the late 18th century as a medicinal elixir. Historians differ as to whether it was invented by a French doctor living in Couvet, Dr Pierre Ordinaire, or by the two Henroid sisters, who sold their formula to Henry-Louis Pernod. He opened the first absinthe distillery in Couvet in 1797 and a second one in Pontarlier, France in 1805 under the company name Maison Pernod Fils.

Absinthe was banned in France in 1915 because of its alleged harmful effects and a sensational murder

The green 60-70% proof elixir was given as a fever preventative in the 1840s to French troops, who brought back their taste for the spirit from campaigns in Indo-china. By the 1860s absinthe had become so popular with the bourgeoisie and bohemian artists that it was considered France’s favourite drink. The reputation that it made people crazy was popularised in the Edgar Degas painting *The Absinthe Drinker* and Émile Zola’s treatise on alcoholism, *L’assommoir*.

Produced in Switzerland for more than two centuries, absinthe was banned in 1910 because of its alleged harmful effects. France followed suit in 1915 (only re-legalising it in 2011!). Absinthe continued to be made clandestinely by several women in the Val-de-Travers, who had inherited the



Absinthe has inspired artists for centuries

original recipe and kept the tradition alive. The label absinthe Suisse has long been used in France to indicate the highest quality. Claude-Alain Bugnon of Couvet, who knew the nephew of one of the Val-de-Travers women, Charlotte Vaucher, was among the first to come out into the open when the nearly century-old Swiss ban was lifted. Today his Distillery-Artemisia produces several different types and colours of absinthe, including the appropriately named *La Clandestine*.

“The traditional recipe remains in the hands of older people who had it handed down to them for generations,” Bugnon explained. “They modified it over the years because we have different tastes today. The original plant, artemisia absinthium (wormwood), is quite bitter and we now mix it with other plants to make a better tasting drink.” The current white absinthe is believed to have originated in the clandestine period when distillers produced a spirit, which contains no sugar, to fool customs into thinking it was another colourless eau-de-vie. The Swiss add sugar only to the classic *fée vert* absinthe, which has a higher alcoholic content (70%), and is diluted with water like its cousin Pernod.

Pamela Taylor



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Lifestyle

Au pairing: maybe?

Two popular misconceptions exist when talking about au pairing. One is based on gender bias; the other is that it's not a "proper" job.

Reality poses an altogether different take. Living and working abroad while being entrusted with a parent's most precious possession, their children, is no laughing matter. Nor is it one necessarily reserved for women. Mix this with cultural immersion, learning a new language, and simply being away from home for long periods of time, and one is offered an insight into the unique universe of the au pair.

A good au pairing experience can be life-changing. While most are girls, boys are increasingly trying the experience. Take Alejandro Rico de Miguel, a Spanish industrial design graduate, who began work as an au pair for a family living in France close to the Swiss border last November. Within the household, Alex's au pairing job is treated as such: a job. Despite having had to navigate a bureaucratic quagmire of paperwork, Alejandro stresses that "my role is clearly defined and legally recognised by the French authorities." In Switzerland, it is the Federal Office for Migration that provides the requisite guidelines ensuring a correct salary, holidays and the description of duties to be carried out by the appointee. These are rules that both sides need to respect.

Respect for such clauses, however, is by no means automatic. Many stories conjure a totally different reality to that of Alejandro's. One problem is the legal and financial cleavage between being a domestic helper and an au pair – a subtlety too little understood by many host

families. Not being paid properly and lacking legal status are unfortunately some of the risks people take when accepting an au pair position. Au pairing is often considered – wrongly – an ad hoc profession, causing commonplace misdemeanours detrimental both to the individual and those aspiring to work in foreign countries as au pairs. It also prevents potentially positive experiences, such as Alejandro's, from happening more often. As he touchingly points out, "this opportunity has enabled me to integrate into a family which I have ended up loving and caring for almost as much as my own."

Information:

EU/Swiss regulations have many stipulations, including that the host family must pay for health insurance and a language course.

Safety: When setting up a match with your host family online, beware of scams. Look for warning signs such as families asking for money, a deposit, or your personal documents (passport/driving licence), and suspicious emails. Contact the matching site for advice and to alert them.

Visas: Depending on what country you are from or going to, you may need a visa. Check out the guidelines on the consulate's website and remember to apply in advance!

Help: Do not hesitate to contact your parents, the agency, your teachers if you are studying, or even the police. Do not suffer in silence!

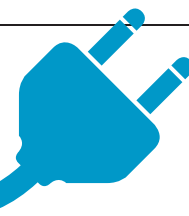
For reputable family matching sites: However no site is 100% secure; always be aware of potential scams.

www.greataupair.com
www.thebestaupair.com
www.rockmybaby.ch

Christopher Woodburn and Jennifer Rose



Plugged in



Is originality dead?

