



Experience the green wonder

Discover a paradise at the foot of the Bernese Alps: Tropenhaus Frutigen. Mountain water, fish farming and a tropical garden – a harmonious trio under one roof and an innovative energy concept to boot. Tropenhaus Frutigen does all of these things.

Tropenhaus Frutigen is unique in the world for its combination of a tropical atmosphere, fish farming and Alpine setting. It makes exemplary use of closed, resource-saving material cycles and renewable energies.

It highlights the fact that a tropical climate once existed here, 250 to 300 million years ago. Sturgeon – sometimes called the living dinosaurs of the fish world – have been around ever since. They are now farmed at Tropenhaus Frutigen and are the only source of real Swiss caviar.

With its tropical garden, permanent exhibition “How the fish came to the mountain”, fish farming and distinctive cuisine, Tropenhaus Frutigen offers an unforgettable and unparalleled experience.

Unique energy concept

But who came up with the idea of breeding sturgeon and producing caviar in Frutigen? When the NEAT Base Tunnel was realized, there was the question of what to do with the 50 litres of crystal clear water that flows unhindered out of the north side of the tunnel near Frutigen every second. Piping the 18°C water directly into the waterways would have endangered the native fish stocks, especially the lake trout.

Rather than cooling the water, which would have cost a lot of money and wasted a lot of energy, the warmth can be used in a sensible and sustainable way in Tropenhaus Frutigen: the Tropenhaus breeds fish and grows plants that flourish because of this warmth.

Heating a tropical greenhouse with residual heat

Tropenhaus Frutigen consumes more electricity than it can produce. However, it produces excess thermal energy. The Tropenhaus releases this into a combined heat power supply and obtains green electricity in its place.

But where exactly does the other electricity at Tropenhaus Frutigen come from? Some comes from the drinking water reservoir in Frutigen: overflow water is not wasted, but is routed instead down a pressure pipe to the lower-lying Tropenhaus where it drives a Pelton turbine and generates electricity. Parts of the turbines are made from Plexiglas, allowing you to see inside them. When they are in use, visitors can see how they work.

In addition, the photovoltaic plant (solar energy) on the roof of the main building supplies around 35 kilowatts of electricity per hour. This is equivalent to the requirements of around ten households. Tropenhaus Frutigen also obtains electricity from all of its organic waste – including the effluent sludge from the fish rearing tanks – which is produced at the biogas plant on site. This is equivalent to the requirements of another 50 households.

The tropical garden: divinely sweet fruit, devilishly hot spices

Tropenhaus Frutigen doesn't only produce sturgeon meat, caviar and other fish fillets, but also harvests exotic fruits, plants and spices from its greenhouses. Bananas, papayas, star fruit, guavas, avocados, pineapples, kumquats, baby bananas: these are all bursting with flavour because they are left on the plants until fully ripe.

Tropenhaus Frutigen harvests around two tonnes a year. All of the fruits are processed in the on-site restaurant and sold in the Tropenhaus shop. In addition, various themed paths give visitors valuable information about individual plants.

For example, on our coffee trail you can learn more about various types of coffee as well as rare coffees and also how coffee goes from being a cherry in a tree to the drink we all know. On the banana trail you will come across all kinds of anecdotes about Switzerland's favourite fruit, including why bananas are so crooked but, above all, so healthy. The spice trail will delight your sense of smell and its scents will whisk you off to faraway lands. To finish, over 300 plants on the orchid trail provide a colourful feast for the eyes.

"How the fish came to the mountain": the interactive permanent exhibition

Why are sturgeon considered the dinosaurs of the fish world? What are they doing in Frutigen of all places? The new permanent exhibition at Tropenhaus Frutigen takes young and old alike along on a surprising tour of discovery and explains more about the ins and outs of Tropenhaus Frutigen in five themed worlds with over 80 elements. Informative, entertaining or virtual, and featuring many activities that invite you to experiment, it provides visitors with a lot of valuable information and a few oddities while offering an interactive overall experience.

Through the time tunnel, into the underwater world and the laboratory

The *Prologue* introduces you to the topic: Why are sturgeon considered the dinosaurs of the fish world and how have they ended up in Frutigen?

The *time tunnel* lets you experience a brief history of the earth: it reveals that sturgeon have been evolving for over 200 million years, and answers the question as to how large and how old sturgeon can become.

What do sturgeon, humans and bananas have in common? The *underwater world* gets to the heart of this question and explains everything you need to know about the most precious resource on our planet: water.

Access to the *laboratory* is only allowed under very strict "conditions" – after passing through a special hygiene sluice. The laboratory takes a fun and experimental approach to teaching you all about the individual phases of fish farming right through to producing and processing caviar.

Why does 18°C warm, clear water flow from the NEAT Base Tunnel? The *Mountain* topic addresses the mountain ranges around Frutigen and displays the sophisticated energy concept in connection with the hydrological cycle.

