

Fribourg, Neuchâtel & Jura



A far cry from the staggering Alpine scenes more readily associated with Switzerland, this gentle less-visited corner in the west of the country remains something of a 'secret'. From the evocative medieval cantonal capitals of Fribourg and Neuchâtel to the mysterious green hills and deep dark forests of the Jura, from the land of three lakes to charming villages like Gruyères and St Ursanne, it proffers a wealth of sights and scapes well off the beaten tourist track. Be it listening to frogs singing in lakeside bogs, marvelling at palatial ice creations between pine trees or following the call of the devilish green fairy into the wayward Val de Travers, travelling here promises a brilliant sensory experience...and that includes for the taste buds. On the food front, there are monks' heads (strong, nutty-flavoured cheese) to be munched, one of Switzerland's best known AOC cheeses to be sampled and sweet feather-light meringues smothered in rich, thick double cream to blow the calorie count on. When it all gets too much, thousands upon thousands of kilometres of waistline-saving walking, cycling and cross-country skiing trails – not to mention sailing, skiing and wakeboarding on lake water – kick in.

This chapter covers (from south to north) the cantons of Fribourg, Neuchâtel and Jura, as well as the northwestern tip of the canton of Bern. The trio of lakes wedged between the Fribourg and Neuchâtel cantons – Lac de Neuchâtel, Lac de Morat and Bieler See – and the Fribourg canton fall mostly within the Plateau Central (Mittelland) plain. French rules everywhere bar the eastward edge of the latter canton where German predominates.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Discovering **Gruyères'** (p106) cheesy side
- Finding out what made modern artistic prodigy **Jean Tinguely** (p100) tick in Fribourg
- Taking a b..ig hearty gulp of Vully wine, *saucisson du marc* and old-fashioned fresh air at **Owl Farm** (p105) near Murten
- Being enchanted by medieval **Neuchâtel** (p109) and the Val de Travers' **green fairy** (p113)
- Getting frog-mad in **Estvayer** (p103) and starry-eyed at a concert in **Avenches amphitheatre** (p106)



■ POPULATION: 474,700

■ AREA: 3311 SQ KM

■ LANGUAGE: FRENCH

History

The area's earliest inhabitants settled along Lac de Neuchâtel around 3000 BC and the second Iron Age in Europe is referred to as 'La Tène Period', after the settlement on the lake's eastern end where a store of weapons and utensils was discovered.

Influential Zähringen nobleman Berchtold IV (father of the fearless bear hunter who founded Bern) came up with Fribourg in 1157. It subsequently became a fortified eastern frontier post of the Burgundy realm and remained so until the Swiss thrashed Burgundy duke Charles the Bold once and for all at the infamous Battle of Murten (p104) in 1476, after which Fribourg was forced to join the Swiss Confederation.

Snooty old Neuchâtel, under the distant thumb of Frederick the Great of Prussia from 1707, remained aloof from the Confederation until 1815 when the Congress of Vienna obliged it – along with its northerly neighbour, the Jura – to turn Swiss.

Getting There & Around

Most of the region is well-covered by train tracks. Rail connections to and from the main cities – Fribourg and Neuchâtel – make light work of getting around. By road, the A12 motorway linking Bern with Lausanne and Geneva roars down the Canton de Fribourg's central spine. Navigating the more remote corners of the Jura is practically impossible without

your own two wheels or a sturdy set of hiking boots.

CANTON DE FRIBOURG

The southernmost of the three cantons, Canton de Fribourg (population 239,100) tots up 1671 sq km on the drawing board. Pre-Alpine foothills rise grandly around its cold craggy feet, cheesy Gruyères with its sprinkling of small mountain resorts pierces its central heart and the capital of Fribourg heads the canton up north. In the northwest, pretty lakeside villages and a wealth of vineyards and fruit orchards bask in a milder climate. The River Sarine traces the canton's central spine.

Variety of scape aside, what makes this canton fascinating is its linguistic divide: roughly, west speaks French (65% of the population), east speaks German (30%).

FRIBOURG

pop 33,000 / elevation 630m

Nowhere is Switzerland's *Röstigraben* (language divide) more keenly felt than in Fribourg (Freiburg) or 'Free Town', a medieval riverside city where inhabitants on the west bank speak French, on the east bank German. Throw Catholicism and a notable student population into the cultural cocktail and you get a fascinating town with a feisty nightlife and a refreshing waft of originality.

Its greatest moment in history – marked by the Murten–Fribourg dash (p105) and a linden tree (right) – saw a messenger sprint from Murten to Fribourg in 1476 to relay the glad tidings that the Swiss had defeated Charles the Bold...only to drop dead with exhaustion on arrival. Onlookers, saddened by this tragic twist, took the linden twig from the messenger's hat and planted it.

Orientation

Much of the Old Town is on the river's west bank, gathered around Cathédrale de St Nicholas and flowing into the low-lying spit of land called Auge cradled in the river's elbow.

From the train station, Ave de la Gare runs northeast, becomes Rue de Romont, and opens into the hub of town, Square des Places and Places Georges Python. From

this square, the pedestrian-only shopping street Rue de Lausanne leads into the Old Town.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Librairie Albert le Grand (☎ 026 347 35 35; www.albert-le-grand.ch in French; Rue du Temple 1; ☎ 1-6.30pm Mon, 8.30am-6.30pm Tue, Wed & Fri, 8.30am-8pm Thu, 8am-4pm Sat) English books, maps and LP travel guides.

INTERNET ACCESS

Cyberworld (☎ 026 321 22 40; Rue de Lausanne 2; per hr Sfr10; ☎ 1pm-midnight)

INTERNET RESOURCES

Pays de Fribourg (www.pays-de-fribourg.ch) Lowdown on Fribourg land.

