

# Finding Switzerland in Japan

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As a non-speaker and non-reader of Japanese I went to Japan fully expecting to be confused. However, the only confusing moment I experienced had nothing to do with anything Japanese: when I stepped off the train at [Hakone Station](#), I suddenly found myself in Switzerland! I was greeted by this large image of [Disentis/Mustér](#), a town in Kanton [Graubünden/Grischun](#). I thought the original

German spelling of “Rhätische Bahn” was very striking in a place where the last thing I was expecting was a reminder of Europe – seeing that I was after an **authentic Japanese** experience away from global Tokyo.

The billboard is in fact an ad for [Swiss Tourism](#) – I know the characteristic red, the emblem with the Swiss Cross inside an edelweiss and the slogan “get natural” all too well from a [research project into the linguistic and communicative challenges faced by the Swiss tourism industry](#) I conducted a few years ago. The billboard is in Hakone because apparently the railway I was travelling on, [Hakone Tozan Railway](#), is a sister railway of [Rhätische Bahn](#).



No sooner had I got over my surprise of finding myself staring at the Swiss Alps instead of Mt Fuji, I found myself in front of the Cafe St Moritz. There is some serious devotion to Graubünden/Grischun in Hakone! The Cafe St Moritz was also liberally displaying the Swiss flag, including on its tables. [Banal nationalism again](#), of course, but with the imagery of another nation! The menu of the Cafe St Moritz, by contrast, doesn't seem to be Swiss-inspired. Hot dogs

must probably be considered un-Swiss 😊

Advertising takes cultural symbols and images from one place and uses them in another to create authenticity. The use of national imagery from elsewhere in marketing coffee-shops, restaurants, food and drink (and all manner of other products and services) is a feature of contemporary symbolic landscapes the world over.

My first reaction to finding Switzerland in Hakone was one of dismay: I felt like I'd stumbled upon [yet another non-space of globalization](#) where globally circulating images make one place exactly like another and Hakone becomes Disentis/Mustér, and Disentis/Mustér becomes Hakone. However, on reflection and after reading up on *gaikoku mura* (“foreign villages”), country-themed theme parks, I have changed my mind: if local tourism



can create an exotic tourism experience, then that is a much more sustainable way of travelling. Why would you make a long and tedious journey to travel all the way to Switzerland and create a huge carbon footprint if you can experience Switzerland 70 min outside downtown Tokyo? And considering that it's entirely possible that in the meantime some marketer has come up with a Japanese theme for St Moritz ...

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BANAL NATIONALISM

GLOBALIZATION

GLOBALIZATION OF NOTHING

JAPAN

LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

SWITZERLAND

TOURISM



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