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Fingers crossed for Swiss Expo

ORGANISERS of an important national exhibition in Switzerland this year are hoping they don't do a Dome.

Expo 02 opens on May 15 and offers 37 exhibitions and a programme of 12,500 shows, performances and concerts until October 20.

More than £600 million has been spent on four well-connected sites on three lakes — Biel, Morat and Neuchâtel — in northwest Switzerland, with a mobile fifth site on a converted barge.

But organisers are crossing their fingers that the event attracts a break-even five million visitors, a figure that many regard as ambitious, given that Switzerland's population is seven million, and that similar recent ventures, such as the Millennium Dome and the 2000 Expo in Hanover, attracted only half their expected visitor numbers.

The themes of the exhibition, which is based on the work of Swiss artists and architects, and centre on Swiss life, include "Power and Freedom", "The Universe and I", and "Nature and Artifice".

There are also two Funparks, offering rides, plus what will be the biggest Ferris wheel in Europe. One section has been set up to give visitors the sensation of being inside a cloud — 35,000 computer-controlled sprinklers create the effect overhead while visitors stand on a transparent glass floor above the lake.

"We studied the Hanover Expo and the Millennium Dome, and we are trying to avoid their faults," said Josefina Trebeljahr, a spokeswoman for Expo 02.

Anthony Lambert

● Expo packages: Inghams (020-8780 4480); Swiss Travel Service (0870-727 5862). Expo tickets: one-day passes £20, three-day passes £42. For further information, visit the website www.expo.02.ch