POST

Central post office (Ave de Tivoli 3; ☎ 7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 026 321 31 75; www.fribourgtourism.ch; Ave de la Gare 1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat May-Sep, 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat Oct-Apr)

Sights

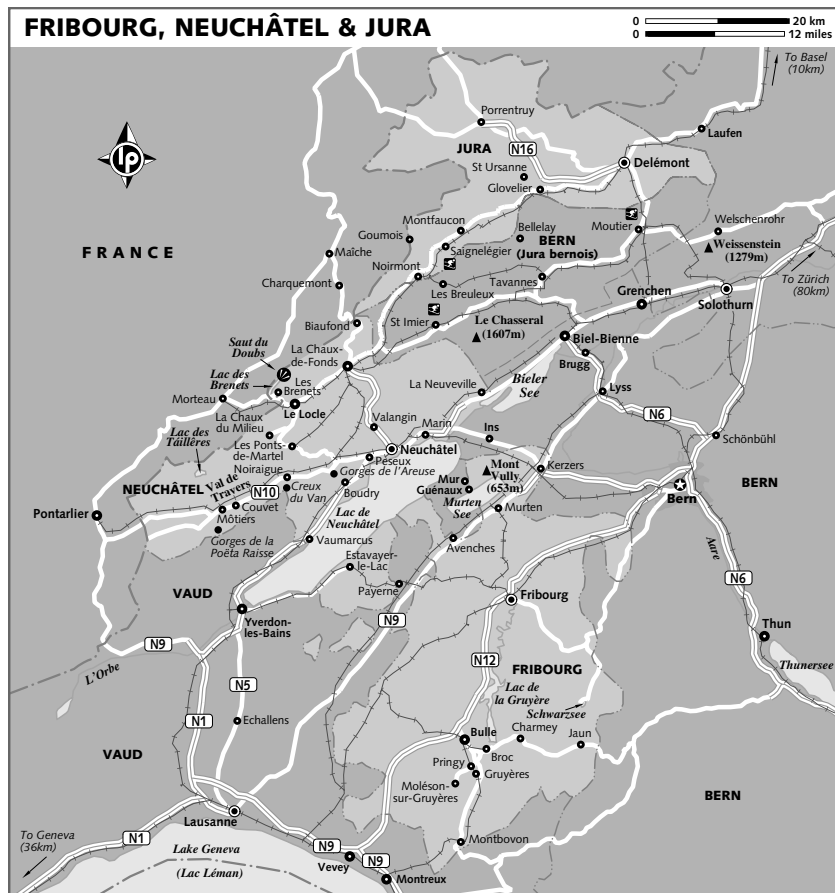
The 12th-century **Old Town** was laid out in simple fashion, with Grand-Rue as the main traffic street and parallel Rue des Chanoines/Rue des Bouchers devoted to markets, church and civic buildings. The settlement later spread down the hill into Auge. The bridges here – quaint stone **Pont du Milieu** and cobbled, roof-covered **Pont du Berne** – proffer great views. Pont de Zähringen, Route des Alpes and Chemin de Lorette are other prime vantage points.

Fribourg's famous **Tilleul de Morat** (Morat Linden Tree) stands in front of the Renaissance **town hall** (Grand-Rue).

CATHÉDRALE DE ST NICHOLAS

Before entering this brooding 13th-century Gothic **cathedral** (Rue des Chanoines), contemplate the main portal with its 15th-century sculptured portrayal of the Last Judgment. On your right as you enter is **Chapelle du Saint Sépulcre** with a sculptural group (1433) depicting Christ's burial with exceptional lifelikeness and movement.

A hike up 368 steps to the top of the cathedral's 74m-tall **tower** (adult/child Sfr3.50/1;



☞ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 10am-noon Thu, 2-5pm Sun Apr-Oct), the city's most recognisable landmark completed in 1490, is a Fribourg highlight.

ESPACE JEAN TINGUELY – NIKI DE SAINT PHALLE

Jump on the red button to watch *L'Retable de l'Abondance Occidentale et du Mercantilisme Totalitaire* (1989–90) – the centrepiece of this fantastic museum – make its larger-than-life, allegorical comment on Western opulence. Created in memory of Fribourg's modern artistic prodigy, Jean Tinguely (1925–91) in a tramway depot dating to 1900, the **Espace Jean Tinguely – Niki de Saint Phalle** (☎ 026 305 51 40; Rue de Morat 2; adult/under 16

Sfr6/free; ☞ 11am-6pm Wed & Fri-Sun, 11am-8pm Thu) showcases his machines and some of the wacky creations of French-American artist Niki de Saint Phalle (1930–2002) who worked/lived with Tinguely from the late 1950s until Tinguely's death.

ÉGLISE DES CORDELIERS

Inside 13th-century **Église des Cordeliers** (Rue de Morat 6; ☞ 7.30am-7pm Apr-Sep, 7.30am-6pm Oct-Mar) the large triptych (1480) above the high altar depicts the Crucifixion. Its mighty neighbour, the **Basilique de Notre-Dame de Fribourg** (Rue de Morat 1), shelters a beautifully restored 18th-century **Neapolitan crib** featuring 75 figurines re-enacting the nativity, announcement and scenes from daily life.

FRIBOURG (FREIBURG)

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MUSÉE D'ART ET D'HISTOIRE

Fribourg's **Art & History Museum** (MAHF; ☎ 026 305 51 40; Rue de Morat 12; adult/under 16/student Sfr8/free/5; ☞ 11am-6pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun, 11am-8pm Thu), with an excellent collection of late-Gothic sculpture and painting, is housed in the Renaissance Hôtel Ratzé, with annexes in the former slaughterhouse and armoury. Gothic meets Goth in the underground chamber where religious statues are juxtaposed with some of Tinguely's sculptural creations combining animal skulls with metal machine components. The bench-clad museum garden, overlooking the river and pierced by a Niki de Saint Phalle sculpture, is one of the city's few green picnic spots.