Listening to another number one hit, with the same bass drum beat and familiar guitar riffs, the resemblance to the previous track is often uncanny. In today's high-paced world, there is a lot of demand for entertainment en masse. This is especially true in the music industry, where pop songs are released with remarkable frequency. I must admit that I am no exception, and do enjoy listening to eerily similar music. However, does this mean that we're losing the essence of what music is supposed to be – an expression of individuality?

Chords create the overall feeling and mood of the piece and form the basis for the melody. In much of today's music the same chord sequence is used in large numbers of songs, since these have provided the secret for many a number one. If you listen to '4 Chords' from the Axis of Awesome, this is all too clear to hear. The number of songs that now use this as a technique is astonishing and has led to a similar sounding style. This means that when listening to songs in a row, apart from the different voices, it can be incredibly difficult to distin-

guish one from the other. It's so rare to hear a truly new style that when it does come along we're all taken by surprise. This could be a catalyst for a new trend, but surely, as soon as others in the business realise that this music has become an instant hit, they will attempt to follow. So the concept of originality is compromised, even though one person did have an inspirational flare, all too often their art is lost within a mass of similar items.

There are artists who found fame because their music was so distinctive, with Elvis Presley and Queen being good examples. Love them or hate them, their music stood out at the time. Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody' was such a new concept when it was first released, it captured everyone's attention. This originality, as well as quality, meant that the song has gone down in musical history. When originality does strike, it is truly refreshing and may be considered the essential ingredient required to create a long-term hit. Sadly, it is something that many of today's artists lack.

Natasha Tomkinson

Cool in sites

lenews.ch/coolinsites

Pimp that snack

Among other astonishing recipes, this site teaches how to make a Philip Burger. If you eat one by yourself in under an hour, Le News will pay for it.

pimpthatsnack.com/project/481/

manbabies.com

Create your own Manbaby. Just swap the heads of a father and his baby and post it up for a good, honest bit of humiliating fun!

manbabies.com/

Property

Swiss real estate: slowing but still risky

ZURICH Buying a house or a flat in Switzerland is a less attractive proposition now than it has been in the last 10 years.

While property values have reached a high, according to the UBS Real Estate Focus Report 2014 earlier this week, there has been a decline in momentum, which could mean that residential prices will fall. Commercial real estate values are also expected to drop. The report maintained that the average price growth for housing real estate fell slightly last year because apartments grew by only 3.5%, less than the 10-year average. Prices for single-family homes, on the other hand, rose 4.5% in 2013, slightly more than the year before. Overall, however, price growth has slowed, due to factors such as the doubling of long-term interest rates, the introduction of the anti-cyclical capital buffer (to ensure that banks have enough capital to weather another financial crisis), and tougher minimum standards in mortgage lending.

"We do not expect an across-the-board correction in home prices this year despite the weaker impetus from key market drivers."

"Momentum may be slowing, but that cannot hide the fact that risks have continued to rise. Inflation-adjusted real estate prices are only roughly 5% lower than in 1989, when the last real-estate bubble burst in Switzerland," Claudio Saputelli and Daniel Kalt wrote in the UBS report. They added that prices are still climbing faster than rents, household incomes, and consumer prices. "Nevertheless, we do not expect an across-the-board correction in home prices this year despite the weaker impetus from key market drivers (population growth, economic growth and interest rates)."

Instead, UBS forecasts weak price growth of 2% for single-family homes and condominiums in 2014. Political



Regional property prices mean that buying is still a good idea in the medium term.

decisions on immigration, interest rates and the potential tightening of lending conditions will determine whether the market's current calm will degenerate into a correction phase in 2015. "A credit squeeze would bring the risk of an abrupt drop in prices. Failing a slump in demand, however, there is a risk that real estate prices could soar to dizzying heights," the report said. However, if the macroeconomic picture does not change, the Swiss home-owned housing market (as opposed to the rental market) should get a big enough boost to mean that buying is still a good idea in the medium term.

At the same time, this would build up "enormous risks for the economy". Office valuations have also climbed to lofty heights in recent years, pushing net initial yields for prime locations to a historic low of 3%. This trend is driven by strong growth in lease prices. However, rental revenue is not expected to grow in the near future because there are so many construction projects going on, which is likely to reduce occupancy. UBS expects the vacancy rate of rented accommodation to increase by 1.2% by 2015. Retail properties are forecast to develop along similar lines. Swiss retailers are struggling to increase nominal revenues due to steep price reductions for consumer goods, and are thus less willing to pay for retail space.

Moyette Marrett

Simply Theatre Productions Presents

James and the Giant PEACH

by Roald Dahl
Adapted for the stage by David Wood

18th JANUARY - 9th FEBRUARY 2014

Simply Theatre Productions
creating the scene

Simply Theatre Studios, Main House
Avenue de Choiseul, Versoix
www.simplytheatre.com
022 860 05 18

Travel

Up, up and away at Château-d'Oex!

For tourists, newcomers or natives, the much-loved, winter time Château-d'Oex balloon festival is compulsory!