Before visiting the exhibition, children and adults each receive a flyer giving them various tasks to do on the way. At various stations, children can copy subjects of the exhibition as pencil hatchings, creating a funny image as a memento. Adults are invited to answer various questions, submit the completed questionnaire, and enter a competition offering exciting prizes.

Other attractions: audio guide and aquarium

With the aid of a device provided by the Tropenhaus or your own smartphone plus an app from the App Store or Google Play Store, an audio guide will explain the exhibition with audio clips for adults or even children.

After your visit to the exhibition, the tour continues to the numerous outdoor and indoor fish rearing tanks. The highlight is the stop in front of the aquarium's large windows: there are a total of 12 different species of fish waiting to be discovered, of which nine are species of sturgeon such as the paddlefish and shortnose sturgeon.

Why roam so far away? Sturgeon and perch farmed in the Alps.

In addition to the warm water from within the Lötschberg, the recirculation aquaculture system at Tropenhaus Frutigen is the secret to its success: The fish rearing tanks are set up to allow the same, purified water to circulate continuously through them. Water is pumped out of the central water treatment facility and into the top of the tanks before flowing out below and back into the cleaning unit.

There are around 80,000 sturgeon in the fish rearing tanks

Tropenhaus Frutigen has continuously developed its leading role in sustainable fish farming since the first sturgeons were reared in the facility in 2005.

Together with the Centre for Fish and Wild Animal Medicine at the University of Bern, it has optimized the animal husbandry conditions and developed innovative, more animal-friendly methods, for example to determine the optimal caviar maturity point. Today, around 80,000 sturgeons swim in the rearing tanks, not to mention the perch, pike perch and graylings.

Sensible and sustainable alternative to wild-caught fish

Fish is a healthy and popular food. This is reflected in our consumption of fish, which has risen sharply around the world over the last few decades. As a consequence, fish stocks in waterways, including the number of sturgeon, has fallen sharply too: overfishing is the sad diagnosis worldwide.

Our appetite for fish and also precious and expensive caviar in particular has resulted in the sad fact that most of the 26 species of sturgeon are threatened with extinction. The catching of wild sturgeon is now prohibited in most areas of the world.

Fish farming is the sensible and sustainable alternative to wild-caught fish. Fish are reared in ponds or tanks and are fed without any added medication or hormones.

An exotic touch, a little exclusivity: Finest caviar

Oona caviar, the real Swiss Alpine caviar from Tropenhaus Frutigen, is the first and only caviar made from sturgeon which are raised in Swiss mountain spring water. This, along with optimum and modern animal husbandry conditions, forms the guaranteed exclusivity claim for fish farming at Tropenhaus Frutigen. Sustainable production, too, is the top priority. Processing is carried out carefully by hand on site, ensuring a quick process from the fish to the tin.

Freshness is the most important factor for high-quality caviar. It is Tropenhaus Frutigen's aim to produce and provide natural, authentic caviar that is stored as briefly as possible, without any additives or preservatives.

As one of the few caviar producers to refrain from using the additive borax, Tropenhaus Frutigen produces caviar with a delicate skin and a pleasantly tender, smooth consistency. This allows for the optimal development of its nutty aroma with a faint hint of earthiness. Oona caviar is refined using only pure salt, since purity and revealing the subtle nuances in flavour play an essential role.

Oona – real Swiss Alpine caviar: exceptional and pure

Oona is a brand name and also a description of the caviar at Tropenhaus Frutigen. The Oona label emphasizes the origin of Swiss sturgeon in particular. The word “Oona” comes from the Celtic language and means unique or unusual. Oona caviar is available in four exclusive varieties.

N°101 – limité

The term 101 means caviar of the highest quality with an egg size of at least 2.6 millimetres, an intense flavour, and delicate skin.

N°102 – jeune

This quality promises pure freshness, because as the only caviar producer in Switzerland, Tropenhaus Frutigen guarantees it can supply the extracted caviar in just a few days. The loose, pearly roe, which is seasoned with minimal salt, is only available if pre-ordered.

N°103 – traditionnel

In this variety, the pureness of the caviar comes into its own. Lightly salted, with a salt content of a maximum of 3.5%, its nutty, characterful flavour really stands out. The homogeneous colour and round eggs make this caviar really special.

Oona Caviar Millésime

An intense flavour and a shiny black colour are characteristic of this variety of caviar. The full flavour develops after maturing for a few months, at which point it is pasteurized in a glass. This caviar is particularly good for combining with other dishes, for example, to add the finishing touch to beef tartare. It lasts longer when pasteurized and has more of a crunch to it.

Oona Caviar Osietra Carat

The latest product from the House of Oona. The **first ever Swiss caviar from Russian sturgeon** comes from fish that had 9-10 years in which to develop and grow in warm mountain water. The result is a fine, dry caviar. The grains are silver-grey to olive and have a golden sheen. Traditionally aged in slip-lid tins, the caviar develops its nutty and unbelievably fresh aroma with subtle notes of fresh earth. It is therefore stronger than Oona Caviar N°103 – traditional. A product for true caviar connoisseurs.