MUSÉE SUISSE DE LA MARIONNETTE

Puppets rub shoulders in the **Swiss Puppetry Museum** ☎ 026 322 85 13; www.marionnette.ch in French; Derrière-les-Jardins 2; adult/child Sfr5/3; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-6pm Sat & Sun).

PLANCHE SUPÉRIEURE

Cross Pont du Milieu and head west towards the broad sloping square known as Planche Supérieure. The former **Commanderie de St Jean**, erected by the Knights of the Order of St John in the 13th century, dominates its eastern side and Chemin de Sonnenberg climbs from the square's western end to the **Kuriosium Sonnenberg** (☎ 026 322 03 50; www.corpaato.ch in French & German; Chemin du Sonnenberg 4; adult/12-16yr Sfr10/6; ☞ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). Curious indeed, the gallery features surrealist and absurd works by *Le Boucher Corpaato* (the butcher Corpaato), alias jolly old butcher-painter Jean-Pierre Corpaato (b 1950) who apparently paints exclusively with a knife.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Auberge aux 4 Vents (☎ 026 347 36 00; www.aux4vents.ch; Res Balzi Grandfrey 124; s/d Sfr120/170, s/d/tr/q without bathroom Sfr50/100/140/160; ☞ 🍴 🚿 🚿 🚿) 'Stylish' scarcely does justice to this imaginative and luxurious country inn where design of a wacky rustic nature prevails. Its eight rooms are individually designed ('by a bunch of adorable lunatics' says the hotel); the four-bedded 'dortoir' is Switzerland's most luxurious dorm; single red roses in vases plaster the walls of 'cathédrale'; while dreamy 'bleue' sports blue flowery period furnishings and a tub on rails that rolls out through the window for a bath beneath stars. Style or *what?* In the ambling gardens a cable car doubles as playhouse and smooching spot. There are swings, a pool, barbecue and tables that spill from the highly recommended conservatory-style restaurant to overlook a stunning medieval Fribourg panorama.

To get to the '4 Winds', 2km north in Grandfrey, drive north along Rue de Morat through 15th-century Porte de Morat and turn right immediately before the train bridge.

Sleeping

The tourist office has details of B&Bs in surrounding farms.

Auberge de Jeunesse Fribourg (☎ 026 323 19 16; Rue de l'Hôpital 2; dm Sfr30.65, s/d Sfr51.50/85; ☞ 🍴 🚿 🚿 🚿) 7.30-10am & 5-10pm Mar-early Nov; ☞ 🚿 🚿) The rules are clear at this city hostel in one wing of the 17th-century Hôpital des Bourgeois, opposite Fribourg University. No smoking, no cooking or eating in rooms, and night owls must ring to enter after 10pm.

Kuriosium Sonnenberg (☎ 079 331 42 48; www.corpaato.ch; Chemin du Sonnenberg 4; s/d Sfr70/120; ☞ 🍴 🚿 🚿) In a 19th-century house aplomb Mont Sonnenberg, this peaceful house opposite Fribourg's wackiest art gallery (left) has several simple rooms, breakfast included and bathrooms shared. Take bus No 4 from the train station to Planche Supérieure and hike up the hill.

NH Fribourg (☎ 026 351 91 91; www.nh-hotels.com; Grand-Places 14; s/d from Sfr150/220; ☞ 🍴 🚿 🚿 🚿) Notably modern in a lumbering apartment block, upmarket NH lures suits with its business facilities, modern décor, classy restaurant and Jacuzzi-clad suites.

Hôtel Elite (☎ 026 322 22 60; elitefribourg@bluewin.ch; Rue du Criblet 7; s/d/tr/q Sfr90/140/160/215) Nothing to look at from the outside, Hôtel Elite offers well-maintained rooms and competitive half-board rates should you wish to dine in its neighbouring restaurant.

Auberge de Zaehringen (☎ 026 322 42 36; www.auberge-de-zaehringen.ch in French; Rue de Zaehringen 13; ste for 1/2 people Sfr190/260; menus Sfr49-116; ☞ 🍴 🚿 🚿 🚿) This medieval mansion named after the Dukes of Zaehringen who founded Fribourg in 1157 dates to the 13th century – read: loads of lovely timber beams, grandiose halls and labyrinthine passages.

Hôtel du Sauvage (☎ 026 347 30 60; www.hotel-sauvage.ch in French; Planché Supérieure 12; s/d from Sfr190/240; menus Sfr30 & Sfr40) Another medieval veteran, this one boasts 17 charming rooms in a twin set of 16th-century houses footsteps from the Sarine.

Eating

Café du Gothard (Rue du Pont Muré 16) Watch out for Tinguely's favourite eating haunt to reopen in 2006 after months of renovation. A kitsch mix of original 19th-century furnishings, Niki de Saint Phalle drawings and art nostalgia, the traditional bistro is legendary.

Les Halles (Pl des Ormeaux 1; meals Sfr15-17; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Sat) Market-driven creations with an inventive twist are the mainstay of this bright and bold eating hall above the market place.

La Petite Brasserie (☎ 026 321 36 46; Rue de Lausanne 25; starters/mains Sfr10/15, lunch menu Sfr16; ☎ 9am-11.30pm Tue-Thu, 9-2am Fri & Sat) Giant windows overlooking people-busy Rue de Lausanne makes this free Wi-Fi zone a hot lunchtime spot. Cooking is modern European.

Café du Midi (☎ 026 322 31 33; www.lemidi.ch; Rue de Romont 25; salads Sfr6.50-21.50, menu fondue Sfr36) Fribourg's old boy pulls the punters on its busy pavement terrace with seven types of fondue and a menu fondue featuring air-dried beef, fondue and meringues with cream.

