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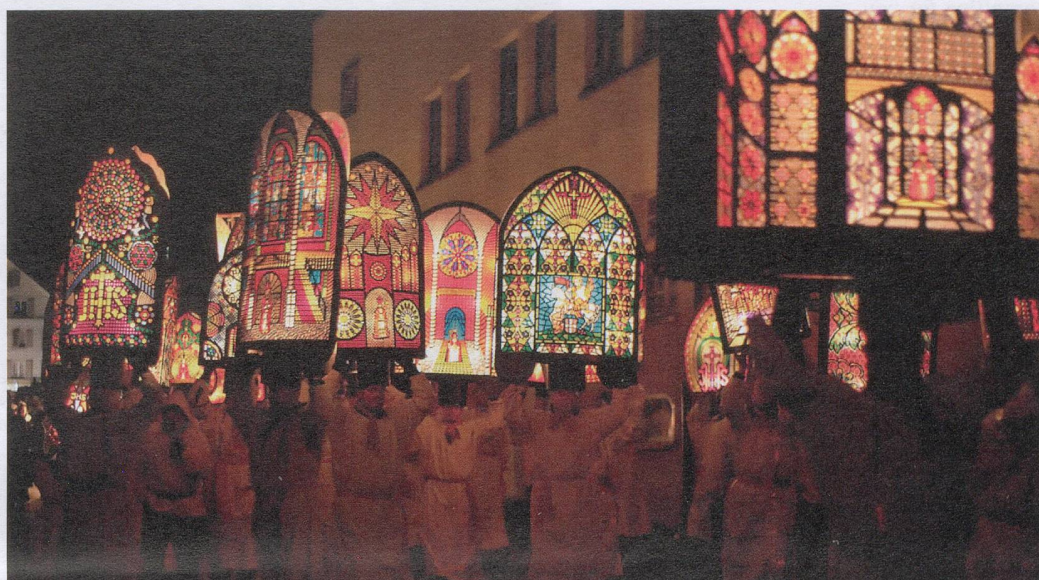
### Christmas and New Year in Switzerland

#### Highlights

- Swiss Christmas & New Year Traditions
- Visp and surrounding area in canton Valais
- Kids colouring-in competition
- History of the Federal Shooting Festival

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In Switzerland, snow may not always be a sure thing at Christmas time. What is, though, is an impressive assortment of festivals and traditional celebrations which are enjoyed by everyone, regardless of their religious beliefs. There are Christmas markets and parades where many enjoy a warming glass of mulled wine, church services, special concerts and carol singing, "Guetzli" baking and "Tischbombe" (a party bomb for the table). And every area of Switzerland enjoys a different kind of tradition especially for "Silvester", to scare away evil spirits for the New Year. It is wonderful to see that still so many, century old traditions have been preserved and are still actively celebrated every year.

For many families, a hike through the forest on a quest to find and cut the perfect Christmas tree is a holiday season tradition. Good quality means well-spaced branches for candle placement – yes, "real" candles - kept upright by dangling ornamental counter-balancers that are lit on Christmas Eve. Trees stay up until January 2 as the candles are lit again on New Year's Eve for good luck.

Many of us were lucky enough to have grown up and experience "Winter Wonderland" during the festive season and its many scary, loud and colourful traditions. Certainly a huge difference to BBQ's on the beach which is the way most

of us celebrate Christmas these days. Be it in Switzerland or New Zealand though, the main focus is to be together with loved ones and to celebrate the birth of Christ.

The Swiss Society of New Zealand wishes all of you a Merry Christmas and a very prosperous, happy and healthy New Year!

By Tanja Latham-Zurbrugg