The annual international event takes flight on 25 January to 2 February with breath-taking performances including races and air shows. In accordance with the international theme of the World Cup in Brazil, assistant coach to the Swiss football team Michel Pont, alongside former footballers, Köbi Kuhn and Ottmar Hitzfeld, will open the week-long event, which attracts 50,000 spectators annually.

The inventive, traditional races are a marvel. In the Don Quichotte race, competitors gracefully manoeuvre their balloons to be the first to burst helium balloons with spears. The Hare and Hounds race involves pilots ("hounds") chasing the "hare" balloon,

and dropping markers as near as possible to a target. During the week there will be many other flights, some featuring balloons shaped as cats, ducks and even Miss Piggy!

As well as the famous balloon racing, a number of other spectacles such as aerobatic flying, sky chariots and airships will scatter the skies. Professional pilot Jérôme Cusin presents "Vultige Unlimited Freestyle," a show including flight sequences in an Extra 330 SC, the aeroplane equivalent of an F1 car and winner of the world championships in 2009. Single-seater balloons, or "sky chariots," equipped with a gas canister on which the pilot is seated, are small, light craft whose course is mainly dictated by the winds. In contrast are the gigantic thermal airships – the cruise liners of the skies – gliding gracefully into the winds against the alpine backdrop.

It is possible to take balloon flights or even a helicopter tour above the

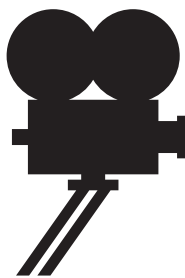


Surreal balloons, and colour dotted skies make the balloon festival a magical day out.

Pays-d'Enhaut. However, this doesn't come cheaply – tickets for the 45-minute balloon flight are CHF 350 for adults and CHF 175 for children. As a spectator, entry is free during the week, and at the weekend tickets cost CHF 15

for adults and are free for under 14s. For more information about the festival and booking tickets, visit www.festival-deballons.ch/ or call 026 924 25 25.

Jennifer Rose



FILM REVIEWS

By Neptune



WAKOLDA ★ ★ ★

(The German Doctor/Le médecin de famille)

(vo Spanish & German)

Release: 8/1

As the film starts - with a good-looking doctor (Alex Brendemühl) who comes into the lives of an Argentinean family, because of his interest in their little girl's small stature - we feel we're watching a social drama unfold in the 1960s. But this is no ordinary doctor; he is German and quite a notorious one at that, unbe-

knownst to the family. In the meantime, there is a woman in the area who seems to be searching for Nazis hiding in South America. In the invigorating Patagonian landscape there are definitely sinister goings-on and we are witness to the possible capture of Josef Mengele. Argentinean director Lucia Puenzo creates a tense atmosphere around the troubled family, the close-knit German colony, the enigmatic doctor and his hunters, weaving it all into this fascinating thriller that hopes to represent Argentina at the Oscars.

PHILOMENA ★ ★ ★

Release: 8/1

Veteran British director Stephen Frears is both prolific and amazingly versatile (from the grungy *My Beautiful Launderette* in 1985, through period drama in *Dangerous Liaisons* and his superb *The Queen*, among his many works), and his films are almost always excellent. Here, he tackles the true story of a mother's search for her long-lost son, based on the book by BBC correspondent

Martin Sixsmith. This gripping tale has it all: the duplicity and harshness of the Catholic Church (like that other outstanding film, *The Magdalene Sisters*); a jaded journalist's awakening to both the meat and morals of a story; gay issues; a provincial woman's discovering a wider world; and above all, a mother's unending love. Judy Dench portrays Philomena - as always sublime and already in the running for a series of best actress awards.



Education & Technology

Choosing a school in the Lake Geneva region

GENEVA English-speaking families are often overwhelmed by which option to choose for their children: a local Swiss or French school, or an international one with English only, or bilingual options. The same goes for Germans, Italians, Dutch and other nationalities.

The Lake Geneva region is an exciting place for education because of the variety of systems available. For those considering either French or English, or both, the choice is even wider, and includes the possibility of selecting another national language alongside French. This is one of half a dozen programmes, including Spanish, Swedish, Italian and Dutch, offered by Ferney Voltaire's International Lycée, a state-funded public school, or the German Gymnasium in Geneva. Both are among the highest rated such institutions in Europe.

For those living in Switzerland, the fundamental choices are between public or private education; anglophone, francophone or bilingual; followed by Swiss, French, British, International, or American curricula. Obviously, opting for a state-run school (where "state" means "canton", such as Geneva or Vaud) implies a Swiss curriculum. Expat parents are often wary of Swiss schools as they are not familiar with the systems or because everything is in French. They may also draw comparisons with their own country, where state schools are often poor, particularly in the US. Switzerland regularly ranks in the top 10 of international education surveys, such as the recent OECD PISA ratings.

Switzerland's eight years of pre- and primary schooling focuses on academic and social foundations, with children streamed as young as 12 years for their final three years of compulsory education. This may seem like an elitist method, but the levels are fluid. Students can move up or down throughout the school year depending on their performance. From primary

school onwards, teachers assess their work through regular grades, so consistent effort is rewarded rather than last-minute exam revision. By the age of 15, students from any stream will normally have studied German for up to seven years and English for up to five.