Manora Restaurant (Grand Places; meals Sfr15; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 8am-9.30pm Thu, 8am-6pm Sat) This glass shoebox heaves. Grab a tray, pick a cheap fill...and finish with a gander at the Tinguely fountain (created by the Fribourg artist for his mate, Swiss racing driver Jo Siffert, months before his deadly car accident in 1971) spouting out water in the park.

BREWERIES BIG & SMALL

If it's big-name beer you crave, head for Fribourg's **Brasserie du Cardinal** (☎ 084 812 50 00; www.cardinal.ch in French & Dutch; Passage du Cardinal) where one of Switzerland's best-known lagers has been brewed since 1788. **Brewery tours** (☎ 058 123 22 16; admission Sfr10; ☎ 8.30-10am & 1.30-3pm Mon-Thu) demonstrate how water, malt and hops are turned into nine different types of Cardinal beer and take in the **Musée de la Bière Cardinal** (☎ 084 812 50 00; www.cardinal.ch; Passage du Cardinal; adult/under 12 with drink Sfr10/5; ☎ 2-6pm Tue & Thu), in the brewery cellar.

At the other end of the scale is small-time microbrewery **Brasserie Artisanale de Fribourg** (☎ 026 322 80 88; Rue de la Samaritaine 19; ☎ 8am-5pm Sat). Run by a couple of mates who began the enterprise as an amusing pastime (and now run it as a Saturday hobby!), the one-room brewery brews just 50 hectolitres a year. Pay Sfr4 for a bottle of its golden German-style Barbeblanche or Barberousse with subtle caramel and honey aromas, and Sfr4.50 for a bottle of black, Irish-style Old Cat stout.

Café de la Belvédère (☎ 026 323 44 07; Grand-Rue 36; menu Sfr20; ☎ Tue-Sat) Sushi, sashimi, Thai and Chinese menus make a welcome change from the traditional norm. But the main reason to visit this bistro is for its staggering rooftop terrace.

Auberge de la Cigogne (☎ 026 322 68 34; www.la-cigogne.ch in French; Rue d'Or 24; starters Sfr20, mains Sfr25-78, menus Sfr80 & Sfr105; ☎ Tue-Sat) Eastern aromas waft over a couple of mains and desserts are divine at this highly revered establishment, constructed in 1771 in riverside Auge.

For a line-up of quick-eat kebab joints, hit Rue de l'Hôpital.

Drinking

TW (☎ 026 321 53 82; www.tmcafe.ch; Rue de Romont 29-31; ☎ 7am-11.30pm Mon-Wed, 7am-midnight Thu, 7-2am Fri, 9-2am Sat, 2-11.30pm Sun) Scale the tatty staircase next to a shoe shop to woo TW (Talk Wine) – a chic lounge bar where trendy drinks and dance. Shots are hot and DJs spin everything from bastardelectro and breakbeat to house, bop and jazz.

Paddy Reilly's (Grand-Places 12; ☎ 4.30pm-2am Mon, 11-2am Tue-Thu, 4.30pm-3am Fri & Sat) If it's pints of the hard stuff you're after Irish Paddy's your man. Student night (read: cheap beer) is Monday.

L'Apert (Grand-Places 14; ☎ 2pm-3am Mon-Sat) A slick wooden-deck terrace fronts designed 'Apartment', tucked in the shadow of Paddy's.

Plaza Lounge Bar (Rue de Lausanne 91; ☎ to 4am) It serves food too (a good-value menu du jour kicks in at Sfr15.50), but the spacious bar is best suited for an aperitif on its vast pavement terrace.

THE FRIBOURG FUNICULAR

Nowhere else in Europe bar Fribourg does a funicular lurch up the mountainside with the aid of good old stinky sewage water. Constructed in 1899, the **Funiculaire de Fribourg** (ticket Sfr1.60; ☎ 7-8.15am & 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-7pm Sun) links the lower part of the town with the upper every six minutes. The ride in one of two counterbalancing water-powered carriages from the lower Pertuis station (121m; Pl du Pertuis) to the upper station (618m; Route des Alpes) takes two minutes and includes bags of Old Town views.

Winebar (☎ 026 322 48 69; www.wine-bar.ch in French; Rue de l'Hôpital 39; ☎ 7am-11pm Mon-Thu, 7-3am Fri, 2pm-3am Sat, 10am-11pm Sun) Young, fun and funky is the spirit of this student-driven, free WiFi venue. Special events (beach parties, Asetrix and Obelix soirées etc) fill weekends and munchies can be put to rest in its Le Bout du Monde restaurant.

Entertainment

Service Culturel Regional (☎ 026 350 11 00; Ave de la Gare 1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) Buy tickets for cultural events in the Service Culturel Regional adjoining the tourist office.

La Spirale (☎ 026 322 66 39; www.laspirale.ch in French; Pl du Petit St-Jean 39; admission Sfr10-35; ☎ Wed-Sun) Jazz, blues, folk and flamenco musicians create a potent musical cocktail in this cellar club by the river. Wednesdays are dedicated to home-grown sounds.

Morrison Room (☎ 026 321 18 28; Grand-Places 12; ☎ 9.30pm-2am Mon, 9pm-2am Wed, 10pm-2am Thu, 10pm-3am Fri, 10pm-1am Sat) Pub club above Paddy's.

To See (☎ 026 424 46 53; www.toseedclub.com in French; Passage Cardinal 2c; admission Sfr10-20, before 11pm often free; ☎ 10pm-4am Wed, Fri & Sat, 10pm-3am Thu) Two dance floors, a select gallery and frenetic clubbing crowd. DJs spin all styles.

Fri-son (☎ 026 424 36 25; www.fri-son.ch; Route de la Fonderie 13; admission up to Sfr15, concerts up to Sfr40) Fri-son spins rap, reggae, soul, techno and house – and is one of western Switzerland's biggest stages for live concerts.

