



A Gem Tucked Away

Explore the Appenzell region with its wide variety of pretty villages, beautiful scenery, colourful Swiss customs and more.

It was the last bastion of men-only voting in Switzerland – and this fits in well with the Catholic and conservative half-Canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden, perched high above the plains of East Switzerland, in an area hardly known by tourists. The other half of the two Appenzells – Ausserrhoden – is predominantly Protestant and more open to change, but both have great secrets to offer to day-trippers and holidaymakers.

You can leave your car at home and take advantage of the many red-and-white trains of the *Appenzellerbahnen*, and the bright yellow postal buses criss-crossing the steep hills, deep valleys, bustling towns and pretty villages. And the mountain peaks with breathtaking panoramic views, like Säntis, the highest point at 2502m, are easily reached by cable car.

Arriving from Zurich (or further west), you step off the InterCity at Gossau and change to the narrow-gauge train for Herisau, and on to the charming town of Appenzell, the centre of tourism. The houses in the main, car-free street are brightly painted, and the shops offer many local handicrafts and regional specialities. Here the railway line splits, one arm going to Weissbad with its well-known spa and the other to Gais. This village is famous for its beautifully preserved historic town square. Time to pick up a bike, and cycle down through meadows and orchards to Altstätten

in the Rhine Valley. Return on the rack-and-pinion train – celebrating its centenary this year – which features a historic open carriage during summer and well into autumn, so you can fully enjoy the views (your bike travels in a special van).

Another lovely round-trip starts before midday on the shores of Lake Constance at Rorschach, where you have the choice of sailing up the Rhine Canal to Rheineck or taking the mountain cog railway to Heiden. This village is well known for its Biedermeier architecture and its most famous visitor, Henry Dunand, founder of the Red Cross, who spent some time high above Lake Constance relaxing and enjoying the wonderful scenery. A museum records the story of his life and good works. You continue either by walking along the *Witzweg* or taking the postal bus to Wolfhalden and Walzenhausen. The *Witzweg* portrays the humour of the inhabitants of the two half-cantons on 80 display boards – and there are 20 more especially for children. Cosy inns along the path tempt you aside with their charming old-world atmosphere and local specialities such as *Chäshörnli mit Siedwurst* (macaroni cheese with fried onions and a white, boiled sausage) and *Biber* (a flat cake filled with almond paste). The whole stretch takes three to three-and-a-half hours, but may be shortened at many points, as the postal bus runs on a regular schedule almost parallel to the well-marked footpath. The next leg brings you down in the single car rack-and-pinion-railway to Rheineck, where the boat is waiting to take you back to Rorschach. Or you can do the whole trip in reverse.

The Appenzells boast a large number of museums, both modern and traditional. Museum Liner and Kunsthalle Ziegelhütte display the works of two local painters, Carl August Liner (1871-1946) and his son Carl Walter



Main Street Appenzell

(1914-1997), as well as 20th century and contemporary art. If you are more interested in local customs, the Volkskunde-Museum in Stein and the Brauchtumsmuseum in Urnäsch show naive local paintings (*Bauernmalerei*), textiles, jewellery and scenes of daily life of farmers and craftsmen, past and present. If you are a cheese aficionado, then you shouldn't miss visiting one of the *Schaukäseereien* in Stein, Weissbad or on Schwägälp at the bottom of Säntis. Here you can learn all about how to make the famous Appenzeller cheese, but will not be told the secret of its unique flavour. Maybe it has something to do with the variety of flowers and fine herbs growing in this pre-alpine area, for this is the daily diet of the many cows grazing the pretty meadows.

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Saentisbahn