

# Expo.02: Tiny Switzerland throws 'gigantic party'

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

MURTEN, Switzerland  
Imaginative. Inspirational. Innovative. Immense. And very, very late.

Switzerland's national exhibition, which opened May 15 and runs through Oct. 20, looks to be everything that its cautious, meticulous, tiny host nation is not.

An estimated 5 million people are expected to flock to Expo.02, which is scattered around three lakes, four towns and two different language regions (French and German) in a scenic part of Switzerland off the usual tourist track.

"It will be a gigantic party in which Switzerland invites itself and the world to rediscover the world," proclaims Nelly Wenger, chairwoman of Expo.02.

Visitors can choose from 2,500 shows, 10,000 performances and 39 exhibitions featuring such un-Swiss attractions as 24-hour marriages, sitting in clouds and reliving 15th century battles.

Wenger predicts Expo.02 will be a success, and says financial and management problems that plagued the early organization of the national fair, forcing its postponement by one year, are but a bad memory.

Organizers abandoned the initial goal of relying primarily on private financing because of lack of corporate enthusiasm. Company sponsors are now kicking in about one-third of the cost, which tops \$823 million, with government funding and receipts making up the rest. Parliament recently agreed, reluctantly, to an additional \$71 million credit to meet the forecast deficit.

In Yverdon-les-Bains, a leafy town with thermal baths about one hour from Geneva, the theme of the exhibition is "Me and the Universe," with visitors encouraged to re-examine themselves and their surroundings through a new perspective.

One highlight is an enormous artificial cloud, created by New York architects Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio, floating above the lake. Its steel structure incorporates a fine network of 33,000 jets that spray tiny droplets of water to create an artificial mist.

"You can achieve your childhood dream of being an angel on a cloud," declares Sergio Caverio, artistic director at the Yverdon site. He insists the cloud is "refreshing" rather than wet, although raincoats will be on sale



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"marriages" which have no legal binding but promise the experience of the marital state, thus prompting people to think seriously about relationships.

"You can marry who you want, even if you're already married to somebody else. The only condition is that it has to be between two mutually consenting adults," says Caverio.

SignalPain, a tent with hundreds of dangling, spaghetti-like foam creations, is filled with lighting and sound effects to create the impression of the human body being in a car accident, testing how the individual copes with pain.

There's an exhibit by kids for kids, and indeed throughout Expo.02 there is plenty to keep the young entertained.

The town of Neuchatel, with its theme of "Nature and Artifice," features three sweeping roofs, 50

immense open-air theater complex, Funpark, and what claims to be Europe's tallest Ferris wheel with unforgettable lake views.

The watchmaking center of Biel is devoted to "Power and Freedom," illustrated by three futuristic transparent towers and a quiet landscape garden.

"Moment and Eternity" is the theme in Murten, a peaceful, medieval town of quintessential Swiss postcard beauty. The formerly harmonious view over shimmering lake waters is shattered by the crude hulk of what looks like an old ship container. Even the organizers describe it as a "gigantic rusted metal cube," while its many detractors use much less flattering terms.

The creation of star Parisian artist Jean Nouvel, the so-called Monolith is meant to convey the impression of transitoriness — in

The "Empire of Silence," above, is seen in Biel, Switzerland, and "The Shipyard," below, in Murten, are part of Expo.02. At left, organizers are pushing "Human Powered Mobility" for traveling between venues of the expo, which runs through Oct. 20.



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Switzerland. The other is a breathtakingly restored panorama of the 1476 Battle of Murten in which the stunning interplay of color and light bring back to life the Swiss victory over the superior numbers of Burgundy's Charles the Bold. Even visitors who take an instant dislike to the Monolith come away filled with awe.

But frustration and frayed tempers are almost guaranteed. About 20,000 visitors are expected to overwhelm Murten daily, whereas the Monolith and the small, solar-powered boats to transport visitors

## If you go:

► **GETTING THERE:** Swiss, the new national airline, flies into Geneva and, especially for long-haul flights, Zurich. Yverdon, Neuchatel and Biel are on a direct rail line from Geneva and Zurich. All sites are linked by frequent shuttles. Given the time, the nicest way to travel is by boat, especially from Neuchatel to Murten. Public transport is recommended over private cars — a Swiss flexipass cuts costs. Swiss Federal Railways is one of the Expo.02 sponsors, and tickets for the events can be purchased at Swiss railway stations. Daily Expo.02 tickets, good for entry to all venues, \$28; a three-day ticket is \$71. They can be booked on the Web at [www.expo.02.ch](http://www.expo.02.ch). Children under 6 get in free and those under 16 are half-price. Many group tours of Switzerland during the period include entry to Expo.02 as part of the package.

► **WHERE TO STAY:** Organizers insist there will be enough accommodation in the region and have established uniform price categories for hotels. All the venues are within a couple of hours of cities like Zurich, Basel, Geneva and Bern, which have plenty of rooms. There are numerous camping sites, often in great lake-side locations. Two big teepee villages accommodate families (\$114 per teepee) and groups (\$24 per adult or \$194 for a party of 12), with sleeping bags and cotton sheets provided.

► **WHAT TO EAT:** Standard fare includes sliced veal and fried potatoes, and melted cheese fondue — heavy for summer. Expo.02 plans to offer all types of national and international food, catering to all budgets. There are some good local wines in the Three Lakes region.

► **WHAT TO DO:** In addition to the exhibits, Yverdon has thermal



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baths, Neuchatel and Biel boast lovely architecture in fine lake locations. Murten is gorgeous, but will likely be overrun by the hordes. Hiking and walking possibilities in the surrounding area are virtually unlimited. Nearby is the under-visited, under-rated Jura region of rolling green hills. Switzerland's major cities, and tourist magnets such as Lucerne and Interlaken, are within easy reach.

► **FOR MORE INFORMATION:** The Expo Web site, [www.expo.02.ch](http://www.expo.02.ch), has extensive information on all the "arteplages," ticket and lodging booking and general advice in English, French, German and Italian, as well as links to other tourism sites. Switzerland Tourism has a good Web site, [www.mySwitzerland.com](http://www.mySwitzerland.com). Its free international line for bookings and information is 110-800-100-200-30; fax, 110-800-100-200-31. Swiss Federal Railways: 110-41-900-300-300; fax, 110-41-512-20-42-65. Tickets can be ordered at [www.sbb.ch](http://www.sbb.ch).

Factory (Heimatfabrik) producing various models of native Switzerland and farming. The Garden of Violence, sponsored by the International Red Cross, has the theme of violence lurking behind the tranquility of nature.

A mobile arteplage, "Meaning and Movement," floats between the other various sites.

Organizers recommend taking three days to visit the exhibition. Alternatively, pick your site beforehand. The venues are within easy reach of one other, with special deals on the country's ultra-efficient public transport network.

blades and bikes between venues. Accommodation will be tight, but a wide variety is available, from five-star hotel luxury to camping in tents, caravans and specially constructed teepee villages.

Wenger, the director, says organizers are determined to avoid a repeat of Expo 2000, the world fair in the German city of Hanover, which drew less than half the anticipated visitors and was criticized as overpriced and a waste of taxpayers' money.

But she admits the test is enormous. "It is an incredible chal-

San Francisco Chronicle-USA  
26 mai 2002