Post-15 choices are varied and cater for all levels. There are three paths: academic, general or professional, all of which can lead to further specialisation or careers. In 2012, according to Geneva government statistics, 95% of 15-year-olds and 71.5% of 18-year-olds were still in education. Unlike in other, more rural parts of Switzerland, as many as one third of Genevois follow the academic route towards university. This takes four years leading to the Maturité Gymnasiale diploma. During this period, students study 11 core subjects, two options and two introductory courses, and produce a research project, usually an extended essay. With languages representing 30-40% of the programme, students may take one of their languages to a higher level. Whether it is French, English, German, Italian or Spanish, students are required to eventually read and analyse literature in the target language.

The Swiss academic route is best suited to all-rounders, who are comfortable in all aspects of the curriculum, whether arts or sciences, and who perform well throughout the school year. Vital, too, is the ability to absorb substantial amounts of information. All of these readily open the doors to university or college education throughout the world. The earlier stages provide a sound basis for general knowledge and allow for a wider choice of paths. The alternatives to the academic route are just as valid and lead to interesting careers and well-paid jobs. So, why not give Swiss schools a proper look?

Sabine Hutcheson



The region offers a variety of world-class school systems.



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- + Saturday, March 22nd
- + Saturday, April 12th

BULLE CAMPUS

- + Saturday, February 22nd

For more information on our programs and campuses, please contact our Regional Admissions Manager, **Gregoire Pittet**:

+41 (0)21 989 26 85 / gregoire.pittet@laureate.ch

GLION.EDU

Classifieds

LE MOTOR SELL



Motorbike for sale

Yamaha Fazer 600 cc. Silver. 30,500 km, 1st registered in May 2008, expertisé in Dec 2011. Price CHF 3,000.

Contact : lan@scotskirklausanne.ch or tel 021 323 98 28

L'EDUCATION

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DIY and gardening

Serious person offering weekend DIY and gardening (incl. mowing, strimming, wood-cutting), Pays de Gex and Geneva region. Good prices, if interested please contact Chris at cw12846@my.bristol.ac.uk, tel: 0041762275641



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L'Age d'Or, in the heart of Vevey - Modern as well as timeless jewelry and watches. Quality customer service in English and in French, and an in-house service centre for jewelry, watch and clock repairs and alterations. Horlogerie-Bijouterie L'Age d'Or-Vevey. 021 921 18 13 www.agedor.ch

LES POSITIONS VACANT

Sonographer wanted.

We use Easote MyLab25Gold equipment. You will be trained. West Lausanne.
Beate Keisa, +44 752 844 1672

Home help wanted

Girl Friday required, large house, West Lausanne. Part of team. £500/week. Beate Keisa +44 752 844 1672

Nurse required

West Lausanne. SRN / SEN preferred, but will consider others. £800/week. Beate Keisa +44 752 844 1672

Doctor wanted

Full time, will train you to eradicate cancer using ultrasonography, and later set you up in your own clinic. West Lausanne.
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LE MEET

Anyone fancy drinks out / dinner out

Dinner and drinks at our place in West Lausanne? Beate Keisa +44 752 844 1672

LES ARTS

The 9th Geneva Writers' Conference

begins on January 31 through February 2, featuring top notch guest instructors and panelists from the US, UK, Italy, Switzerland and elsewhere. Participants from the Geneva area hail from over 20 different countries. It's not too late to register at conference@genevawritersgroup.org or check out our website at www.genevawritersgroup.org.

LE MISCELLANEOUS

Scots Kirk Business Network - Presentation and networking event

Thursday 20th February at 19.30
«Organisational cultures» - Alfred Collander
The presentation will be followed by a networking Apéro. The event is free although donations are requested to cover the cost of refreshments. Guests are warmly encouraged to attend. St Andrew's House, The Scots Kirk, Avenue de Rumine 26, Lausanne. Please register by emailing: skbn@scotskirklausanne.ch.

Lutheran Church of Geneva

Switzerland's only English-speaking Lutheran Church is located in Geneva's Old Town on the Place Bourg-de-Four at 20, rue Verdaine. Worship Sundays at 11h00. Worship, Bible studies, children's education, retreats and more. www.genevalutheran.ch 022 310 50 89 pastor@genevalutheran.ch



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www.livinginnyon.com

Local events in Nyon area, photos, articles, interviews, frequently asked questions.

"Living along Lac Léman": see website to purchase

Readers are asked to note that Le News cannot accept responsibility for the quality, safe delivery or operation of any products or services advertised or mentioned in this newspaper. Responsible precautions are taken before advertisements are accepted but such acceptance does not imply any form of approval or recommendation. Advertisements or other material are accepted subject to the approval of the publisher and its terms and conditions. The publisher will accept an advertisement or other only on the condition that the advertiser warrants that such advertisement does not infringe copyright or contravene the provisions of the trade descriptions legislation. All copy is subject to the approval of the publisher, who reserves the right to refuse, amend, withdraw or otherwise deal with advertisements submitted to it at its absolute discretion and without explanation. All advertisements must comply with the Swiss Code of Advertising Practice. Mail order advertisers are required to state in advertisements to the public the true surname or company name, together with the address from which the business is managed.

