JUNE 2022 - ORCHIDS, FLORA AND ALPINE SCENERY IN SWITZERLAND

The Orchid Conservation Alliance is proud to offer an Orchids in the Wild trip to Switzerland, one of the most scenic nations in Europe. Switzerland’s landscape includes picturesque mountains, lakes, waterfalls, valleys and glaciers, as well as magnificent Alpine flora. The Matterhorn at 4,478 m (14,692 ft) is an iconic symbol of Switzerland, and the mountain ranges from Mont Blanc across Lake Geneva to the Säntis in the eastern part of the country provide breathtaking scenery. Switzerland is also famous for its extensive network of trails for hiking (sometimes called the “national sport”), diverse and excellent cuisine, and, of course, Swiss chocolate. Less well known but critical to our trip are orchids, with nearly 70 species found around the country. These bloom from early spring to late summer, and we should see many in flower during this trip.

Switzerland is a landlocked mountainous country in Western Europe, bordering Austria, France, Germany, Italy, and Liechtenstein. With an area of 41,285 km², the country is almost twice the size of New Jersey. Switzerland has a population of 8.7 million people (in 2020), the capital is Bern, and the largest city is Zürich. Spoken languages are German, French, Italian and Rumantsch.

The yellow lady’s slipper (Cypripedium calceolus), often simply called lady’s slipper, is one of the most magnificent wild orchid species in Europe and strictly protected in Switzerland. Large numbers of these beautiful plants can be found during the flowering period from the end of May to about the end of June/middle of July in many parts of the country.

US DEPARTURES -- SATURDAY, June 11, 2022

Flight suggestion from the West coast: LAX – United LX 3173 (10:00) to Newark NJ (18:28)
From Newark NJ on Swiss LX 19 (21:55) to Zürich (arrival in Zürich 11:40)
Flight suggestion from the East coast: Newark NJ; Swiss LX 19 (21:55) to Zürich (arrival in Zürich 11:40)

Good walking shoes and a pair of walking sticks are advisable as many trails are relatively narrow, slightly uphill/downhill, or covered with gravel. Suggestion: collapsible walking poles that fit into your luggage. Tours and locations may change depending on weather conditions.
Sunday, June 12/DAY 0 Arrival in Zürich.

We expect that everyone will arrive at Zürich Airport by noon on Sunday, June 12. Our bus company for the entire trip will be GROSS REISEN. Judith and the driver will meet you at the airport and take you to Hotel Mercure Krone in Lenzburg. More details will be provided when the trip roster has been finalized.

Castle Lenzburg, founded in the Middle Ages, lies in the Seetal Valley, about 3 kilometers south of the Aare River.

Ölggi-Alp – Center of Switzerland

Hotel Mercure Lenzburg Krone, Lenzburg (4 nights)  +41 62 886 65 65

Upon our arrival, we may have lunch at the hotel, or have a nap. Check-in will be at 3:00 pm. Later, walk up to the Lenzburg castle for a view of the town and its surroundings. Dinner at the hotel or in town.

Monday, June 13/Day 1

Breakfast buffet from 7:00-7:45 am. Our bus will meet us at the Hotel at 8:00 am, and with good weather we plan to visit the orchid nature trail of the Aargau Native Orchids Group (AGEO) in Obererlinsbach AG. This is a nature trail with protected plants, including a considerable number of orchid species. (A visit to the nature trail is not advisable in wet weather, as the rather steep, narrow paths on the hillside provide poor traction).

Our carry-on lunch can be enjoyed on site at the end of the tour. Depending on the weather we may visit the Seleger Moor Park in Rifferswil, home to one of Switzerland’s largest collections of rhododendrons and azaleas, or the University of Basel Botanic Garden (both easy walking).

