



St. Gallen is the most eastern province in Switzerland. It's also the most populated with over 180,000 residents, but you would never know it from traveling around the countryside with its forests, grazing cows, and rolling hills that look like someone comes out every night and dusts them off. Neatness is very important in Switzerland.

To get a sense that there are actually more people than cows you need to go into the area's capital city. The capital city of St. Gallen, is called St. Gallen, which can be confusing but very efficient. Like New York, New York.

But St. Gallen was into efficiency for at least a thousand years before anyone heard of New York. And they are presently in the process of celebrating that history.

It all started in 612, when a wandering Irish monk by the name of Gallus was passing through eastern Switzerland and decided that this was his kind of neighborhood. It was cold, it was barren, it was gray---it was miserable, and that was just what he was looking for. Because in those days, in order to have great accommodations in the after-life you had to have miserable accommodations in this one.

Over the years Gallus developed a substantial following, and after his death a Benedictine Abbey was founded on the spot where he died. Gallus was sainted and within two hundred years the abbey became one of the most powerful monasteries in Europe. It was the most important educational institution north of the Alps.

The room where the abbey scribes worked



became one of the most famous libraries. It was built in 1758 and contains more than 150,000 books from and about the Middle Ages. The books are arranged according to different scientific fields of study. It's still a working library for scholars studying the Middle Ages. This library is considered to be the cradle of the German language. It was here that Latin was first translated and written in the German dialect. Before the St. Gallen translations, German was spoken but not written.

HISTORY OF EMBROIDERY

The environment inside the abbey might have been magnificent but the surroundings outside were still pretty rough. At 700 meters above sea level the only crops that grew well were flax and hemp which the monks used to weave linen. They also taught the local population how to weave.



During the early 1700s, the St. Gallen weavers saw how Turkish hand-embroiderers decorated the silks that were being sold in Europe, and they decided to embroider the fabrics made in St. Gallen. By the end of the 1700s, over 40,000 embroiderers were working in eastern Switzerland. By the middle of the 1800s, the town of St. Gallen had become the world epicenter for embroidery—and it still is. There are several great embroidery houses in St. Gallen and each has a different approach to the art.

During the 1860s, craftsmen in Switzerland developed a mechanized loom. It utilized a combination of continuously threaded needles and a shuttle containing a bobbin of thread. The shuttle was shaped like the hull of a boat. In the Swiss German language, the word for

WHERE TO STAY



HOTEL EINSTEIN
BERNEGGSTRASSE 2
CH-9000 ST. GALLEN
SWITZERLAND
TEL: 011 41 (0)71 227 55 55
WWW.EINSTEIN.CH

little boat is Schiffli and the mechanism became famous as the “Schiffli machine”.

When the first large embroidery machines were built in St. Gallen, these elaborate fabrics were suddenly available at a much lower price than ever before. Today about 65 percent of embroidered fabrics are produced for generally affordable items, particularly lingerie.

About 35 percent of St. Gallen’s embroidery goes to the fashion industry for the creation of haute couture and prêt-a-porter clothing by the great designers.

But I was surprised to find out that almost all of the embroidery designs are developed not by the fashion houses that design the clothing, but by the embroidery companies.

Humans have been embroidering fabric for thousands of years. The ancient Egyptians and the Babylonians embroidered their robes. During the Middle Ages ecclesiastical clothing was embroidered. And by the early 1300s successful merchants were into embroidered clothing because it was an unmistakable sign of their wealth.

One of the great inspirations for new designs are the embroidery house libraries. Bischoff Textile is a great embroidery house in St. Gallen and it is famous for its textile library.



AKRIS

St. Gallen’s thousand year history in textiles eventually led to the development of its own couture fashion house. It’s called AKRIS.



AKRIS was founded in 1922 by Alice Kriemler-Schock. Her children had grown up and gone off on their own. She re-channeled her energy into designing aprons that she sold to her friends. Eventually the demand for her work developed into a small manufacturing company. When her children entered the business it became a producer of high quality ready-to-wear for the great designers in Paris.

In 1982, Alice’s grandson Albert was brought into design their own label under the AKRIS name. The drawing and the fabric are discussed with the tailor and developed into a three dimensional model. Albert is always mindful of St. Gallen’s history in embroidery. His signature clothes use both classic embroidery and modern fabrics. Twenty-five percent of the manufacturing process for an AKRIS garment still requires highly specialized handwork.

His designs are sold in major department stores and AKRIS shops that have been set-up in cities throughout the world.

SCHNITTPUNKT

In recognition of its thousand year history in the textile business, St. Gallen has organized a celebration called “Schnittpunkt”. It’s a word that’s used in the textile industry, and means “cutting point.” But it has a second meaning — it also means “crossroads”. The spot where you choose your future.

As a part of the celebration, the work of AKRIS is on display at the Textile Museum.

As part of Schnittpunkt, The St. Gallen Art Museum installed an exhibition called “Lifestyle” which is a collection of works that deal with the relationship between art and fashion. The curator is Konrad Bitterli.



St. Gallen, Switzerland

Just down the street is the St. Gallen historical museum which has an exhibition called "Dresscode". The works present the idea that a dress contains a coded message.

There is an extraordinary video by Eve Sussman. It presents an imaginary vision of the people surrounding the 17th Century Spanish painter Velasquez, while he was at work.

A video by Hussein Chalayan presents furniture that can be turned into clothing.

Jacqueline Hassink is a photographer with a special interest in the private fitting rooms used by the great designers for their most important clients. This series presents some of those rooms.

