

HTSI Travel

Zürich - Europe's new capital of cool

Think Switzerland's biggest city is slick, staid, bourgeois and... a bit boring? Think

Louis Wise. Photography by Beat Schweizer



A quiet weekend afternoon in Zürich. At the Galerie Gmurzynska on the city's central Paradeplatz, an exhibition devoted to Picasso hangs along the gallery's undulating Zaha Hadid-designed walls. Suddenly a smartly dressed woman dashes in. "Excuse me, is that for sale?" she asks the young man at reception, pointing to a Picasso drawing as though enquiring after a lamb chop. Sadly not, he replies – it's already sold – and she's out of the door with a shrug. I ask the receptionist if this happens very often. Well, you have to remember, he replies politely, we're opposite places like *that* – gesturing to the vast headquarters of a major Swiss bank. I take it as a yes.

So far, so [Zürich](#). Switzerland's largest city, wealthy and venerable for centuries, arguably still labours under the impression that it is slick, staid, bourgeois and not a little entitled. But there is, in fact, another Zürich, far looser and more playful than the austere façade. It would make sense in a city that is rapidly expanding: Zürich recently reached its largest population size since 1962. If it is no longer a byword for banking, the industry having dispersed, it is still a hub for companies such as Google (it's home to its largest continental European HQ) and always drawing in international talent; meanwhile, other Zürich natives, or "Zürchers", have chosen to return. One symbol: in the ever-gentrifying west of the city, formerly an industrial zone where young Zürchers would go for underground raves, the sportswear company On has just opened its On Labs flagship store, where 651 staff from 54 nationalities congregate to work, exercise and enjoy its vegan restaurant. The average age, says On's founder, David Allemann, a proud native Zürcher, is 31.

Under the glistening polish of the city you have this frenetic pulse

Unsurprisingly, this growth spurt is echoed by a strong proposition across the arts, food, even fashion (an outlier is Balenciaga's Demna Gvasalia, who long lived here, though he has apparently now decamped even further out). Galerie Gmurzynska is just one of a hundred or so galleries and off-spaces in the city, a

pretty dizzying number considering the city's still relatively tiny size – 440,000 and counting. In 2021, its vast David Chipperfield-designed Kunsthaus finally opened; in January it will welcome a brand-new dynamic director who has already got everybody in a lather by announcing that art is "sex for the brain". Across the square, at the city's 19th century Schauspielhaus, the American artist Wu Tsang is reinventing classics such as *Pinocchio* with a sensibility finessed on the queer club scene of LA. In terms of style, the suave propositions of Mats Klingberg's Trunk store are offset by Tasoni, run by sisters Taya and Tary Sawiris, a high-fashion boutique selling a cutting-edge mix of Molly Goddard, Martine Rose or Marine Serre. And in gastronomy, a new young generation has opened a range of pop-ups, restaurants and bars, moving the stolid Zürcher diet on from its classic staples of French, Italian and Swiss.