Our Tour Guide Judith

Tuesday, June 14/Day 2  Lenzburg- Rheinfall - Tannbüel - Stein am Rhein (easy walking everywhere)

Breakfast buffet from 7:00-7:45 am. Our bus will meet us at the Hotel Krone at 8:00 am and take us to Tannbüel, a well-known nature reserve, with a stop to view the Rhinefall, the largest waterfall in Europe and one of the 7 natural wonders in Switzerland.
As we drive through the city of Schaffhausen we can view the Munot, a circular fortress and the town’s landmark in the center of Schaffhausen. It was built in the 16th century from ashlar and quarry stone. Tannbüel is near Bargen, at the border between Switzerland and Germany. It is home to one of the most important and well-known nature reserves in the Randen. Every year, hundreds of nature lovers visit the area to experience the blooming "Frauenschüeli" (Lady’s slipper) in June. The Tannbüel is a nature reserve of national importance, known for its more than 20 orchid species. The great "flagship plant species" in Tannbüel is undoubtedly the lady’s slipper. In addition, there are many other orchid species that contribute to the extensive biodiversity. Our carry-on lunch can be enjoyed on site at the end of the tour.

Later, a drive along the Rhine River to visit historic Stein am Rhein, famous for its finely painted facades, half-timbered houses, and the lovely countryside surrounding it. Possibly have dinner on the Rhine River or return to Lenzburg Hotel.

Wednesday, June 15/Day 3  
Sightseeing Capital of Switzerland – Bern  (easy city walking)
Breakfast buffet from 7:00-7:45 am. Our bus will meet us at the Hotel Krone at 8:00 am for a drive to the capital city of Switzerland. "She is the most beautiful we have ever seen," Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote about Bern as early as 1779. More than 240 years later, the federal city still inspires with its beauty. A small and compact city, it has a lovely atmosphere, picture-perfect cobblestone streets and beautiful views of the Aare River. The Old Town is where you will find all the main sights, especially the famous public fountains; Google ‘Bernese Fountains’ for images. Most of it is pedestrian-only, and the distances are short, making it a paradise for those who like to explore towns on foot. Bern is also famous for the bear pit, located on the edge of the old town, the fourth bear pit in the history of Bern, dating back to 1857. The bear is the heraldic animal of the city of Bern and, according to tradition, its namesake. Thus, even today, it is impossible to imagine Bern without the bear pit. We can enjoy our carry-on lunch there along with a beer. The bus can meet us there for the return to Lenzburg, or to a SURPRISE destination, weather permitted.
Thursday, June 16/Day 4
Breakfast buffet from 7:00-8:00 am. Checkout from Hotel Krone. Our bus will meet us in front of the Hotel at 8:15 am to collect luggage and take us for a scenic tour to Sachseln. We will first be travelling through the picturesque highlands and then nearing Lake Luzern, with the high peak of the Pilatus in view. A stop to tour the city and walk over the Spreuerbrücke, so called because in former times you were only allowed to pour chaff, straw and leaves into the Reuss from this bridge. Then continue to Sachseln, located on Lake Sarnen. We can enjoy our carry-on lunch on Lake Sarnen. The geographic center of Switzerland is in Sachseln/Älggi-Alp.

Thursday, June 16/Day 4    Jugendstil Hotel Paxmontana, Sachseln - Flüeli-Ranft,  (5 nights)
After check-in at the Pax Montana (Peace Mountain), ambitious walkers can walk up to the Älggi-Alp, while others can enjoy the peaceful surroundings and hometown of Nicholas of Flüe (German: Niklaus von Flüe; 1417 – 21 March 1487), a Swiss hermit and ascetic who is the patron saint of Switzerland. He is sometimes invoked as Brother Klaus. A farmer, military leader, member of the assembly, councilor, judge and mystic, he was respected as a man of complete moral integrity. Brother Klaus's counsel to the Diet of Stans (1481) helped to prevent war between the Swiss cantons. Dinner at the hotel.

Friday, June 17/Day 5
Breakfast buffet from 7:00-7:45 am. Our bus will take us to Bürglen UR, Brügg-Biel (one hour drive) - Lady’s slipper trail, passing the town of Altdorf. We may stop on the way back. A 15 minute cable car takes us up to mountain. The "Gangbachweg", also called "Orchidway", is a popular circular trail of about two hours, on which you can marvel at many rare specimens of the yellow lady's slippers, Orchis and gentian. The trail starts directly at the mountain station Biel-Kinzig and leads first over open meadow terrain into a light wooded area. In between, small bridges lead over small torrents. Trees provide shade where the trail goes slightly uphill. A rest area toward the end of the trail provides an ideal spot for a lunch break. Travelers who do not want to walk the narrow trails may meet us at the picnic area. The Wilhelm Tell monument stands in the center of Altdorf on the town hall square. The village bailiff Bessler had a stone fountain built here in 1567. At today's entrance to the church square there was a similar fountain with a statue of Tell. Both fountains marked the alleged positions of Tell and his son. There is reasonable doubt whether Wilhelm Tell ever has lived at all. However, thanks to the German poet Friedrich von Schiller and his drama Wilhelm Tell, the very legend itself did have an enormous influence on the history of Switzerland and of other countries. Dinner at the hotel.