Regional Events

Lausanne, VD MARINATAL

24-26 January

16th edition of Marinatal, the biggest wedding exhibition in Suisse Romande and will feature more than 80 exhibitors. 9 superb parades will take place, lasting about 45 minutes each: Friday: 17h, 19h Saturday: 11h, 14h, 19h Sunday: 11h, 13h30, 16h General opening hours: Friday: 16h-21h Saturday: 10h-20h Sunday: 10h-18h Entrance fee: 15.-/adult; Children free up to age 14 Also look out for other wedding exhibitions in Bern and Basel on their website.

Location
Palais de Beaulieu, Lausanne, VD
www.marinatal-lausanne.ch



Versois, GE LAN PARTY

25-26 January, 8h-18h

The ludothèque in Versois will celebrate its 30th birthday in 2014, and to mark this occasion it will hold a number of special events throughout the year. The first of these will be the LAN party, which will aim to demystify video games!

Location
Salle communale de Versois
Salle Lachenal
Rte de Saint-Loup 12
1290 Versois
www.lan22.ch/fr



Morges, VD CARLA BRUNI

25 January

Beausobre welcomes, for the first time in Switzerland, the former first lady of France, and model: Carla Bruni. Her new album entitled "Little French Song" is typical of her original songs. Ticket price: Fr. 68.-.

Location
Théâtre de Beausobre
Avenue de Vertou 2
1110 Morges
021 804 97 16
www.beausobre.ch



Annecy, France BROCANTE ET MARCHE DE L'ART

25 January, 8h-17h

Annecy hosts their monthly antiques market every last Saturday of the month throughout the old town. If the weather is nice, you will be sure to find some great buys. Make sure to get there early as it is a busy shopping day. Park in one of the underground parking lots and make sure to go along the pedestrian zone which is also full of great shops!

Location
Annecy
France
www.lac-annecy.com



Château-d'Oex, VD HOT AIR BALLOON FESTIVAL

25 January to 2 February

The International Hot-Air Balloon Festival in Château-d'Oex is a meeting place of aerostiers from over twenty countries. Nearly a hundred hot-air balloons take advantage of the exceptional winter climate in the Alps. The first international meeting was organized in 1979. The festival draws large crowds who come to see the flights and the sound. You can also reserve a flight through the website. Fr. 15.- weekends, free during the week.

Location
1660 Château-d'Oex
www.festivaldeballons.ch/en/



Nyon, VD PUCES DE NYON

26 January

Almost every last Sunday of the month Nyon hosts a bountiful flea market selling everything including the kitchen sink! A nice Sunday stroll for those of you digesting a big lunch at one of the many fine restaurants in Nyon! If parking is full at La Duche, then try to park up the hill in Perdtemps and walk down. Make sure to dress warmly as this is right on the lake. If the weather is poor or windy, there might not be enough vendors to make it worth going.

Location
Nyon lakeside
1260 Nyon
www.comoncity.ch/ass-com10/marche_puces.html



Vevey, VD HOMAGE TO COLE PORTER: INTERPRETATIONS V

26 January, 16h

Another occasion to enjoy the arts. Wolfgang Hanninger and Jerome Jeanrenaud, on saxophone and piano respectively will continue with this series of concerts. A nice way to ease into the end of the weekend and set you up for Monday!

Location
LAC
8 ruelle des Anciens Fossés
1800 Vevey
www.rammerink.com
www.lacvevey.ch



Gland, VD ENSEMBLE BAROQUE DU LEMAN

26 January, 17h

Directed by Roberto Gini with soloist Isabelle Poulenard, soprano. 26 musicians with trumpets, tunes and dances of the 17th century as well as a demonstration of ancient dances.

Location
Théâtre de Grand Champ
Chemin de la Serine 2
1196 Gland
022 354 04 19
www.gland.ch



Founex, VD INTERSOCCER ADULT INDOOR WINTER LEAGUE : TRIAL SESSION

30 January

Want to get involved in a 5-a-side football league this winter? You can join up with your own team, play with your mates, enter your own work team or just turn up on your own & link up with another team. Adults only! Men and women welcome to try out. Enjoy from every Thursday night.

Location
La Chataigneraie campus
1297 Founex
www.intersoccer.ch



9th GENEVA WRITERS' CONFERENCE

January 31 to February 2

Over two hundred writers from around the world to a week-end of workshops, panels, readings and networking, led by well-known authors, agents, editors, and publishers.