IWC

It's difficult to be in Switzerland and not think about Swiss watches. You get the feeling that each street has at least one store selling them and the selection is rather magnificent.



While I was in St. Gallen I noticed that many of the people involved with fashion, art and technology wore watches made by a company call IWC which stands for the International Watch Company.

The company was founded by F. A. Jones, an American engineer and watchmaker who came to Switzerland with a plan to use American engineering technology and Swiss craftsmanship to produce watch parts for the American market.

Originally he wanted to manufacture his watches in the French speaking part of Switzerland near Geneva. But the French would have none of his modern American ideas and basically told him to get lost.

But while Jones was getting lost in the Swiss mountains, he heard about a new hydroelectric plant in eastern Switzerland that was producing low cost energy. Just what Jones needed to power his watchmaking equipment and so in 1868 he set-up IWC.

Technical innovation has always been an essential part of the company's operation. In 1885 they introduced the first digital watch with tiny windows for the hours and minutes.

During the 1930s they turned their attention to the needs of early aviators. Pilots needed a watch

WHERE TO EAT

GEMPERLI'S
SCHLACHTHOFSTRASSE 5
CH-9015 ST. GALLEN-WINKELN
TEL: 011 41 (0)71 313 72 72
WWW.GEMPERLI.CH

CONFISERIE / TEA ROOM ROGGWILLER
MULTERGASSE 17
9000 ST. GALLEN, SWITZERLAND
TEL: 011 41 (0)71 222 50 92
WWW.ROGGWILLER.CH

SCHERRER CHOCOLATE SHOP
MARKTGASSE 28
9000 ST. GALLEN, SWITZERLAND
TEL: 011 41 (0)71 222 18 52

that would function precisely at extreme temperatures, could withstand pressure changes, would not be affected by magnetic fields and was easy to read.



They adapted their pocket watches and introduced the Big Pilots Watch with a long strap because the watch was worn over the pilot's flight suit. Today IWC still produces the most advanced watches for pilots.

In 1985 they introduced the DaVinci. It was the first wristwatch with a mechanical calendar programmed for 500 years. It proved especially popular with people who had a family history of longevity.

Then they started hanging out with the scuba pioneer Jacques Cousteau. The result was a group of watches known as the Aquatimer Chronograph Cousteau Divers.

They even make a model that is water-resistant to a depth of 2,000 meters. I can't imagine what I would be doing at that depth and if I was there why I would need to know what time it is. But you never can tell. I



might have a sushi date with a mermaid, and not want to be late.

The International Watch Company has an impressive history and they have certainly developed some fantastic technology. And those are certainly major reasons for their popularity in St. Gallen.

Most important they are made here in the German speaking Eastern part of Switzerland and not in the French part, where the original founder was rejected.

ST. GALLEN FOOD

And on that note it's time to see what's cooking in St.



Gallen. Clearly, its most famous contribution to gastronomy is the St. Gallen bratwurst. Until the middle of the 1800s sausages were rather course in texture, but a technical breakthrough of awesome proportions produced a sausage with a smooth and creamy texture. And soon the St. Gallen bratwurst was born. It's a hot dog that even a dog could love.

And when in St. Gallen, the place to get one is Gemperli's. They have their own recipe and produce over ten thousand bratwurst per week. They have the best of the wurst.

A St. Gallen bratwurst is made from veal, pork, bacon and a secret ingredient which will not be very secret after I tell you - fresh milk. And it's served with a typical Eastern Switzerland roll called a Burley.



For a coffee and a traditional sweet the place to go is the Roggwiler's Café and Tea Room.

St. Gallen has two great sweets. One is a St. Gallen Spitzen which means "embroidered" and it's actually chocolate with an embroidery pattern on it - both milk and dark. And the other one is a "biber" which is gingerbread, marzipan, gingerbread. It's a marzipan sandwich.

And finally there is the Scherrer Chocolate Shop with its handmade specialties. It's all an obvious test of one's willpower. And my willpower was not as strong as I thought it was.

TO LEARN MORE...

ST. GALLEN-BODENSEE TOURISM

TEL: 011 41 (0)71 227 37 19

WWW.ST.GALLEN-BODENSEE.CH

SWITZERLAND TOURISM

WWW.MYSWITZERLAND.COM

AKRIS

WWW.AKRIS.CH

BISCHOFF TEXTILE

WWW.BISCHOFF-TEXTIL.COM

FORSTER ROHNER

WWW.FORSTERROHNER.COM

IWC SCHAFFHAUSEN

WWW.IWC.CH

JAKOB SCHLAEPFER COMPANY

WWW.JAKOB-SCHLAEPFER.CH

ST. GALLEN ABBEY MUSEUM

KLOSTERHOF 6D POSTFACH

9001 ST. GALLEN, SWITZERLAND

TEL: 011 41 (0)71 227 34 16

WWW.STIBI.CH

ST. GALLEN ART MUSEUM

MUSEUMSTRASSE 32

9000 ST. GALLEN, SWITZERLAND

TEL: 011 41 (0)71 242 06 71

WWW.KUNSTMUSEUMSG.CH

ST. GALLEN HISTORY AND FOLKLORE MUSEUM

MUSEUMSTRASSE 50

9000 ST. GALLEN, SWITZERLAND

TEL: 011 41 (0)71 242 06 42

WWW.HMSG.CH

ST. GALLEN TEXTILE MUSEUM

VADIANSTRASSE 2

9000 ST. GALLEN, SWITZERLAND

TEL: 011 41 (0)71 222 17 44

WWW.TEXTILMUSEUM.CH

SWISS INTERNATIONAL AIR LINES

WWW.SWISS.COM