

## Episode 16: Winter in Switzerland

### Summary

Winter has arrived in Switzerland and even though it's cold, it's still an enjoyable time of year. Nick and Wendy talk about the different winter activities they do and other aspects of winter life in Switzerland.

### Transcript

Nick: Well, it's winter in Switzerland and, Wendy, as we've talked about before, there are distinct seasons in Switzerland. And now we come to winter, which is actually<sup>1</sup> probably the most interesting season that there is.

Wendy: Yeah, I really love winter here. Umm, I know a lot of people tend to complain about the cold, and it definitely is cold, but, you know, as long as you wear the right clothes and, uhh, dress appropriately for it, then, uhh, it can be a lot of fun to play out in the snow and, uhh, there are a lot of things that you can do only in the winter.

Nick: Yeah, and I think the country as a whole embraces<sup>2</sup> that, because, yeah, what can you do, right? It's going to be cold and wet, and you can complain about it, or you can understand that every year it'll be like this and you can really embrace it instead. And so a lot of the traditions and a lot of the culture of Switzerland is tied up in this winter. I mean, it's a mountainous country and it's basically a winter country.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, it's true. Like, the really iconic dishes in Swiss cuisine, those are all dishes that the local people only eat in the winter, like you wouldn't ever eat fondue in the summer as a Swiss person, or very rarely anyway. Umm, and, yeah, a lot of the things that they're known for are things that happen in the winter. You know, there's hockey, there's skiing, there's, uhh, skating, you know, lots of, uhh, different activities that, uhh, really you can only do at this time of year.

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<sup>1</sup> actually: in fact, contrary to expectation. Note that this is a false friend with Latin-based languages; in English it does not mean currently or at this moment. Nick uses it here to emphasise that you may not think that winter is interesting, but it is.

<sup>2</sup> embraces: accepts willingly or gladly (in this context). Embrace can also mean to hug.

Nick: Right, and I'd say that those activities, umm ... well, I'd say there's two aspects to it, as spectator sports, ice hockey is popular, uhh, and alpine skiing is very popular and then, but more I think as sports or activities that people do. You know, Swiss people are very active people and there's just all sorts of things that you can do in the winter. You can do alpine skiing, you can do cross country skiing, skating like you said, and everything.

Wendy: Yeah, and even people of all ages, you know. Uhh, cross country skiing, especially, you'll see a lot of what I would call elderly people who are still very fit and very active and it's a great sport, uhh, because it's not that dangerous. You know, alpine skiing, it can be dangerous and you can fall and hurt yourself, and if you're 70 years old and you're afraid of breaking a hip or something, then you might not want to be doing that anymore. But cross country skiing is something that you can still do, uhh, at any age, and it helps keep you fit as well. So, uhh, I think, umm, yeah, that's something that, uhh, all Swiss people really - well, I wouldn't say they all enjoy it - but, uhh, it's something that's a real characteristic of the nation as a whole.

Nick: Yeah, I think it's good that you have these levels of different winter activities that you can do, as you said. So alpine skiing is extremely popular, umm, basically Swiss kids, when they're four years old, start skiing. By the age of six they're way better<sup>3</sup> than you and I will ever be, umm, and then, yeah, you have cross country as a level down in terms of<sup>4</sup> danger. And the other thing you can do in winter is you can keep hiking.

Wendy: Right.

Nick: Uhh, so there are these winter trails all over the place, all over the country, so if you really just want to hike you can do that, either, uhh, on a trail where you can walk as normal, or, uhh, with snowshoes.

Wendy: Umm-hmm, yep. Snowshoes (snowshoeing) is a really popular activity, too. So those are different kinds of trails as well and they're maintained differently. So you have, umm, these winter hiking trails that are well groomed<sup>5</sup> and the snow has been packed down so that you won't just fall knee deep into the snow if you're trying to hike and you'll be able to walk on top of it even if you're just using regular shoes or maybe snow boots of some kind. But then the, uhh, snowshoeing trails are not packed down, so it's just, you know, fresh powder and, uhh, the shoe allows you to still walk on top of it, uhh, without falling deep into the snow. So, uhh, yeah, they really go to a lot of effort to, uhh, maintain these trails and also the cross

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<sup>3</sup> way better: much better, significantly better (informal)

<sup>4</sup> in terms of: with regard to, concerning

<sup>5</sup> groomed: taken care of, carefully maintained

country trails and the alpine skiing trails, and, you know, to make it possible for people to take part in all these different activities.

Nick: Yeah, we would've maybe liked to have done more cross country skiing together but the problem is that there are two types of cross country skiing and you like one type and I like the other type.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: Uhh, and so basically you have the classic style which is what you do, where you're skiing in what we call ruts<sup>6</sup> or tracks that are made into the snow. And so you're ... you can't really choose exactly where you go, you follow the lines of the tracks that your, that your skis are in. And I prefer the skating or the freestyle technique where you can really go outside of these tracks and you're skiing more freely, but the technique to that is quite difficult and you really have to learn it and I took some lessons but I never got really, really good at it, uhh, to the point where I could really enjoy it rather than it being really, kind of hard work. So I stuck more to<sup>7</sup> alpine or to downhill skiing rather than cross country skiing.

