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Expo.02: Tiny Switzerland throws 'gigantic party'

By Clare Nullis ASSOCIATED PRINCE

MURTEN, Switzerland maginative. 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

"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 Cavero, artistic director at the Yverdon site. He insists the cloud is "refreshing" rather than wet, although raincoats will be on sale





Switzerland Tourist

The "Empire of Silence."

Shipyard," below, in Murten,

are part of Expo.02. At left,

"Human Powered Mobility"

for traveling between venues

MARTIN RUETSCHI / Associated Press

Switzerland. The other is a breath-

takingly 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

But frustration and frayed tem-

pers 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

come away filled with awe.

above, is seen in Biel.

Switzerland, and "The

organizers are pushing

of the expo, which runs

through Oct. 20.

"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 Cavero.

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

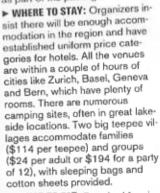
immense open-air theater complex, Funpark, and what claims to be Europe's tallest Ferris wheel with unforgettable lake views.

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

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



► 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 re-

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



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, 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. 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.

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 vil-

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-