Location
Webster University
Bellevue, GE



These events have been recommended by Know-it-all passport!
More events on: www.knowitall.ch

Local Community Groups & Associations

CLUBS AND GROUPS

Geneva Ballet Fitness

Exercise class based on dance training. Led by a small group of ex-dancers who invite all dancers, ex-dancers and beginners to join an English-speaking group to get fit, increase your flexibility and meet others! Check out their calendar at www.meetup.com/Ballet-Fitness-Geneva/

Geneva Serve the City

Organization run by volunteers to serve the poor and marginalized. Partnering with homeless shelters, refugee centres and orphanages, Serve the City is looking for new volunteers. Visit www.servethecity-geneva.ch to get involved.

Lausanne Le Petit théâtre

Amateur dramatics in French hosting five productions per year. New members welcome. Or if you prefer being in the audience, season tickets are available! Based at Place de la Cathédrale 12, 1005, Lausanne. Telephone +41 (0)210875112 or email info@lepetittheatre.ch.

Nyon CinéClub

Offers a selection of great international films on Mondays at 20:00. This non-profit club is open to suggestions for possible screenings in its two theatres. At 5 Rue Neuve, 1260 Nyon or find us at informations@cineclubnyon.ch.

HELP AND SUPPORT

Geneva and Lausanne

Overeaters Anonymous

Support group for those suffering or supporting persons with bulimia, anorexia and eating disorders. English-speaking meetings are held regularly in Geneva and Lausanne usually on Monday 18:45-19:45 and Saturday 08:30-09:30 at Emmanuel Church, 3 Rue de Monthoux, Geneva. Visit www.aa.org for more information.

Vaud abC Centre for Anorexia and Bulimia

Provides specialty care and support for adolescents and adults with anorexia nervosa and/or bulimia and those with anxiety or obsession concerning food consumption. An interdisciplinary team tackles psychological, physical, nutritional and social aspects of these complex conditions to provide personal care. Call 0848 282 282 or visit www.chuv.ch/abc for details.

Website Depression Understood

The website offers a supportive network from those suffering from depression and anxiety. It provides a platform through which like-minded people can communicate and offer peer support to one another. Crisis hotline: 143. Visit <http://www.depression-understood.org> to get involved.

Vaud Association of Diabetes

As a member of the Swiss Association of Diabetes, this group provides information that helps improve the quality of life of people with diabetes with special diabetes focused consultations and information sessions. Based at Avenue de Provence 12, Lausanne call 021 657 19 20 or e-mail info@diabetes-vaud.ch for more information.

New Groups and Associations

Any group that wishes to raise its profile is welcome to submit an entry for free to Le News on a first come first served basis. Only entries from charities and not-for-profit organizations will be accepted. Entries must be no more than 50 words long and they must not fundraise, sell or promote events. Priority will be given to new organizations.

Cracking up

Of suitcases and sandcastles

Luggage is what you make of it, not the customs people. Robyn Goss writes on what it means to return home with things that your husband may resent carrying. But then, he really doesn't have a say, does he?

Nyon The day we came back to Switzerland from our Christmas holiday in South Africa, I opened my toiletry bag and a bucket's worth of beach sand fell out onto the bathroom floor.

"Oh," said the smaller child, eyeing it sadly. 'It was a sandcastle when I put it in there.'

She wasn't the only one who had issues with her luggage.

"Why do we need seven packets of powdered jelly and three litres of Dettol?" my husband had asked, surveying our suitcases the night before we flew back to Europe.

"I can't get them in Switzerland," I answered.

"And the nine notebooks? Can't you find paper in Switzerland?"

"These feel nicer to write in than other books."

"And all those giant balls of red wool? Can you explain those?"

"I could. But as you can see, I'm busy trying to fit a plaster mould of an impala's hoof print into this suitcase," I replied



patiently.

He looked forlornly at the pile of bags that he was going to have to drag through three airports and two train stations.

"Why can't we just smuggle in wine and biltong like any other South African?"

Frankly, given his heritage, I expected more from him. His father: now there's a man who isn't afraid of baggage. He has distributed to the corners of the earth, among other things, a beaded wire sheep (large), a decorative baobab tree (small but inconveniently shaped) and a bolt of shweshwe fabric (starched and completely unyielding). And my mother-in-law is no suitcase slouch either; the last Christmas cake she brought over was so enormous that we

enjoyed a slice with tea every day for months.

Anyway, I pointed out to my shirking husband, I wasn't the only one to blame for those bulging suitcases. With a joyful disregard for Lufthansa's weight limitations, our South African friends and family showered us with gifts, including 18 books, two bath towels, a full set of table linen and a music box. And a violin.

All of this was in addition to a ridiculously large toy monkey that the bigger child never leaves home without, and all the heavy jackets and snow boots we'd need back in Switzerland.

My husband did lug it all home, albeit with very bad grace. And I'm pleased to report that last week he was proven wrong by my dear friends, the

ladies of the High Mileage Nordic Walking Club: it turns out that I was, in fact, not the only person bringing home what he so unkindly termed "random crap".

Laura From England flew back with 30 plastic Disney plates, and the entire M&S lingerie department. Sandy The Other South African imported several boxes of beeswax lip balm.

"It's the only one that isn't addictive," she told us. "I can't live without it!"

