

# Chocolate—Switzerland's Brown Gold

*With the Easter holiday approaching, mountains of chocolate Easter eggs and Easter bunnies are piling up in the stores—in addition to all the wonderful chocolate bars you can find there year-round. Many of these delicacies are even “made in Switzerland.” But why did Switzerland become so famous for its chocolate? After all, the country has never been a seafaring nation with colonies overseas where they could have easily obtained the raw materials needed to create the delicious sweet. The answer is that Swiss inventiveness resulted in some crucial improvements in chocolate production that established this country's reputation as producer of some of the world's best chocolates.*



## What is Chocolate?

The main ingredient in chocolate is cocoa beans, which originate in South America, where they were cultivated by the Maya as early as the 7th century. The Maya used the beans to make a drink called “xocolatl”—hence the word “chocolate.” In the 16th century, Spanish conquerors introduced cocoa to Europe, where sweetened chocolate drinks became very popular. Because of the high cost of cocoa, however, chocolate was affordable only to the aristocracy. Only once the import of cocoa beans increased, and new processes to press the beans and grind them to a powder were invented, did chocolate become available to the general population. It came to be considered a strengthening agent (and was even sold as such in pharmacies) and aphrodisiac.



From Spain, the trade with cocoa and chocolate spread to other European countries throughout the 17th and 18th century. Also, it was no longer consumed only as a drink, and solid chocolate became more popular. Especially in Italy, craftsmen called “cioccolatieri” created this new confection and sold it for high prices. And this is where the Swiss entered the picture, as traveling journeymen from numerous countries, including Switzerland, came to Italy to learn the art of the confectioners and cioccolatieri. Among them was François-Louis Cailler, who brought his knowledge back to Switzerland and opened a mechanical chocolate production facility near Vevey in 1819. He was followed by many others, some of whose names you may recognize from the chocolate brands you still find at stores today, including Philippe Suchard, Rudolf Sprüngli-Ammann, Rodolphe Lindt, and Jean Tobler.

## Swiss Inventiveness and Chocolate

Chocolate at the beginning of the 19th century was rather different from what we enjoy today—with a much coarser and almost sandy texture and a slightly sour taste—and Swiss chocolatiers were instrumental in creating the delicious confections Switzerland is now renowned for. Two inventions were particularly important. First, Daniel Peter, a son-in-law of François-Louis Cailler, began to experiment with refining the traditional cocoa mixture with milk, arguing that if people mixed the cocoa with milk for their drink anyway, it might also be possible to add it to the cocoa base. In 1875 his attempts finally paid off and he created the first cocoa milk powder, followed by solid milk chocolate bars. The development of milk chocolate was a win-win situation for consumers and producers: Consumers enjoyed the improved flavor and consistency of the milk chocolate, while producers required less of the expensive cocoa beans to produce the same amount of chocolate.

The second major contribution to chocolate-making came from Rodolphe Lindt, who owned a chocolate factory in Bern. Lindt was dissat-

isfied with the consistency and taste of the chocolate at the time. To improve this, he modified the chocolate-making process. For the regular chocolate production, the cocoa beans were smashed and mixed with other ingredients in a roller grinder. While maintaining the same principle, Lindt now heated the roller grinder, added extra cocoa butter, and extended the processing time in the machine to three whole days. The result of this modified process, which is now known as “conching”: The chocolate has a smooth, velvety texture with a matte silky shine, produces a much better flavor, and it melts on the tongue—fondant (melting) chocolate was born! The new, more liquid product also had the advantage that it could easily be poured into molds, making the production of chocolate bars much easier and allowing for the creation of hollow shapes, such as Easter bunnies and Easter eggs!

## Swiss Chocolate Today

Since the late 19th century, the Swiss chocolate industry has grown continuously, despite increasing competition from manufacturers in other countries who adopted the chocolate-making processes developed here in Switzerland. Over the first 20 years of the 20th century, little Switzerland became the chocolate world power, accounting for 55% of the chocolate exports worldwide in 1912. While they no longer hold that share of the market today, Swiss chocolate is still sought after the world over. About 60% of the chocolate produced in Switzerland is exported to about 150 countries worldwide, and that doesn't include the much larger amounts of chocolate produced abroad for Swiss brands. Today, more than 4,000 people work in the Swiss chocolate industry, producing about 180,000 tons of chocolate products annually. And, not surprisingly, the Swiss are world champions of chocolate consumption with about 12 kg per person per year (although that does include the purchases by tourists). So don't feel bad about buying an extra bag of chocolate Easter eggs or another bar of the wonderful, melt-in-your-mouth chocolate—it's a Swiss thing to do!

If you want to learn more about chocolate and its production, you can visit the Lindt Home of Chocolate in Kilchberg (ZH) (<https://www.lindt-home-of-chocolate.com/en/>) or the Maison Cailler in Broc (FR) (<http://cailler.ch/>

[en/cailler-experiences](http://cailler-experiences)) (Broc is actually close to Gruyere, so you can combine a visit to the chocolate museum with a visit to the cheese factory.) Other chocolate tours and experiences throughout Switzerland are listed at <https://www.myswitzerland.com/en-us/search/?q=chocolate&f=Experience>. Finally, you can learn more about Swiss chocolate, its history, and its production in a brochure called “Chocologie” that you can download at <https://www.chocosuisse.ch/en/services>; there you will also find more information on chocolate factories you can visit.

