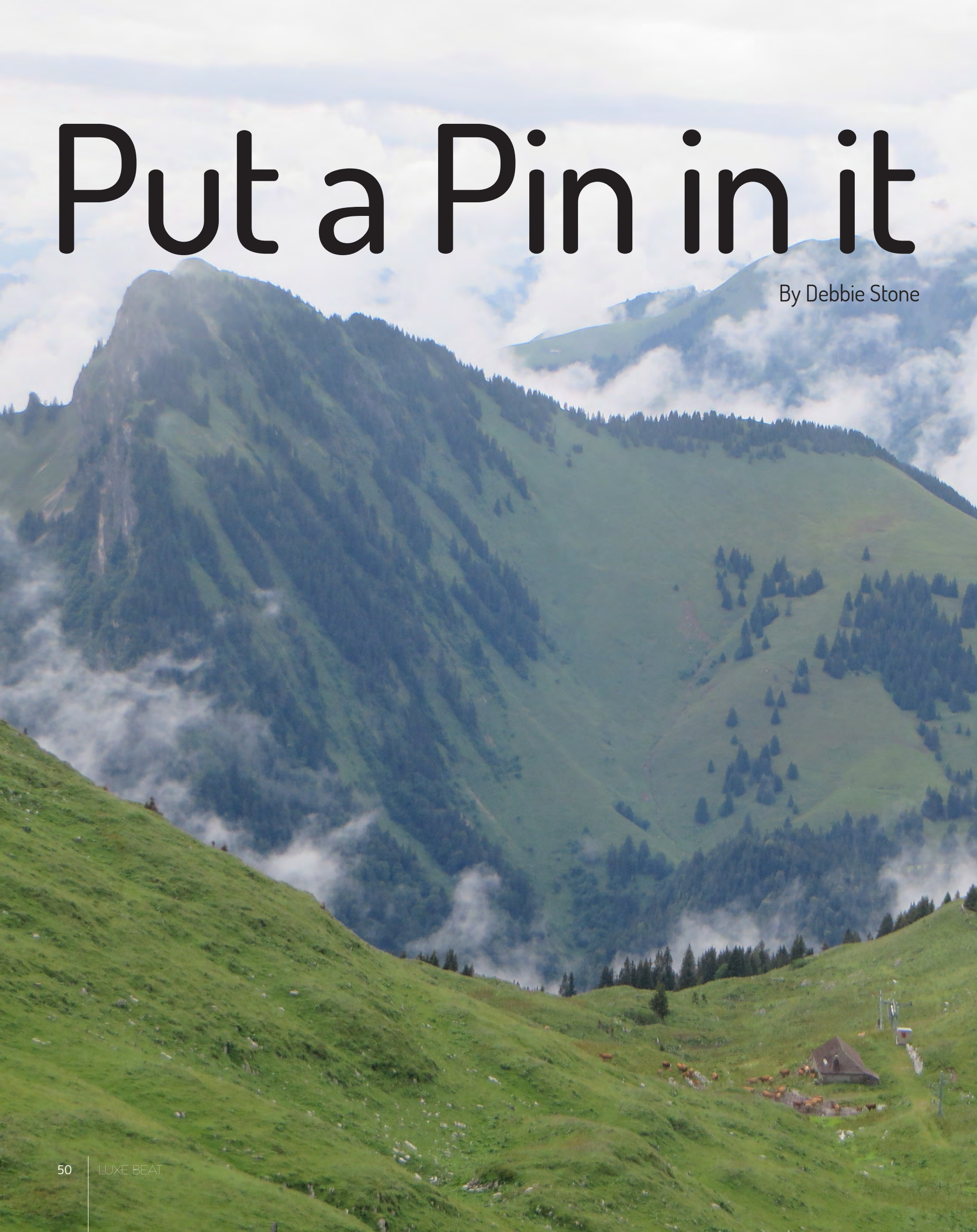


Put a Pin in it

By Debbie Stone



Star-studded Swiss Cities of Lausanne and Montreux

It's hard to imagine what a noted British poet, a famous film actor, a celebrated French fashion designer and the lead vocalist of the rock band Queen could possibly have in common. Yet each of them – Lord Byron, Charlie Chaplin, Coco Chanel and Freddie Mercury – all resided, at one point in their lives, in and around the French-speaking region of Lausanne and Montreux, Switzerland. After visiting this vibrant and alluring locale, I understand why these celebs and so many others have chosen to call it home.