But it was Elsa From Germany who surprised us the most. She brought a month's supply of Lindt chocolates. Back to Switzerland.

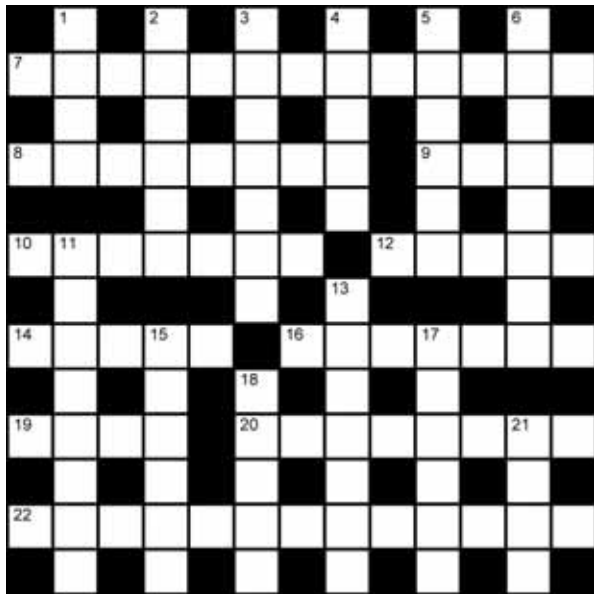
"You do realise..." I began.

"Yes, yes, I know. I can get it here. But ... it's not the same."

And that's the truth of it. No matter how it may look to the customs officials, it's not really the jelly/baobab tree/five kilogrammes of mosaic tiles that matters so much. It's what it represents: home; something familiar; something we loved and didn't want to leave behind. Just like my daughter, sitting with her friends under a hot South African sky and stuffing sandcastles into my suitcase.

Robyn Goss is a South African writer, recently moved to Switzerland. You can read her blogs at www.robbygoss.com

Puzzles



QUICK CROSSWORD

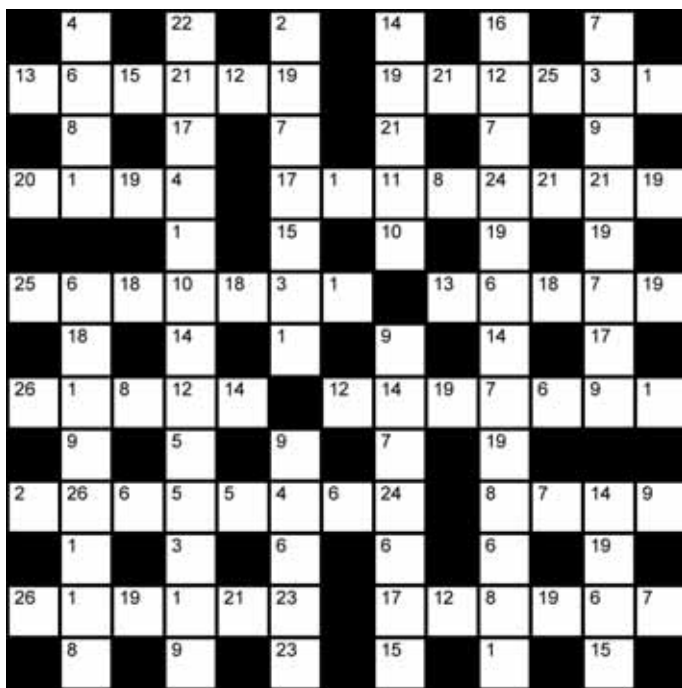
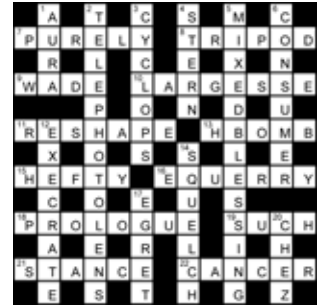
ACROSS

- 7 Pleasure ground (9,4)
- 8 Postpone (8)
- 9 Belonging to us (4)
- 10 Reuse (7)
- 12 A pariah who is avoided by others (5)
- 14 Forbidden fruit (5)
- 16 Elaborately or excessively ornamented (7)
- 19 An established custom (4)
- 20 Sovereign prince (8)
- 22 Pool table for serious players (8,5)

DOWN

- 1 Arab chieftain (4)
- 2 Sea eagle (6)
- 3 Illegally import (7)
- 4 Beginning (5)
- 5 Resist strongly (6)
- 6 Salacious (8)
- 11 Exaggerated elation (8)
- 13 Self-annihilation (7)
- 15 Small in quantity (6)
- 17 Make lovable (6)
- 18 Primary (5)
- 21 Furnace (4)

Last week's solution



CODEWORDS

Each letter has been replaced by the same number throughout the puzzle. Simply decide which letter is represented by which number and complete the puzzle. To start off we're given you the first three letters.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
				Z								V
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
											H	

What's On

Artgenève at Palexpo

In its third year, artgenève (on from 30 January to 2 February), offers any art lover or collector a deluge of contemporary and modern art and design. With the aim of establishing an avant-garde artistic platform in Suisse Romande, artgenève features works from international galleries and public and private collections.

