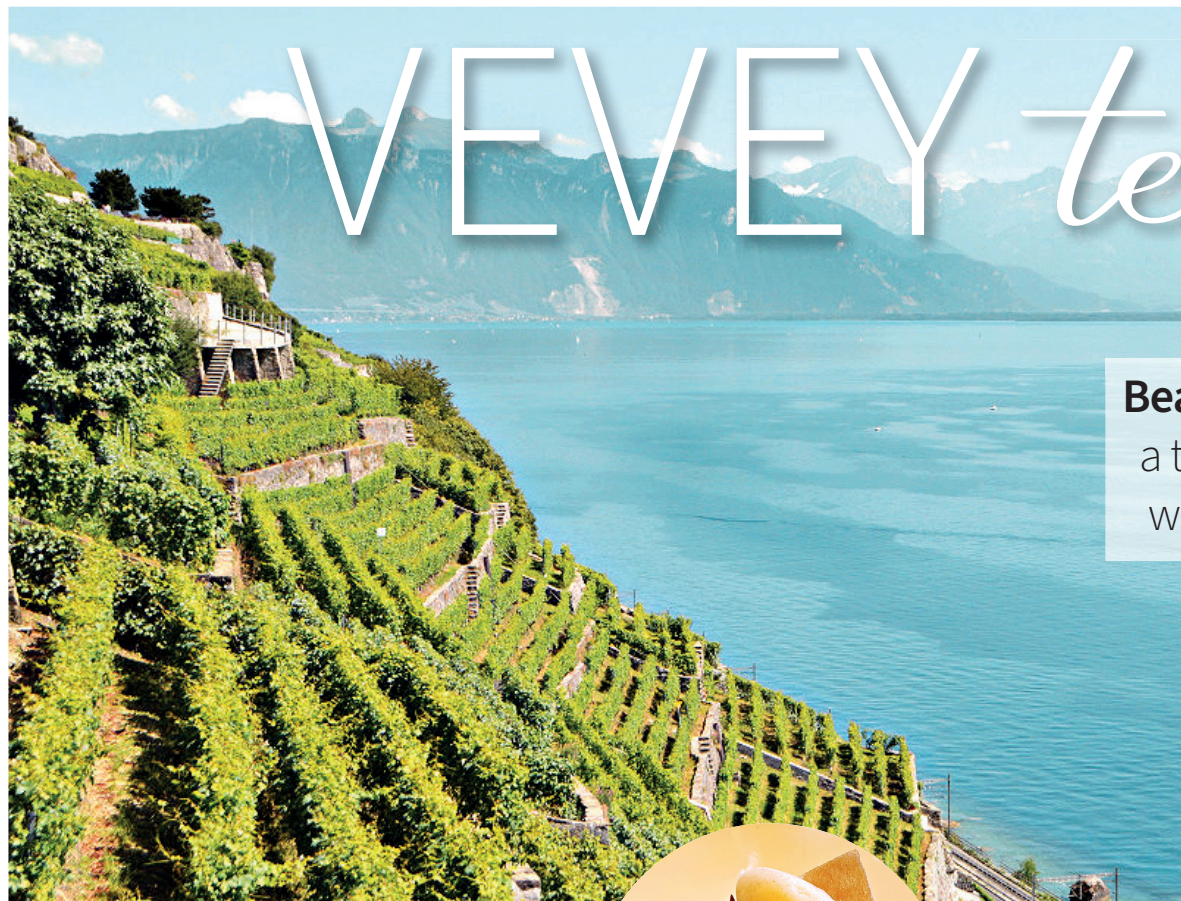


VEVEY *tempting*

Beatrice Sayers whets appetites for a visit to a town on the Swiss Riviera, where food and wine are paired with links to a comic genius



While some countries serve up their attractions on a plate, others hold back and let curious travellers discover them. Charlie Chaplin was an inquisitive visitor and he so liked what he found in the Swiss town of Vevey, on the shore of Lake Geneva, that he stayed – for the final 25 years of his life.

Over the course of a four-day trip I felt the pull of the area's gentle humour and good taste that the genius of Hollywood slapstick appreciated.