Getting There & Away

Trains travel hourly to/from Neuchâtel (Sfr19, 55 minutes), and more frequently to Geneva (Sfr37, 1½ hours) and Bern (Sfr12.40,

20 minutes). Regular trains run to Yverdon-les-Bains (Sfr16.80, 55 to 80 minutes) and Lausanne (Sfr22, 45 to 55 minutes).

Bus depart from behind the train station for Avenches (Sfr8.60, 25 minutes) and Bulle (Sfr14.20, 55 minutes) and Schwarzsee (Sfr14.20, one hour).

Fribourg is on the N12 between Lake Geneva and Bern.

ESTAVAYER-LE-LAC

pop 4330 / elevation 455m

A charming manicured lakeside enclave that has largely preserved its medieval core, Estavayer-le-Lac is a lovely little hideout. Pretty face aside, it is known for frogs – dead or alive.

Orientation & Information

From the train station walk 400m to town and the **Tourist Office** (☎ 026 663 12 37; www.estavayer-le-lac.ch in French; Rue de la Gare 14; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1.30-5.45pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 2-4pm Sat, 10am-noon Sun Jul & Aug, 8.30am-noon & 1.30-5.45pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 2-4pm Sat Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm Tue-Fri Oct-Mar).

Sights & Activities

The stars of the eclectic show at the **Musée Communal** (Regional Museum; ☎ 026 663 24 48; Rue du Musée 13; adult/child Sfr4/2; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Sun Mar-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-noon & 2-5pm daily Jul & Aug, 2-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Feb) are 108 stuffed frogs. François Perrier, a retired Swiss military fellow, spent the 1860s catching, stuffing and 'modelling' frogs.

Fairytales **Château de Chenaux** (1285–90), home to the Préfecture de Fribourg and *gendarmierie* (police station), cannot be visited but its ramparts can be strolled. The **Circuit des Remparts** takes you along much of the original 40m-long and 35m-wide rectangle interspersed with 16 gates and turrets galore. The largest tower, 32m-tall **Grand Tour**, could only be accessed via a door that stood 9m above ground level and was reached by a drawer bridge in medieval times.

Lac de Neuchâtel reins in a buoyant crowd with Alphasurf's **Téléski** (☎ 079 258 21 47; www.alphasurf.ch; 1/5/20 circuits Sfr5/20/50; ☎ May-Sep) that tows water-skiers and wake-boarders around a cableway circuit from the end of a jetty at **Nouvelle Plage**. You can swim, sail and surf on the gravelly beach here...or listen to a frogs' chorus in the **Grande Carrière**

(www.grande-caricaei.ch). The chain of marshy reed-fringed lakes strung along the southern edge of Lac de Neuchâtel is a stronghold for common green frogs, pool frogs, tree frogs and common toads. Watchtowers provide a bird's eye view of the unique frog land.

Sleeping & Eating

MyLady's Manor (☎ 026 663 23 16; www.myladysmanor.org; Route de la Gare; 1/2 or more nights per person with breakfast Sfr50/60; ☹ Mar-Oct; Ⓟ) Grilling dinner in the flowery gardens, painting, or sleeping like a babe is all part of the charm at this stately B&B in a manor house near the station.

Abri-Côtier (☎ 026 663 50 52; www.abri-cotier.ch in French; Grande Gouille 1; dm Sfr20) The accommodation arm of Alphasurf, this shoebox gets packed with outdoor enthusiasts. Guests share a kitchen.

Hôtel Restaurant du Port (☎ 026 664 82 82; www.hotelduport.ch in French; Route du Port; s/d/tr/q Sfr80/130/150/160, menu du jour Sfr16, mains around Sfr30; Ⓟ) Hôtel du Port sits plump between lake and Old Town – making it an easy stroll home wherever you are. Fish lovers make up the jovial crowd that dines here and lunch in the garden is a family choice.

Hostellerie du Château (☎ 026 663 10 49; www.au.chateau.info in French & German; Rue des Granges 2; mains around Sfr20) Dine on the informal tree-shaded terrace or up top in the formal restaurant at this ode to regional cuisine where you can eat as many *cuisses de grenouilles* (frogs' thighs) as you like for Sfr32.

Les Lacustres (☎ 026 663 11 96; www.leslacustres.ch in French; Rue des Lacustres; ☹ Mar-Oct) For beach buzz hit this trendy waterfront café-restaurant where boarders eat, drink, play *pétanque* (French bowls) and lounge. Brunch is dished up Sunday and beach sushi is a Friday speciality.

Getting There & Away

Estavayer-le-Lac is on the road and train route between Fribourg (Sfr11.40, 40 minutes) and Yverdon (Sfr6.60, 17 minutes), or it's a short detour off the northbound N1 from Lausanne. Boats call in too (see p112).

MURTEN

pop 5650 / elevation 450m

This fortified German-speaking medieval village on the eastern shore of Murten See

(Lac de Morat) isn't called Murten (Morat) – derived from the Celtic word *moriduno* meaning 'fortress on the lake' – for nothing. In May 1476 the Burgundian duke Charles the Bold set off from Lausanne to besiege Murten – only to have 8000 of his men butchered or drowned in Murten Lake during the Battle of Murten. The fortifications that thwarted the duke (who escaped) create a quaint little lakeside town well worth an afternoon stroll today.

Canals link Murten See with Lac de Neuchâtel (west) and Bieler See (north) to form the Pays des Trois Lacs – a lake district crisscrossed with 250km-odd of marked roller-skating, cycling and walking paths.

