

FINDING LOVE IN SWITZERLAND



You're single and successful. You dress well and know what wine to order. You moved to Switzerland because you love the idea of taking on new challenges and adventures. You've got serious form, for goodness sakes! Then why doesn't your love life follow suit? Jennifer Davies and Ana Maria Montero investigate.

Charlotte* is a trainee lawyer from New York who has lived in Switzerland for five years and currently lives in Bern. She's 28, blond and tall and has come out of a long term relationship. She's been looking for love for nearly a year and says it has not been easy.

"It's really different here compared to the US. Americans don't take themselves too seriously and have no problem flirting. There you are used to guys approaching you and you can easily strike up a conversation with anyone."

Talking about her experience in Bern, Charlotte says she is almost never approached, and some men have even reacted negatively to being 'chatted up'. "People tend to stick to the group they go out with for the evening and don't come over to you – ever!" she says. "You could be the last girl in the bar and it's unlikely that you would be approached. That means, as a woman you have to be more assertive and overt to talk to a guy as he's usually with his friends."

According to Leslie Lawson Botez, a Geneva-based psychologist and author of *Holding out for a hero, five steps to marriage over 40*, Charlotte is not alone. She believes that the attributes that make Charlotte such a 'catch' are typical of international singles in affluent nations; yet more and more people in countries like Switzerland are finding it difficult to find love, often right up until later life. Lawson-Botez pinpoints two reasons:

"International people work very hard. Here in Geneva, you spend a whole career assigned in an organisation before you realise 'I've got no-one to come home to!' The second challenge is that when a society has all it needs and more, its people are less outgoing with each other", she says. "We start to perceive independence through the acquisition of things, but don't seek to connect everyday with people."

Yet despite the challenges on the ground, international singles in Switzerland will be glad to know that the statistics look optimistic. According to the Swiss government's figures last year in 2013, expatriate lovebirds are well represented. Some 35 percent of marriages were between a Swiss and a foreigner and 13.8 percent were between foreigners.

Navigating the services and events on offer for love-seekers all over the country is a certainly a task to be reckoned with. Aside from the ubiquitous online dating sites, there are supper clubs, speed dating, dating apps, and a myriad of singles events based on your interest or subculture in music, art, books or food. And then there are the stalwart favourites, which nowadays seem steeped in nostalgia. Newspaper 'lonely hearts' and now online personal ads on newspaper sites have, perhaps surprisingly, remained as popular as ever, with papers across the country reporting significant numbers placed every week.

Yet no matter which method you choose, many couples who have met here say you won't meet a significant other until you truly examine how you come across to a potential partner. Rebecca,* an American living in Uetikon am See, was looking for someone for a year and a half before she found her partner, also an American living here, through an online dating service. She says that his very straightforward approach won her over. "I think it is important to try to be clear about the things one is looking for. Perhaps I was too flexible on this point. My partner was very direct and I met his criteria and that's why he wrote me a fantastic first email!"

The experts agree that working on yourself and how you are perceived comes first, and that the next step – becoming proactive – is the key to finding love. "A lot of men and women feel that finding a partner has become a 'mission impossible'. But they have to ask themselves what have they done to achieve their goal of

finding a partner?" says Trea Tijmens from the Zurich and Geneva-based Success Match. "If they keep telling themselves they can't find anyone then they probably won't," she explains, "instead of waiting for love to happen, we have to be proactive and create opportunities. We have to engage with our environment; to unplug from our iPhones, look around us, smile and make eye contact with people."

Tijmens, who also provides date coaching services, believes that career women, like Charlotte's example, find it especially challenging and must be more open minded.

"We are so used to making checklists at work, that we do the same for our love lives and sometimes that makes us forgo perfectly suitable partners," she explains. "Many women tend to look for someone who is a better version of themselves – they tend to want to look up to their partner, but when you're at the top of your game that means your pool could become very small." And the traditionally masculine traits and driven demeanour that's made women so successful at work, might work against them in the dating process. "Women often don't realise that men are not using the same criteria in their search for a partner. Sure, they appreciate women who are smart and successful, however they say she needs to look, feel and act feminine. Most importantly men want someone who makes them feel good. They are, in many respects, much more open."

The rules of the dating game may have changed over the past decade but if you're searching for love in Switzerland, then there is no shortage of places to look, just make sure you're willing, prepared, and actively taking part in the journey. ●

*The names of interviewees have been changed at their request.

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