The show also features special exhibitions including Conversation Piece, a collection comprising pieces submitted by various galleries that provoke discussion; and My Joy, a collection inspired by the Russian film, which explores Russian culture and society and its sometime paradoxical nature.

On Friday, president of the artgenève committee and curator of the Néons Parallax project will host a guided tour from 18h00 to 20h00 of the nine public art neon installations installed around Plainpalais. The signs are placed on the rooftops of buildings and have been contributed by artists such as Sylvie Fleury, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Nic Hess.

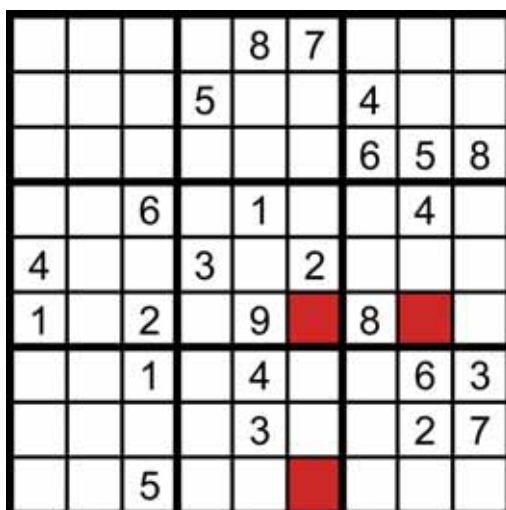
Opening hours are from 12h00 to 20h00 from Thursday to Sunday. Tickets are CHF 20 for adults, CHF 12



for groups (minimum 20 people) and CHF 10 for seniors, students and children under 16. Under 6s go for free.

In addition, there is a free exhibition outside Palexpo that aims to bring art to the wider public (30 January from 21h00 at 42 rue du Rhône at the former ABC cinema). This will involve a video presentation of the works of a selection of artists such as Sebastian Diaz Morales, Cao Fei and Wang Jianwei. Le News has a number of free tickets for readers. Email: prizes@lenews.ch

Jennifer Rose



SUDOKU

Easy

Enter numbers into the blank spaces so that each row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

Win!

Sudoku: Send us the three numbers in the shaded squares for a chance to win CHF 10.00. The first correct answer drawn will win. Email: prizes@lenews.ch
Code word: Send us the three letters in the shaded squares for a chance to win CHF 10.00. The first correct answer drawn will win. Email: prizes@lenews.ch

Weather

SUISSE ROMANDE



GENEVA



LAUSANNE



SNOW REPORT - ON THE SLOPES

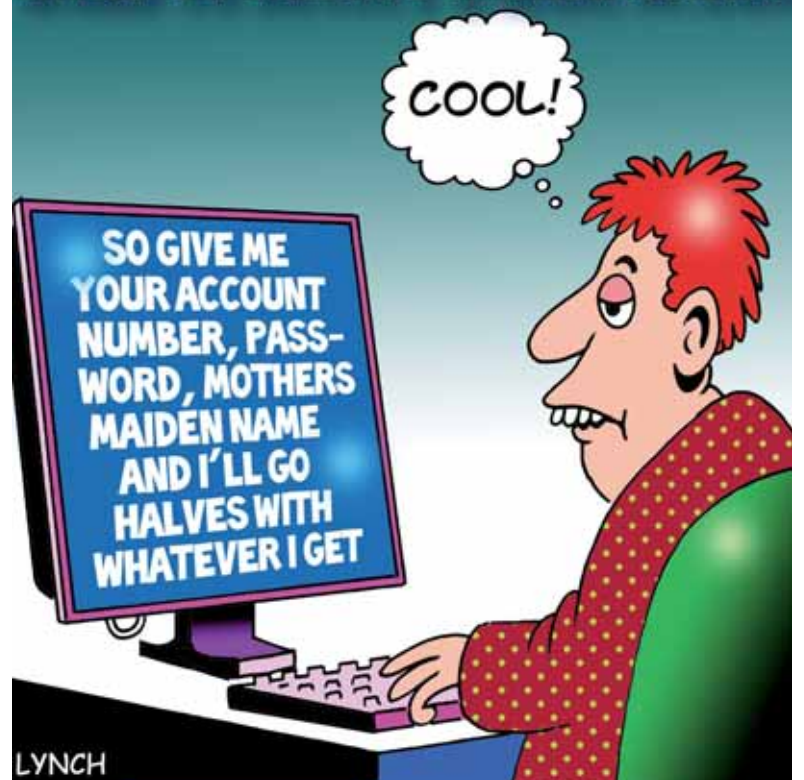
Verbier	119 cm	Crans Montana	150 cm	Les Rousses	100 cm
Villars	100 cm	Château d'Oex	50 cm	Chamonix	150 cm
Leysin	90 cm	Les Crosets	100 cm	Morzine	190 cm



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