Information

Tourist Office (☎ 026 670 51 12; www.murten.ch in German; Französische Kirchgasse 6; ☹ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Apr-Sep)

Sights & Activities

Murten is a cobbled three-street town crammed with arcaded houses. A string of hotel-restaurants culminating in a 13th-century **castle** (closed to visitors) line Rathausgasse; shops and eateries stud parallel Hauptgasse, capped by the medieval **Bermtor** city gate at its eastern end; while parallel Deutsche Kirchgasse and its western continuation, Schulgasse, hug the city ramparts. Scale the wooden **Aufstieg auf die Ringmauer** (rampart stairs) behind the **Deutsche Kirche** (German Church; Deutsche Kirchgasse) to reach the covered walkway traversing part of the sturdy medieval walls.

In a mill beyond the castle, the **Museum Murten** (☎ 026 670 31 00; www.museummurten.ch in French & German; Ryf4; adult/child Sfr4/1; ☹ 2-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 2-5pm Tue-Sun Nov-Apr) displays artefacts discovered during the dredging of the Broye Canal in 1829 and cannons used in the Battle of Murten.

From May to September, shuttle boats operated by the **Société de Navigation sur les Lacs de Neuchâtel et Morat** (see p112) criss-cross the lake and **Schiffahrtsgesellschaft drei Seen** (☎ 026 673 08 00; www.dreiseenschiffahrt.ch) organises Sunday brunch (adult/child six to 16 Sfr39/19.50), floating fondue evenings and other interesting food-orientated boat cruises.

Festivals & Events

Murten's three-day **carnival** is in early March and its 8000-runner **marathon**, the Murten-Fribourg race on the first Sunday of October, commemorates the dash by the messenger who relayed news of the Battle of Murten.

Sleeping & Eating

Many Murten restaurants are inside hotels; find cheaper eats on Hauptgasse.

Hotel Murtenhof & Krone (☎ 026 672 90 30; www.murtenhof.ch; Rathausgasse; s/d from Sfr80/100, menu Sfr29.50; Ⓟ ☹) The Murtenhof, in a 16th-century patrician's house, mixes old and new to create a very spacious sleeping and eating space. Eco rooms have basic furnishings but 'superior' ones ooze style – fancy a round bed! The terrace restaurant has 1st-class lake views and tasty perch filets in sherry and lime sauce or pan-fried in mango chilli.

Hotel Weisses Kreuz (☎ 026 670 26 41; www.weisses-kreuz.ch; Rathausgasse 31; s Sfr110-170, d Sfr160-280) A striking design-led interior contrasts to that of the historic exterior of the 'White Cross', a 15th-century tavern. Fish drives its restaurant.

Restaurant des Bains (☎ 026 670 23 38; www.restaurant-des-bains.ch in German; Ryf 35; mains Sfr30; ☹ 9am-midnight Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, Wed-Sun Oct-May) For lakeside dining, this is prime. A green lawn slopes down from its tabled terrace to the water where swans gag for crumbs. *Filets de perche* (perch filets) come in imaginative guises – including in local Vully wine.

Le Vieux Manoir au Lac (☎ 026 678 61 61; www.vieuxmanoir.ch; Rue de Lausanne 18, Meyriez; s/d from Sfr290/390, ste Sfr410-630, starters/mains from Sfr30/50; ☹ mid-Feb-mid-Dec; Ⓟ ☹) This unabashedly luxurious timber Normandy house,

built as a whim on the lakeside in the early 1900s, is *the* ultimate splurge. For wooers wanting their loved one to say yes, there's one table for two at the end of a long jetty where you can dine in style (at sunset) for Sfr250 per person. Find it 1km south of Murten in Meyriez.

Drinking

Bar und Blumen (☎ 026 670 01 90; Rathausgasse 9; ☹ 10-12.30am Mon-Thu, 10-3am Fri & Sat, 11am-midnight Sun) 'Bar and Flowers' is just that – a minimalist café-bar that serves sushi after work and sells vases and flowers.

Irish Tavern (☎ 026 672 19 20; www.irish-tavern.ch; Hauptgasse 45; ☹ 10am-11.30pm Mon-Thu, 10-3am Fri & Sat) Irish watering hole with beamed interior. For wine, don't miss its L'Oenothèque du Muratum next door.

Getting There & Around

From the **train station** (Bahnhofstrasse), 300m south of the city walls, hourly trains operate to/from Fribourg (Sfr10.40, 30 minutes), Bern (Sfr12.40, 35 minutes) via Kerzers (Sfr3.50, nine minutes), and Neuchâtel (Sfr11.40, 25 minutes). Hourly trains to/from Payerne (Sfr7.20, 20 minutes) stop at Avenches (Sfr3.20, seven minutes). Murten train station rents **bicycles** (☎ 051 221 15 52; per day Sfr31).

Seasonal boats sail from Murten to/from Neuchâtel (p112). By car, Murten is on the N1 linking Lausanne with Bern.

AROUND MURTEN

Agricultural with the odd village or farm thrown in for an overnight roll in the hay (see p313), Murten's surrounding green

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Eulenhof (Ferme du Hibou; ☎ 026 673 18 85; www.fermeduhibou.ch; Rue du Château 24, Mur; camping on straw adult/child Sfr26/16, dm adult/child Sfr25/35, d Sfr90-120, dinner mid-May-mid-Sep Sfr27, Sun lunch mid-May-mid-Sep Sfr27-40; ☹ Jan-Oct; Ⓟ ☹) Nowhere do guests get a warmer welcome and more authentic regional cuisine than at Owl Farm, run by farmer Willy and wife Nadja. Well placed on the Sentier du Vins de Vully (Vully wine trail), many guests arrive on foot or by bicycle. Terraced gardens sport tables, a pond, swing and spectacular lake views. There are various animals to see and tennis-ball chasing Spake and his mate Sasha for canine entertainment. Rooms are spotless; pine bunk beds fill a spacious dorm in a converted barn; and blankets to thwart off straw prickles are laid on for campers kipping in the hay barn (bring your own sleeping bag). Advance reservations for accommodation, dinner and Sunday lunch are essential. To get here from Murten 13km away, drive north around the lake, following the lake road as far as Guénaux, then head inland for 1km to Mur village.

fields offer a gulp of fine old-fashioned fresh air. Farmers trustingly pile up carrots on the roadside for motorists to buy (Sfr10 for a 10kg sack) and open their lettuce fields and apple orchards to the agriculturally curious as part of the **Inforama Seeland** (www.inforama.ch in German) green tourism project. On the western side of the lake, Vully wine is produced from grapes grown on the slopes of Mont Vully (653m).