Wendy: Yeah, and I prefer cross country skiing. But I can enjoy the downhill too. I mean, it took me a long time to get over the fear because in the beginning it is really scary if you haven't grown up skiing. You know, as you said, Swiss children basically as soon as they can walk they start learning how to ski and so they have no fear and, uhh, when you're out there on the slopes, you'll see the kids just zoom<sup>8</sup> past you, you know, and, uhh, they're amazing skiers and they're just tiny little kids, uhh, but when you're learning as an adult, it's a lot more difficult to overcome that fear. And for me it took a long time, but, uhh, because we kept going, uhh, eventually I got to the point where I can enjoy alpine skiing too. Uhh, but it does still make me nervous and, uhh, really I would prefer to just do cross country, because it's like hiking, umm, you know, in that you get to enjoy the landscapes. It's not about the adrenaline rush<sup>9</sup> and the, you know, the activity itself. It's more about just, uhh, enjoying nature and, uhh, sometimes you're completely alone on the trails. They're a lot less busy than the downhill skiing trails, and so you just get to be out in nature in the snow, you know, in this completely different landscape even though it's perhaps the same place where you've been hiking, it looks completely different in the winter than it does in the summer. So...

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<sup>6</sup> ruts: marks in the ground, usually made by vehicles

<sup>7</sup> stuck to: stayed with, continued with (something else, rather than changing to this new thing)

<sup>8</sup> zoom: to go very fast

<sup>9</sup> adrenaline rush: what you get when you do a thrilling and possibly scary activity like alpine skiing or going on rollercoasters.

Nick: Yeah that's definitely true. And we've done a couple of hikes, or places where we've hiked in the summer where we've gone cross country skiing as well, and yeah, you really see that. And the other thing that you really got into for a while, although you haven't really done it much lately, is ice skating.

Wendy: Yeah, no I love ice skating. I've just been really busy the past couple of years. I haven't had that much time for it, but I actually took lessons a few years ago, uhh, as an adult. They do have, uhh, classes that are specifically for adolescents and adults, so they're not for children. Umm, and, uhh, so I learned a few things, but again, you know, the fear factor is really hard to overcome because you can really hurt yourself when you're figure skating too, umm, especially if you start doing jumps. You're going to fall, that's guaranteed, and the ice is pretty hard, uhh, it's actually a lot harder than snow when you land on it, so, umm, yeah, I didn't really do any jumps but I learned to do a few turns and things like that. Umm, and I really love it and I especially love watching it as well. I love it as a spectator and also as an activity that I can do myself. Umm, and so there are a few different places where you can do it. There are a few, uhh, rinks<sup>10</sup> in Geneva where we live, skating rinks. Some are outdoors and some also have indoor, uhh, rinks. So I really love the outdoor ones, uhh, you know, if the weather is good then it's a lot more fun to be outside.

Nick: Right, and then one of the most magical winter experiences that we had in Switzerland was to go to this, uhh, lake that was frozen over and you can skate on the lake. And it's called *Lac de Joux*, and it only freezes over maybe once every two or three years, and probably now with climate change it's happening less and less.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: So I think it's only happened once or twice in the six years that we've been here.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: And we went with some friends and that's incredible because it's a very large lake and it's completely frozen, and you can really just look down, uhh, into it and you can just go skating on it. And you ... there's this incredible noise of the vibration and the sound of the ice...

Wendy: Yeah, it's kind of like a popping sound, it sounds like this electronic, kind of, sound. Umm, yeah I can definitely remember that, and I just loved the freedom of just being able to skate, you know, just straight ahead for as long as you want to and not just having to keep going around in circles as you would normally in a skating rink.

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<sup>10</sup> rinks: places where you can go ice skating or play ice hockey

Nick: Right, and so we did that maybe about three winters ago, and then it hasn't frozen over since then that we're aware (of) and so we haven't had a chance to do it, but when it does happen, it's on the local news, and then everybody kind of rushes, on the next weekend, to this lake so everyone can go skating on it. And it's really, it's really magical.

Wendy: Yeah, it is.

Nick: And so it's one of the great winter experiences that you can have here in Switzerland.

Wendy: Yep, one of many.

## Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Wendy like cross country skiing more than alpine skiing?
2. Which form of cross country skiing does Nick like and which type does Wendy like?
3. According to Nick, how often can you go ice skating on the frozen *Lac de Joux*?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. If you visit the Roman ruins at Pompeii, you can see \_\_\_\_\_ made by chariots in the old Roman roads.
2. I would like to go ice skating more often, but there aren't any skating \_\_\_\_\_ where I live.
3. Going ice skating outdoors is \_\_\_\_\_ than doing it indoors.
4. Cross country skiing is more family friendly than alpine skiing, \_\_\_\_\_ safety.
5. I started playing the piano but I wasn't very good at it so I just \_\_\_\_\_ playing the guitar.
6. Rather than running away from challenges, he \_\_\_\_\_ them instead.
7. It \_\_\_\_\_ rains more in Rome than it does in London.
8. If there's heavy snowfall at night, the cross country tracks need to be \_\_\_\_\_ early the next morning.
9. After only a week or two of practice, kids can \_\_\_\_\_ down the ski slopes really quickly.
10. Some people say the biggest \_\_\_\_\_ you can get is by jumping out of a plane.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. What is winter like where you live? Do you like it?
2. Which winter sports activity do you like the most? Why?
3. Would you like to live in a country like Switzerland with cold winters but lots of snow and ice sports? Why or why not? (If you already live in a cold country, what are the advantages and disadvantages of it?)

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. Wendy likes cross country skiing because it's not as dangerous as alpine skiing and because she can enjoy the landscape in a similar way to hiking.
2. Nick likes the freestyle or skating form of cross country skiing while Wendy likes the classic form where you skate in tracks.
3. Nick says the lake is open for ice skating once every two or three years.

### Exercises

1. ruts
2. rinks
3. way better
4. in terms of
5. stuck to
6. embraces
7. actually
8. groomed
9. zoom
10. adrenaline rush