

## Media Release

“Harder-Potschete” – new life for an old Interlaken custom

## Banishing Interlaken’s evil spirits...

**2 January – time to again drive evil spirits out of Interlaken. The “Harder-Potschete” in Interlaken is a traditional event with roots in several legends and old customs.**

Old chronicles reveal that 2 January has been celebrated for centuries on the “Bödeli” – as the area around Interlaken is known. As so often with traditional old New Year celebrations, this one sometimes became a little unruly. The word “Potschen“ is derived from the old “es Potschi“, meaning almost the same as scarecrow. Local people dressed up as creatures intended to frighten the spirits, who would then flee into the area around the Harder mountain.

A stop was put to these riotous goings-on about 25 years ago. The custom, which was getting out of hand, was steered into more orderly channels. Over the last quarter of a century, the “Harder-Potschete“ has developed into a flourishing folk festival which however still bears close ties to old tradition.

### **Hardermannkli**

As always, the event revolves around the Hardermannkli (male), Harderfraueli (female) and a whole gang of spirits. Brienz woodcarver Hans Trauffer has given faces to the spirits - in the shape of carved masks. Thus with time, many other figures have been created in addition to the Harder pair and these are brought to life for special events throughout the whole year. The “Snail Shellers“, with many snail shells sewn on to their sack-cloth costumes, the “Wood Shavers“, with costumes decorated with wood shavings, the “Pine Cones“, the Moss Spirits” and the “ Root Dwarves” to name but a few. Wood spirits, elves and mermaids risen from the River Aare join with these creatures to form strange groups. The spirits are judged by a jury on Interlaken’s Marktplatz, with prizes awarded to the most “beautiful” being.

### **Much more than a procession**

On the afternoon of 2 January, a long procession of weird and wonderful creatures winds through the streets of Interlaken and Unterseen, accompanied by cowbell ringers and folk music. Those taking part in the procession make good-natured contact with the many spectators lining the whole route. A prize for the best costume is presented on the Marktplatz and local restaurants are bursting with amiable ambiance. Guests start out on the “Pintenceer” – a tour from restaurant to restaurant. The second day of the New Year in Interlaken draws to a close, full of friendly get-togethers. And once again we can rest assured that all evil spirits have been banished to the Harder Forest for another year.

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