Saturday, June 18/Day 6    Aare Gorge – Meiringen
Breakfast buffet from 7:00-7:45 am. Our bus will take us to the Aare Gorge, a 1400 m long and 200 m deep natural wonder. Over footbridges and through tunnels the imposing gorge can be hiked in about 45 minutes. The Haslital is one of the large transverse valleys of the Alpine massif. It stretches from the Grimsel Pass to Lake Brienz. The flat bottom of the lower valley is separated from the upper valley by an imposing rock bar called "Kirchet". Over tens of thousands of years, the Aare River has eroded a course through the limestone rocks of the "Kirchet", creating the Aare Gorge, which is only 1 to 2 meters wide in places. The trail is not difficult and very safe. We can enjoy our carry-on lunch after the tour. On the way back to Hasliberg we may visit with Dora, a private orchid grower. Dinner at the hotel.
Sunday, June 19/Day 7
Breakfast buffet from 7:00-7:45 am. Our bus will take us to the Pilatus Railway in Alpnachstad. Commissioned in 1889, this is the world’s steepest cogwheel railway, with a gradient of up to 48 percent. The ascent takes about 30 minutes, scaling it way meter by meter from Alpnachstad to Pilatus Kulm, past alpine meadows and striking rock formations. We can enjoy our carry-on lunch pack on top of the mountain. Various options to walk and view the mountains, depending on fitness to walk on narrow trails. Return by cable cars to Kriens where the bus will meet us. Dinner at the hotel.

Monday, June 20 - Day 8  Stöckalp – Melchsee-Frutt, an alpine meadow with spectacular mountain scenery. Breakfast buffet from 7:00-7:45 am. Our bus will take us to the Stöckalp, then by cable car to the Melchsee-Frutt mountain station at 1930 m. From there, a good hiking trail with a variety of alpine flowers and some orchids leads to the Tannalp Inn. For those unable to make the long hike, the Melchsee-Frutt train departs every hour to the Tannalp Inn. The fantastic mountain scenery, some easy hiking trails, and restaurants with refreshment facilities make this trip an delightful experience. We can enjoy our carry-on lunch pack somewhere along the trail or at the Tannalp Inn. Return by cable car to Stöckalp, where the bus will meet us. Dinner at the hotel.

Tuesday, June 21/Day 9  Check-out from Hotel Paxmontana. Breakfast buffet from 7:00-7:45 am. The bus will take us on a lovely journey from Paxmontana to Davos by the most scenic route via Andermatt –Laax - Films – Chur and on to Davos. A couple of stops along the way to view the scenery and have lunch.
Tuesday, June 21/Day 9  Schatzalp Hotel, Davos  June 21-23 (3 nights)
In Davos, our luggage will be transferred to the Schatzalp Hotel, since more than one piece is difficult to carry on the monorail that will take us up the mountain. Dinner at the hotel.

Wednesday, June 22/Day 10
Breakfast buffet from 7:00-8:00 am. After breakfast we will have a guided tour of the Alpine Garden and Thomas Mann Zauberberg = Magic Mountain with Klaus Oetjen, the master gardener of the Schatzalp. His design of the Alpine Garden with high-altitude flowers from the Pyrenees, New Zealand, China, Nepal or Tibet is spectacular. In the botanical garden Alpinum Schatzalp, 3500 plant species and flower varieties bloom from June to September.
We can enjoy our carry-on lunch at the hotel terrace or behind the hotel woods. After lunch we can go to Davos on the monorail and then take the cable car up to the Jakobshorn (2,590 m/8,000 ft) overlooking Davos. Return to the Hotel Schatzalp. Dinner at the hotel.

