



In the park with Ranger Urs

The Vilette-Park with its impressive tree population was artistically created in the English style in 1865. If you enjoy cultivated garden architecture, this is a must-see – ideally, on a guided tour with an expert.

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“Ranger”. The word probably conjures up images of an Australian gamekeeper battling angry crocodiles and rutting kangaroos in the outback, bouncing along in a four-wheel drive vehicle on dusty gravel tracks. But as soon as you meet Urs Camenzind, such preconceptions go out the window. You won’t find this 57-year-old forest ranger and gardener out in the wilderness with a bush knife. Instead, he’ll be walking through Vilette-Park with binoculars, working on behalf of the municipality of Cham. The badge on the sleeve of his beige uniform shows the organisation he belongs to: the Swiss Rangers.

Vilette-Park is a well-known natural oasis covering around 46,000 square metres. It also has a restaurant of the same name, where many a visitor has lingered over coffee and cake. But only a tour with Ranger Camenzind will truly open your eyes to what an exquisite gem the park really is. It was designed by the famous garden architect Theodor Froebel, who created an English-style garden here in 1865 on

behalf of a wealthy Zurich banker. Unlike French-style gardens, this garden does not feature strictly laid-out beds and meticulously trimmed hedges, but instead strives to reflect the natural landscape. Another distinctive feature of the park is its exotic tree species from various places. These were intended to impress. It’s an altogether highly prestigious park.

There are redwoods from China, Japanese maples, oriental plane trees, African cedars, American bald cypresses and the Caucasian wingnut tree, as well as monkey puzzle trees, whose leaves twist around their branches like screws. The tulip tree, which is adorned with sulphur-yellow to yellow-green, almost palm-sized upright flowers in early summer, was also quite exotic for the time. European and native trees are dotted among the more exotic ones: horse chestnut and holly, weeping willow, beech, birch, poplar, elm, alder, ash, yew and oak.

The sudden chirping of the oriole

No matter when you visit the park, there’s charm to be found there all year round. In spring, for example, you can see the blooming magnolias, when the delicate pink flowers cover the gravel and grass like a luxurious carpet. A little later in the year, the lush rhododendrons transform into a colourful bouquet and the privet, monkshood and dog roses unfurl their flowers. Together, the perennials, beds, hedges and trees create a harmonious whole.

Preserving this harmony also involves leaving old or dead wood in place because it provides a wonderful habitat for insects and small animals, such as woodpeckers and squirrels – it’s good practice for biodiversity. Making people aware of the importance of such seemingly trivial aspects of caring for the garden is part of the ranger’s mission, which he fulfils with enthusiasm. Park visitors are grateful when, thanks to Camenzind’s efforts, they suddenly hear the flute-like chirping of the oriole – a rare, bright-yellow songbird that visits the park as a guest in summer but is seldom spotted. This is in stark contrast to the jet-black cormorant, which likes to spend its time on dry branches near the lake and can be spotted from a distance by attentive park visitors.

The park’s generous lawns are also especially inviting. Your first thought might be that they are perfect for playing badminton or throwing a frisbee, but the rang-



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the idyllic Vilette
Park.



↑ There is a restaurant inside Villa Vilette.



↑ Watch and wait: Urs Camenzind "in action".



← The monkey puzzle tree has very distinctive branches.

↑ The park goes right up to the lake's edge.

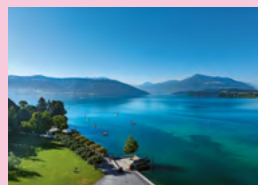
er will quickly tell you that games are not allowed in the park. The same goes for swimming, barbecuing or spreading out blankets or bath towels to have a picnic or sunbathe. Are visitors allowed to have any fun then? "You can have fun, just not here!" says Camenzind. The nearby Hirsgarten and the bathing facilities are the perfect places for these kinds of activities. "At Villette-Park, the needs of flora and fauna take priority."

And rightly so! The rules and restrictions and the presence of the ranger are what makes Villette-Park so pleasantly quiet. The silence is only broken by the splashing of the lake water, the cheerful chirping of birds and the rustling of the grass snakes in summer as they dart off into the bushes.



Villette-Park
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en/villette

Tips



20 Hirsgartenbadi Lido in Cham

"Hirse" (millet) was once grown where the beautiful Hirsgartenbadi bathing lake now stands. Nicknamed the "Hirsi", this bathing lake has a huge grass area where you can relax and enjoy panoramic views of the mountains. The proprietors of the restaurant here are always coming up with new culinary ideas and they serve their own home-brewed beer.



zug-tourismus.ch/en/
hirsgartenbadi



21 Restaurant Villa Villette

Ever wanted to dine in a historic building? You can at Restaurant Villette, which is situated in the park of the same name. This country house surrounded by magnificent trees was built towards the end of the 19th century. In summer, you can dine in the beautiful garden restaurant, and when the weather turns cooler you can soak up the unique ambience of the villa's historic rooms.



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