Sturgeon fillet – another delight

In addition to caviar, Tropenhaus Frutigen also sells fresh and smoked sturgeon fillets: The exquisite flesh is an important product of the sturgeon farm and is available in a range of tastes and smoked varieties.

Sturgeon fillets are a real delicacy owing to their lack of bones. When fresh, they are great for frying or grilling in a spicy marinade. Cold or warm smoked sturgeon fillets go well with salads or pasta, cocktails or tartare. And what's more, sturgeon meat contains valuable unsaturated fatty acids as well as vitamins A and E.

In summary: sturgeon fillets have many benefits

As sturgeon is a bony fish, its fillets do not contain any small bones.

It has a firm consistency and does not fall apart.

The fillets remain succulent for a long time and are therefore suitable for dishes prepared in advance, for example for catering and events.

The large fillets are easy to divide into portions.
They can be easily frozen without any product loss.
Owing to their firm consistency, they are also perfect for the barbecue.
They have a mild and pleasant flavour.
They can be cooked in a variety of different ways.
They are easy to prepare and cannot be overcooked.

Sturgeon accessories

Part of the skin of the sturgeon is processed to create sturgeon leather. This is used to make accessories such as bracelets, bookmarks and bags. The Tropenhaus Shop sells all of these special accessories as well as Oona caviar and sturgeon fillets.

Sturgeon and caviar: the main attractions at the Tropengarten restaurant

Tropenhaus cuisine is inspired daily by the high-quality products from the fish and caviar farming facility and the abundance of fruits and spices from the Tropengarten. These are the main attractions that the kitchen team passionately combine with seasonal products which are sourced from the region where possible.

It's not only the special ambience in the Tropengarten restaurant that will captivate you, but also the food – dishes that will transport you to the tropics in no time at all.

For the inquisitive and the insatiable: themed tours and experience tours

The Tropenhaus has come up with various tours and a whole host of participatory supporting programmes, the experience tours, all of which can be booked for one person or more.

Tours through the worlds of Tropenhaus Frutigen

The Tropenhaus tour guides you through the exhibition, the world of the sturgeon, its peculiarities and way of life, and how caviar is harvested. After that, you will enter the greenhouses with the tropical plants and tour through the orchid garden, learning everything you need to know about the generally unknown plants behind the better-known exotic fruits.

On the two specialist tours, "Garden" and "Fish farming", our experts from fish farming, processing and the tropical garden will take you behind the scenes: you will receive an exclusive, rare insight into their work as well as background information and first-hand insider knowledge. A fascinating tour focusing on individual Tropenhaus topics.

Make it yourself, taste it yourself – exciting experience tours

In contrast to the tours, the experience tours and workshops invite you to take part: after an introduction to the Tropenhaus themes and under specialist supervision, participants create their own exotic tea mixture, mix their own seasoned salt with tropical ingredients or roast their own coffee. Or they can taste products from Tropenhaus Frutigen, such as tropical fruits or sturgeon and caviar, and recognize the finest nuances of flavour. The workshops offer a wide range of activities and cater to a variety of tastes.

Banquets, parties and company events against an unforgettable backdrop

Thanks to the special ambience at Tropenhaus Frutigen, it's not just weddings that can be the best day of your life. Company events, meetings or family gatherings can also be made into unforgettable experiences thanks to a themed tour through the tropical garden or entertaining interludes inviting you to join in – which will quite literally spice things up.

From the wide variety of programmes available, event experts will create individual programmes that will complete any occasion, whether for two or 120 people. Inspiration comes easily in the new meeting rooms with a view of the mountains.

An important place in terms of tourism, and employer of 80 people

Thanks to the valuable financial, communicative and ideological support from the principal shareholder, Coop, it was possible to build Tropenhaus Frutigen, which opened on 21 November 2009 after just 18 months of construction. Since then, it's not just the tropical ambience, fish farming, permanent exhibition and the cuisine that have made an impact. The building, too, is architecturally striking: with its rough geometric façade, the shell of the visitor centre has been designed to imitate the structure of the rocks towering high above the valley. At the same time, the strict cubic shape of the building fits harmoniously into the neighbouring expanses of water and greenery.

Today, Tropenhaus Frutigen is one of the most significant attractions in the Bernese Oberland, with national and international appeal. In addition, Tropenhaus Frutigen employs around 80 people. The jobs and the sustainable use of renewable energies are important economic factors for the region.

Media contact

Beate Makowsky
Head of Marketing & Communication
Deputy Manager
Tel.: +41 (0)33 672 11 48
beate.makowsky@tropenhaus-frutigen.ch
www.tropenhaus-frutigen.ch