Avenches

Roman Aventicum, 8km southwest of Murten, grew on the site of the ancient capital of the Celtic Helvetii tribe and was a major centre in the 2nd century AD, with a population 10 times that of the modern village. But its 5.6km of defensive ramparts failed to withstand attacks by the Alemanni tribe in the late 3rd century and by the 5th century the town was insignificant.

Its Roman glory days are evoked in the **amphitheatre**, host to the **Musée Romain** (Roman Museum; ☎ 026 675 17 27; Ave Jomini; adult/under 16 Sfr4/free; ☎ 10am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 2-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar) and an audience of 12,000 during its summer opera season. For tickets (Sfr70 to Sfr160), contact the **tourist office** (☎ 026 676 99 22; www.avenches.ch in French; Pl de l'Église 3).

Payerne

Payerne, 10km southwest, is dominated by the 11th-century five-apsed Romanesque **Église Abbatiale** (☎ 026 662 67 04; Pl du Marché). The magnificent sandstone complex boasts fine sculptural decoration and frescoes, hosts art exhibitions (admission up to Sfr12), classical concerts (tickets Sfr20 to Sfr30) and free organ concerts at 6.15pm on the first Saturday of each month. Payerne **tourist office** (☎ 026 660 61 61; www.payerne.ch in French; Pl du Marché 10; ☎ 8am-noon & 1.30-6pm Mon-Fri), beside the church, has details.

Kerzers

Head 11km northeast from Murten to Kerzers where tropical butterflies flutter alongside hummingbirds and other exotic birds at **Papiliorama** (☎ 031 756 04 60; www.papiliorama.ch in French & Dutch; adult/4-15yr/parking Sfr13/7/3; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar). Indigenous butterflies flit about in the **Swiss Butterfly Garden**, night creatures from Latin America hide in **Nocturama** (☎ 10am-

6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar), and in **Jungle Trek** (to open 2006) intrepid explorers can do just that.

The Swiss tropical gardens are a 20-minute walk from Kerzers train station, linked to Murten by train. Shuttle buses (adult/child Sfr2/1) run between Kerzers and the gardens.

GRUYÈRES & AROUND

pop 1490 / elevation 830m

Cheese is what this quaint pre-Alps village – with a fairytale castle so dreamy Sleeping Beauty would never wake up – is all about. Featherweight meringues drowned in thick double cream and a chocolate factory just down the road create a deadly gastronomic cocktail for food junkies.

Tummy matters aside, medieval Gruyères is a riot of 15th- to 17th-century houses tumbling down a hillock. It's cobbled heart will look even prettier by 2008 when a five-year, Sfr5 million project to repave its streets will be complete; buy a virtual cobble at www.pave-gruyeres.ch (in French).

Gruyères gets its name from the emblematic *gru* (crane) brandished by the Counts of Gruyères between the 11th and 16th centuries. Note the hard AOC Gruyère cheese made here for centuries carries no 's'.

Information

Tourist Office Gruyères (☎ 026 921 10 30; www.gruyeres.ch in French; Rue du Bourg 1; ☎ 10.30am-noon & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri year-round, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun Jul-mid-Sep); Moléson (☎ 026 921 85 00; www.moleson.ch)

Sights

CHÂTEAU DE GRUYÈRES

This bewitching turreted **castle** (☎ 026 921 21 02; adult/6-16yr Sfr6.50/2; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Feb), home to 19 different Counts of Gruyères who controlled the Sarine Valley from the 11th to 16th centuries, was rebuilt after a fire in 1493. Inside, you can visit its dungeon, view period furniture, tapestries and modern 'fantasy art'.

MUSEUM HR GIGER

Biomechanical art fills the **HR Giger Museum** (☎ 026 921 22 00; www.hrgigermuseum.com; adult/6-16yr Sfr12/5; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Oct, 11am-5pm Nov-Apr), dedicated to the man behind the sci-fi uniforms in the *Alien* movies – Chur-born Zürich-based Giger (b 1940). Opposite the

Museum Bar HR Giger (☎ 10am-8.30pm Tue-Sun) is kitted out in the same weird and wacky surrealist style.

A combined museum and château ticket costs Sfr14.

CHEESE DAIRIES

The secret behind Gruyère cheese is revealed at the **Maison du Gruyère** (☎ 026 921 84 00; www.la.maisondugruyere.ch; adult/child/student Sfr5/2/4; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm Oct-Mar) in Pringy, 1.5km from Gruyères. Cheese-making takes place four times daily between 9am and 3pm and can be watched through glass windows. The tourist train from Gruyères (p108) stops here.

At the **Fromagerie d'Alpage de Moléson** (☎ 026 921 10 44; adult/child Sfr5/3; ☎ 9.30am-10pm mid-May-mid-Oct), a 17th-century Alpine chalet 5km southwest of Gruyères in Moléson-sur-Gruyères, cheese is made using old-fashioned methods at 9.45am and 2.45pm.

Both dairies sell cheese (Sfr1.98 to Sfr2.40 per 100g) and serve fondue, *soupe du chalet* (a thick 'n hearty vegetable and potato soup topped with Gruyère double cream and cheese), *soupe à l'oignon au Gruyères* (Gruyère-topped onion soup) and other typical mountain dishes in their dairy restaurants.