Lausanne's allure is widespread, from its glorious location on Lake Geneva and its Mediterranean ambiance to its rich history and flourishing arts scene. The city's prominent Cathedral of Notre-Dame, a 13th century Gothic edifice with four stately towers and no less than 105 stained glass windows, dominates the landscape and establishes the town's medieval roots. Buildings dating to the Middle Ages line the cobblestone streets within the picturesque city center. More than just a pretty face, however, Lausanne is a destination of learning, commerce and culture that attracts university students, business titans and visitors from around the globe.

Most tourists are surprised to discover that the main headquarters of the Federal Supreme Court has been situated in this town since 1874 and that it has also been home to the International Olympic Committee since 1915. The acclaimed, state-of-the-art Olympics Museum, one of Lausanne's





main attractions, is based here as well. Plan to spend time exploring this wonderful, interactive museum, which tells the Olympic Story over time, from antiquity to the present day, while paying tribute to the men and women who celebrate and epitomize the Olympic ideal. One floor is devoted to the origins of the ancient Olympic Games, their revival by Pierre de Coubertin and their spread throughout the world. Other galleries focus on the Games and delve into the greatest feats and stories of the athletes who participated in the competitions. Additionally, there are displays that explore the daily lives of athletes before, during and after the Games. Outside the museum, overlooking scenic Lake Geneva, is the Olympic Park, which features works of contemporary artists and sports activity areas.

Art aficionados will rejoice in the city's offerings, especially the Hermitage

Foundation, a gem of a museum housed in a preserved 19th century villa that holds exhibitions of paintings and sculptures created from 1850 to 1920, with a special focus on Impressionism and French art. Another unique, must-see cultural attraction in Lausanne is the Collection de l'Art Brut. The impetus for this museum stemmed from a donation of works by French artist Jean Dubuffet, who began collecting creations outside the mainstream in hopes of shedding light on art that was free from cultural and social conditioning. Works on display are by untrained artists, many who lived difficult lives. Some resided in mental institutions or were incarcerated in prison; others were social outcasts, loners or just eccentrics who turned to painting, sculpture and other artistic media as a means to express themselves. Though the pieces can be disturbing at times, they are truly fascinating, as is the accompanying biographical information about each of the contributors.





Lausanne is also a magnet for shoppers who flock to Place de la Palud and Rue de Bourg, pedestrian-friendly areas with over 1,500 boutiques and stores, along with colorful open-air market stalls selling everything from flowers to local produce, fish and wine. You'll know you're in the right spot when you see the Fountain of Justice, distinguished by a statue holding a scale in one hand to weigh the soul and a sword in the other to right the wrongs. It's just one of 120 historical and whimsical fountains in the town.

When it comes to nightlife, the Flon district is the place to be. The area was once an industrial hub and architects were careful to preserve

the original style of the buildings during renovation. Today, it's a collection of avant-garde-like structures that house shops, offices, apartments and entertainment venues which come alive when the sun sets and the party-goers appear.

With Lausanne's Lake Geneva backdrop, it's impossible not to want to spend some time near or on the water during your visit. Stroll down the beautiful lakeside promenade, or opt for a boat ride to explore neighboring Evian, France. Though only thirty minutes separates the two cities, they are worlds apart from one another when it comes to culture, people and ambiance.

Finding good food is never a problem in Lausanne -- or anywhere in Switzerland for that matter. The offerings are versatile, from award-winning fine dining establishments with gourmet cuisine to cozy cafes and trendy bistros that boast inventive and exciting dishes. Sampling Swiss chocolates is an activity in and of itself and a pursuit I took very seriously, especially when I was informed by a noted chocolate maker that eating chocolate or imbibing a chocolate beverage should be an intensely emotional experience. He emphasized the power of fine chocolate on one's psyche, explaining that it has the ability to make you dream and to set your mind free. My favorite find was

at Le Barbare, a tiny café by the cathedral in Old Town. The place has achieved cult status thanks to its original 1950s décor and its sublime, swoon-worthy hot chocolate, whose aroma envelops you as you enter the door. You'll want to keep your spoon handy, as this is one cup of cocoa that you actually eat, not drink.