A ten-minute bus ride up the hillside from my hotel took me to the house in Corsier-sur-Vevey, overlooking Lake Geneva, where Chaplin and his fourth wife brought up their eight children. It is now

Vevey has a twice-weekly market



La Forchette, opposite the Alimentarium museum



Chaplin's World, a fascinating museum telling the story of the boy who escaped desperate poverty and an unstable family in London for super-stardom in the United States, where he used to stand up for the Jews.

I enjoyed clips from his silent and talking films – including his astonishing 1940 anti-Hitler parody *The Great Dictator* – alongside archive footage of family life. There were also photos of the actor with violinist and physicist Albert Einstein – the two had become friends in the early 1930s – and virtuosos Isaac Stern and Yehudi Menuhin. Chaplin himself was self-taught on the instrument and the fiddle he bought aged 16, strung in reverse so he could bow left-handed, is on display in the dining room. The actor's comment correcting an assertion that he was Jewish – "I'm afraid I don't have that honour" – surely cements his place in all Jewish hearts.

Vevey may host the monolithic HQ of Nestlé, but it satisfies a lot



more than a sweet tooth. The real pride of the town and its surroundings, the canton of Vaud, lies in its fresh produce, its winemaking and in the delicious dishes found in its restaurants and brasseries.

I spent a couple of hours at the Jomini vineyard in the village of Chexbres to find out about the area's winemaking tradition. Sophie Jomini, who runs the vineyard with her husband and sons, offered me a crisp, fresh wine made from the chasselas grape, the main variety of the region, Lavaux, as well as a delicious Merlot.

The vineyards of Lavaux were planted in the 11th century by local monks. But denuded of trees, the steep hill-sides suffered soil erosion, which was remedied by constructing the 250 miles of stone walls that interweave the terraces. The walls create a stunning landscape, and the vineyards are now a Unesco world heritage site.

Such is the pride among the local winegrowers that once in a generation they celebrate it with a pageant as big, elaborate and colourfully costumed as an Olympics ceremony. The most recent *Fête des Vignerons*, in 2019, was created by Daniele Feliz Pasca, who worked on closing ceremonies for the 2006 and 2014 Games.

My guide told me that her husband was one of the local people who appeared alongside wine growers and their families in



Above: a street in Vevey. Left: chocolate dessert; below: seabass



the two-hour show, which ran every night for three weeks in Vevey's marketplace. Along with the other 5,500 actors and extras he had to rehearse for months, take leave from his work for the performances – and pay a thousand Swiss francs (more than £800) for his costume.

After my vineyard tour I lunched at Le Deck, just below Chexbres.

Part of the Baron Tavernier Hotel and Spa, it has panoramic views over the lake and the mountains. For fish lovers like me there was plenty of choice, and I enjoyed flame-burned tuna and Swiss salty meringue followed by roasted arctic char with artichokes, creamy peas and crunchy ravioli.

Back by the lakeside in the evening to walk to our restaurant, the Swiss sense of humour rose out of the water before us, in the shape of a giant piece of cutlery. *La Forchette* was installed in 1995 to mark the 10th anniversary of the Alimentarium, a three-storey food museum. We dined – where else? – at Ze Fork, which has a playful menu idea, presenting each dish in three different ways. I chose *La Mer*, which had three takes on *perche* (perch), a small fish symbolic of the canton of Vaud.

A statue of Chaplin by John Doubleday, a modified version of

the one in Leicester Square, looks across to *La Forchette*. The actor would have loved the view!

I had a very comfortable stay at the Astra Hotel, opposite the railway station, which made travel along the coast – by train and trolleybus – easy. Its restaurant, *La Coupole*, plays a video of the 2019 fete on a continuous loop at breakfast. If you can, take a Lunch on the Lake cruise, where scrumptious local dishes are served by *garçons* in red-and-white-striped tops, a play on the Breton shirt.

On the bus from Luton airport that night, I missed the Swiss efficiency and cleanliness. But Vevey and the Montreux Riviera left me with delicious memories, particularly of Chaplin.

◆ **Double rooms at the Astra Hotel in Vevey start at £140, inclusive of breakfast**



Beatrice with the statue of Chaplin