Thursday, June 23/Day 11
Breakfast buffet from 7:00-8:00 am. Taking local transportation (bus or train) either go to Wiesen and look for orchids along the way or drive up to the Flüela Pass and walk over rocks and small torrents to enjoy the wonderful flora. Those who don't participate in the hike can enjoy the flora on the Flüela Pass. We can enjoy our carry-on lunch somewhere along the trail. Dinner at the hotel.

Friday, June 24/Day 12  Check-out from Hotel Schatzalp
Breakfast buffet from 7:00-8:00 am. Our bus will meet us at the Minirail station to collect luggage and drive us from Davos to Arbon on Lake Constance (Bodensee). We will make a café stop in Bad Ragaz and/or enjoy our carry-on lunch in the Park. We will pass by Liechtenstein, a small country in the heart of Europe. Then, a stop in Appenzell, one of the alpine cantons where Swiss traditions are strong. The colorful houses on the Main Street, the stately parish church, the castle, the works of art by Roman Signer on the Adlerplatz, the living customs: all offer a wealth of interesting and unusual sights on the village tour. Be curious about the smallest Swiss capital! A great place for souvenirs; maybe a cuckoo clock?
Friday, June 24/Day 12  Hotel & Restaurant Seegarten, Arbon
Dinner at the hotel or in town. Then a walk along the lake to enjoy the city gardens.

Saturday, June 25/Day 13
Breakfast buffet from 7:00-8:00 am. Then a short train ride from the Hotel Seegarten to Romanshorn to board a boat for a journey to Insel Mainau, an island in Lake Constance, that is part of Germany. It is maintained as a garden island and a model of excellent environmental practices. It houses a large orchid collection. Spring starts with about a million tulips and other spring flowers, hundreds of rhododendrons and fragrant roses sweeten the summer, more than 11,000 colorful dahlias make autumn unforgettable and in the cold season the flower island turns into a magical winter garden. The popular destination invites visitors all year round to forget the hustle and bustle of everyday life and consciously enjoy the beauty and tranquility of nature. Also houses the second largest butterfly house in Germany. We may have lunch in one of the park’s Restaurant. You may be surprised to find many giant sequoias (Sequoiadendron giganteum) and coast redwoods (Sequoia sempervirens), which came to Europe from California in the 19th century. Return to Romanshorn /Arbon for dinner at the hotel or in town.

Sunday, June 26 /Day 14
Breakfast buffet from 7:00-8:00 am. Our bus will meet us at 8:15 am. If time allows we may visit a cheese factory in Schwagalp. Stop in Magdenau to see more orchids, including Epipactis, and possibly a short tour of St. Gallen, including a visit to the Stiftskirche St. Gallen (actually Stiftskirche St. Gallus und Otmar), a Roman Catholic church building in the city of St. Gallen. It serves as a cathedral for the diocese of St. Gallen and was the church of the Benedictine monastery of St. Gallen from its construction between 1755 and 1766 until 1805. The collegiate church, together with the collegiate district, was added to the list of world cultural heritage sites worthy of protection as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983. Return to Arbon for a farewell dinner at the hotel or in town.

Monday, June 27/Day 15.
Breakfast buffet from 7:00-8:00 am. Departure by train to the Airport Zürich-Kloten, a 70 minute train ride from the Hotel Seegarten in Arbon.
The cost for this transfer to the airport (about CHF 50; US$ 55) is not included in the tour, since some people may extend their trip to visit other parts of Switzerland or Europe.

Our Tour Guide: Although born in the eastern part of Switzerland, Judith spent her professional life in Madison, Wisconsin, working with her husband on genetic aspects of proteins and their receptors in relation to coronary heart disease. Their orchid hobby began with a few cattleyas they received from a friend and expanded to about 700 species and hybrids in a few years. Upon retirement they spent the winter in Florida, taking a couple hundred of their plants along.

As a member of the OCA she journeyed to Brazil and Greece, but previously traveled extensively in Ecuador and more recently in Colombia. She is a member of the AOS Editorial Board and Conservation Committee.

For the past 7 years she has spent summers in Switzerland learning about native orchids in her home country and is happy to share her experience with you!

Option to visit Jungfrauajoch at your own expense of about CHF 500 for train from Arbon to Grindelwald, 2 nights hotel in Grindelwald, and two cogwheel railways from Grindelwald to Kleine Scheidegg and then to the Jungfraujoch. Then next day Grindelwald to Zürich Airport.

