

Make time to see how the Swiss roll

With spectacular medieval architecture and no less than 50 museums to discover, **Jenny Woolf** found out there's more to Zürich than cuckoo clocks and chocolate

FACTFILE

- ❑ For more information on Zurich, go to www.zuerich.com
- ❑ For information on Swiss tourism, call the UK freephone number – 0800 100 200.
- ❑ On arrival at the airport, consider buying a ZurichCard, valid for free public transport, free entry to all museums and 10 per cent shopping discount. It can be purchased at all train stations and at the airport.



THE airport shuttle at Zürich airport had a soundtrack of mooing cows, yodelling songs and alpenhorns, so that incoming passengers knew what to expect, I suppose. And, as we stopped at the platform, the next-train indicator clicked from “1 second” to “zero”, in predictable Swiss style.

Oddly, the soundtrack didn't have cuckoo clocks (my favourite) but otherwise, I expected few surprises in Zürich. My image was of a grey and serious financial centre without much to detain visitors – but in this I was entirely wrong.

In fact, when I put my head around the door at the venerable Kronenhalle restaurant in Ramistrasse, I nearly fainted. This large, traditional dining room is adorned with original paintings and prints by celebrated artists that include Picasso, Chagall, Rauschenberg, Miro and Klee, just sitting on the wall above the tables with no more security than if they were mere reproductions. I had no idea such a place could exist in today's world.

The ancient Fraumünster church has a set of massive Chagall windows which I didn't know existed, and Sigmar Polke's



downright anarchistic modern windows in the big Grossmünster were like nothing I'd ever imagined, with countless slices of multi-coloured agate filtering the light.

Eventually I realised it would have been more surprising if Zürich had not had things to see. For a start, as Switzerland's largest city, it has no less than 50 museums. The average tourist can't possibly visit them all, but the Landesmuseum, a startling Gothic-Victorian pile near the station, is probably a must-see. At this time of year, its eye-catching architecture is made even more

extraordinary by a rainbow-illuminated courtyard skating rink.

It describes Swiss history in a series of themed displays, and its collections include curiosities like 1970s campaign material for women's suffrage – Swiss women only got the vote in 1971 – some deeply disturbing slave trade material, and sleighs straight from Hans Andersen, as well as one of the creepiest museum exhibits I've ever seen.

Known as the “Dead Man of Egg,” this suit of sombre but entirely new-looking clothes was removed from an exhumed 17th century corpse and are displayed on a headless figure. We never learn whose corpse originally wore them, or (far more sinister) whether the corpse was as unnaturally well preserved as the clothes.

But, in a different way, I liked the Beyer watch museum just as much as the Landesmuseum. This private collection is held in the premises of the 250-year-old watchmakers, Beyer, on the main shopping street, Bahnhofstrasse. The highly knowledgeable and helpful gentleman in attendance spoke English, and my favourites included an exquisite John

Champion gold watch set with diamonds and rubies, a pagoda clock presented to the Emperor of China, and a rare Breguet sympathetic clock, which automatically synchronises with its accompanying pocket-watch. Other lesser marvels included an eye-shaped surrealist watch, a glass-cased Lalique watch with dancing ladies, and a quaint and elaborate clockwork oil painting. Here again, though, cuckoo clocks were nowhere in evidence.

There are many good places to eat in the city, but very near to Bayer's is the idiosyncratic Hiltl's, a landmark for lovers of healthy eating. Founded in 1898 under the dispiriting title of the “Vegetarians' Home and Teetotallers' Café” Hiltl's became famous in the 19th century as Europe's first ever no-meat restaurant. After a recent major renovation, it is now a huge, buzzy multi-floor, colourfully-decorated place, with a “pay by weight” buffet of veggie European and Asian dishes. As both a restaurant and a lounge-bar, it is so cosy and welcoming that many of the customers were obviously settled in for hours.

For those who prefer unhealthy



eating, Zürich is also famous for its chocolate shops. Sprüngli is the traditional place for morning coffee and Luxemburgerli, – a sort of chocolate macaroon – and Teuscher's elaborately camp window displays and bizarre novelties always appeal; I couldn't get over a box of chocolates imitating rusty old tools. Frey, who supply high quality own-brand labels like Marks and Spencers, even offer factory tours, but sadly I didn't have time. I went to see the chocolate-makers at Migros on Bahnhofstrasse instead, where the aroma of melted chocolate is

almost overpowering.

Zürich avoided the wartime bombing that damaged so many other European countries, so much of its medieval centre and street plan remains intact. If it wasn't doing so well as a financial hub, the city could surely sell itself as a picturesque tourist destination. Little lanes wind to and fro, with glimpses of church steeples and brightly painted woodwork, and many quaint and unusual shops can be found.

My favourite was Pegasus, on Augustiner-Gasse, which specialises in doll's house furnishing and exquisite miniature toys. It was there that I finally found that elusive cuckoo clock – although I suppose it didn't count because it was only a Christmas tree ornament.

This lack of cuckoo clocks seemed very strange, but I did not leave Switzerland without seeing one. It was displayed in a very expensive craft shop at the airport, and it cost hundreds of euros. But I didn't buy it. I got a chocolate pocket-watch instead, and hurried off with this more appropriate souvenir of Switzerland to catch my plane. And I am glad to say that the plane was precisely on time.



Swiss splendour ... the riverside in Zürich, top; anti-women's votes poster in the Landesmuseum, inset left; the Beyer shop in Bahnhofstrasse, inset right; night skating in the Landesmuseum courtyard, far left; a Zürich street complete with tram, middle left; making chocolates in Migros chocolate shop, left.