Though sadly you won't be able to see Charlie Chaplin, Coco Chanel, Lord Byron or Freddie Mercury around town, you might catch a glimpse of some other celebs if you stop in at the bar at Beau-Rivage Palace, one of the most prestigious hotels in the city. It's where the stars like to stay, and for Diana Ross, as well as Phil Collins, it has also served as the perfect wedding destination. Stroll the gardens and you'll come across an unusual site – a pet cemetery – where Coco Chanel's beloved dog is purported to be buried, along with other pooches of note.



Lausanne provides easy access to the nearby UNESCO World Heritage Lavaux Vineyards. Even if wine is not your thing, you'll want to put this Swiss treasure on your list due to its jaw-dropping setting. Ten thousand vine terraces, a system created by Cistercian monks in the 11th century, hug the steep slopes that face the Alps above the shimmering waters of Lake Geneva. This is the birthplace of the Chasselas grape variety, a wine appreciated for its pure scents and delicate fruit notes. Other varietals grown here, such as Pinot Noir, Gamay, Cabernet Franc, Gamaret and Sauvignon, are testimony to the richness of Lavaux's terroirs which benefit from a temperate climate and a Mediterranean character to the



region. Patrick Fonjallaz is one of 250 vineyard owners in the Lavaux region. He is the successor of twelve generations of wine producers, a wine dynasty established in 1552. His winery is destination-worthy, not only because of the high quality of the wines, but because of its breathtaking views of the surrounding environs.

Continuing south from Lavaux along the lake, you'll soon come to Montreux, Switzerland's "festival city" and a noted international tourist resort. As in Lausanne, many celebs have been attracted to the



area due to its beauty, temperate weather and good quality of life. Among the sights to take in is Chillon Castle, the most-visited historic building in Switzerland. It's located on a small island in the lake, a mere few feet from the shore, and was once the residence and profitable toll station of the Counts of Savoy. For hundreds of years, the occupants extracted a fee from people and goods passing between Italy and the rest of Europe. In more modern times, it became famous for having inspired Lord Byron's poem, "The Prisoner of Chillon," which was based on the true story of Francois Bonivard, a political prisoner from Geneva. Byron is said to have carved his name in one of the columns in the dungeon where Bonivard was kept for several years. The castle has had many well-known visitors over the years, including Henry James, Victor Hugo and Salvador Dali.

If you happen to be in Montreux during the first weeks of July, you'll



be sharing the town with the masses who are there for the Montreux Jazz Festival. The event was the brainchild of Claude Nobs, a young, enterprising Swiss man with a love of music and a forward-thinking approach to technology. He organized the first festival in 1967 and over the years its popularity has extended across the globe, attracting musicians from a wide variety of genres. Big names such as Pink Floyd, Chicago, Santana, Stevie Wonder, Van Morrison and Miles Davis have all performed in Montreux. The headliners play in the acoustically sophisticated Stravinsky Auditorium, while lesser-known acts give their shows in smaller venues around town. The energy and enthusiasm is palpable among the festival-goers, who range from children to seniors, many who make this special event an annual tradition.

Those who come to Montreux at other times of the year won't be disappointed, as the city's first-class hotels and spas, mesmerizing Alpine views and hip restaurant and nightlife scene provide enjoyment and entertainment. And its lovely palm-fringed, lakeside promenade helps to give Montreux a wonderfully relaxed vibe. If you can tear yourself away from this grand Swiss-style Riviera, take the GoldenPass Railway to Les Rochers-de-Naye, the top of the mountain that dominates Montreux. You'll ride a cogwheel train, which will transport you to the summit in less than an hour. At almost 7,000 feet, the view overlooks Lake Geneva with an



impressive panorama across the mountains. Atop, there's an Alpine garden with thousands of plants and flowers from around the world, as well as colonies of marmots, more commonly known as the mascot of the Alps, who live in the vast expanse of the area. There are also two restaurants, a conference room and several authentic Mongolian yurts for those interested in spending the night in this serene environment.

Like the celebs of the past and those of the present, you, too, will be enticed by the enchanting Swiss cities of Lausanne and Montreux. Their charms will cast a spell on you, ensuring that you will return again and again.

If you go

For Switzerland travel information:
www.MySwitzerland.com

For information about all things Swiss: www.swissworld.org