Train from Arbon to Grindelwald is about 4 hrs. Dep. 9:36 from Arbon, arrive 13:34 in Grindelwald. Hotel stay 2 nights at Hotel Kreuz und Post.
RESERVATION REQUIRED FOR THE TRAINS TO JUNGFRAUJOCH. Next morning bus to the train station to Kleine Scheidegg. Then transfer to the Jungfraubahn that takes you through the Eiger north face to the highest railroad station in Europe on the Jungfraujoch.

Below the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau lies Kleine Scheidegg at 2061 meters above sea level. It offers visitors a spectacular view of the infamous Eiger North Face. In 1936, onlookers watched as four climbers perished in dramatic fashion on the face. The story was later made into a film. There is a train station and there are restaurants and hotels in Kleine Scheidegg. Icy air brushes your face, snow crunches under your feet, and the panorama almost takes your breath away: on one side the view of the Swiss Plateau to the Vosges, on the other the Aletsch Glacier, lined with four-thousand-meter peaks. Anyone standing on the Jungfraujoch, 3,454 meters above sea level, feels with the first step that this is another world. One that you have to experience – the Top of Europe!

Peter Tobias adds: When I lived for a year in Bern at the age of 10, my family went to the Jungfraujoch via Kleine Scheidegg. Well worth it, but not many orchids up on the Jungfraujoch! The ‘joch’ is the saddle between two peaks, in this case, between the Jungfrau and the Mönch.

This will probably be the most ‘civilized’ tour the OCA offers. The Swiss have been entertaining travelers for hundreds of years, and they excel at providing ease of travel/walking/hiking/eating/drinking, etc., in their country.

Some details about the OCA Switzerland 2022 trip:

1. Registration for this trip is open now. Registration holds a space and requires a $1,000 deposit, which will be credited toward your trip fees.

2. All trip registrants must provide evidence of COVID-19 vaccination at the time of registration.

3. The trip is limited to 16 travelers plus trip leader Judith Rapacz and one OCA director.

4. The trip will be cancelled if fewer than eight travelers are registered by February 1, 2022; or if, in the sole opinion of the OCA Board of Directors, the state of the coronavirus pandemic makes it unsafe to travel in Switzerland; or if any other circumstance, in the sole opinion of the OCA Board of Directors, makes it unsafe to travel in Switzerland. All trip deposits will be returned in full if the trip is cancelled at the decision of the OCA Board of Directors. We strongly suggest trip cancellation insurance. We will do all we can to bring this trip to fruition, but there are many variables that are not under our control.

5. Travelers may cancel their registered participation in the trip for a full refund of their $1,000 deposit if their cancellation is received by February 1, 2022, and for a refund of $500 of their $1,000 deposit if their cancellation is received after February 1, 2022, but on or before March 1, 2022. After March 1, 2022, there will be no refund of trip deposits.
6. The cost of the OCA Switzerland 2022 trip is Single Occupancy US$ 5,500 and for Double Occupancy US$ 4,950 per person. These fees must be paid on or by March 1, 2022. The traveler’s fee covers all transportation within Switzerland after arrival at the airport in Zürich to the end of the trip in Arbon. Travel from Arbon to the airport in Zürich is not covered, since some travelers may be staying longer. We will arrange one group bus trip from Arbon to the Zürich airport on June 27, 2022, at the traveler’s expense. The trip fee also covers all accommodations and meals in Switzerland that are arranged by the OCA. Travelers may choose to eat at places of their own choosing at their own expense, but the OCA will not compensate travelers for OCA meals not eaten. Also not covered in the trip fee are tips and alcoholic beverages.

7. To participate in this trip, travelers must provide documentary evidence of a travel health insurance policy that, in addition to covering medical expenses incurred in country, also includes a minimum of $50,000 repatriation coverage to the United States in case of medical necessity. Medicare does not cover any foreign medical care, and many private health insurance policies require upfront payment with partial or full reimbursement only later.

8. Travelers must also fill out a health questionnaire to facilitate emergency care in Switzerland. This health information will be erased/deleted at the end of the trip. These documents will be requested after full payment is received.