Cheese is still produced in a couple of traditional mountain chalets along the **Sentier des Fromageries**, a trail that takes walkers through green Gruyères pastures. Ask at the Maison du Gruyère for the brochure outlining the two-hour walk (7km to 8km).

GRUYÈRE: FAST FACTS

- A cow consumes 100kg of grass and 85L of water a day to produce 25L of milk.
- Cheese-makers need 400L of milk to make one 35kg wheel of Gruyère.
- There are allegedly 75 different Alpine scents in Gruyère cheese. Vanilla, orchid, violet, chestnut, mint, wood shavings, hazelnuts, fresh grass...you name it, it's there.
- Approximately 330 million litres of milk are processed into 27,500 tons of cheese in 200-odd dairies in the Fribourg, Neuchâtel, Jura and Vaud cantons; Gruyères cows yield 5.7 million litres a year.
- A mild (*doux*) Gruyère is left to mature for five to six months, a semi-salted (*mi-salé*) for seven to eight months, a salted (*salé*) for nine to 10 months, a reserve (*réserve au surchoix*) for at least 10 months, and a deliciously strong-tasting mature (*vieux*) for at least 15 months.
- Two-thirds of Gruyère production is consumed in Switzerland; the EU and North America eat the rest.

Activities

Moléson-sur-Gruyères (elevation 1100m), 5km southwest of Gruyères, is popular in summer for via ferrata, go-karting, hiking and mountain biking, with plenty of well-marked trails, including a gentle 1½-hour **Sentier Botanique** (botanical trail) from Moléson village. In winter there is easy downhill skiing from the Moléson peak (2002m) and a 4km-long **sledge track** linking mid-station Plan-Francey (1520m) and the village.

Sleeping & Eating

Le Pâquier (☎ 026 912 20 25; www.lepatchi.ch; Rue de la Gare 10, Le Pâquier; s/d/tr Sfr60/90/120; ☎ ☎) Three years of hard graft has paid off for Hedwige and André who run this *maison d'hôtes* in a restored 19th-century manor. Nightly rates are for a bathroom-clad room with breakfast or kitchenette, making it handy for families and self-caterers. Find Le Pâquier 3.5km northwest of Gruyères.

Hostellerie Saint-Georges (☎ 026 921 83 00; www.st-georges-gruyeres.ch in French; s/d from Sfr130/180, menus Sfr45 & Sfr79) 'Sweet dreams' is the house motto at this stylish 14-room inn where hefty beams, fireplaces, embroidered bedspreads and the odd chandelier add a noble touch. The former Michelin-starred chef cooks up strictly poetic creations.

Chalet de Gruyères (☎ 026 921 21 54; www.chalet-gruyeres.ch in French; Rue du Château 53; fondues & raclettes Sfr28; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sun) Feast on Alpine fodder (fondue, raclette, grilled meats) in this cosy chalet strung with cow bells or on its shaded Terrasse du Chalet opposite. Its *croûte en fromage* is super-loaded

with cheese, meringues come with the thickest Gruyère double cream ever, while coffee comes with a whole pot of the creamy stuff.

Auberge de la Halle (☎ 026 921 21 78; Rue du Château; menus Sfr33, Sfr41.50 & Sfr43; ☎ Wed-Mon) Less touristy than some, Auberge de la Halle is known for its meal-sized *soupe du chalet* (soup of mushrooms, pasta, cheese etc, Sfr15) and *serac* (*fromage frais* made from the whey of Gruyère). Its special menu (Sfr12) for 'vos gastronomes en culottes courtes' (little gourmands in short trousers) are popular.

Getting There & Around

From Fribourg, Gruyères can be reached by hourly bus or train (Sfr16.80, 40 minutes to one hour) to Bulle then hourly bus or train (Sfr3.30, 15 to 20 minutes) from there. Gruyères is a 10-minute walk uphill from its train station. One or two buses a day connect Gruyères train station with Gruyères village and Moléson.

The N12 motorway from Vevey to Fribourg passes by Bulle. From there take the N11 road south to Gruyères. Otherwise, take the N11 north from Lake Geneva via Aigle.

Cars must be left in the free parking area at the village entrance. An electric **tourist train** (☎ 079 542 28 30; www.petit-train.info; adult/6-12yr Sfr6.50/4; ☎ 9am or 10am-7pm Mar-Oct) tootles between the car park, château and Maison du Gruyère.

BROC & BULLE

Experience Willy Wonka's chocolate thrills and spills at the **Nestlé-Caillers chocolate factory** (☎ 026 921 51 51; adult/under 16 Sfr4/free; ☎ 1.30pm & 4pm Mon, 9am, 11am, 1.30pm & 4pm Tue-Fri), 2km

north of Gruyères in Broc. But don't expect to get anywhere near the production line; visits comprise a video of how chocolate is made – and free samples.

Five kilometres northwest of Gruyères, **Bulle** (elevation 771m), the main transport hub for the area, is worth a brief look for its 13th-century **château** (now administrative offices) and **Musée Gruérien** (☎ 026 912 72 60; www.musee-gruerien.ch in French; Rue de la Condémine 25; adult/under/student 16 Sfr6/free/5; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Sat, 2-5pm Sun).

CHARMEY & THE SCHWARZSEE

From Broc it is a pretty climb into the pre-Alps of Canton de Fribourg. **Charmey** (elevation 876m) is the centre of local skiing with 30km of downhill slopes (1630m) accessible via the Rapido Sky cable car. In summer, it's a haven for walkers and mountain bikers. The **tourist office** (☎ 026 927 55 80; www.charmey.ch; ☎ 2-6pm Tue-Sun), across the car park from the cable car, has trail details, including some around Vanil Noir, the region's highest point.

Head east for another 11km and you hit German-speaking territory (the 'Willkommen' sign is a dead giveaway) and the hamlet of **Jaun** with its twin-set of churches. The older one with a wood shingle roof shelters **Cantorama** (☎ 026 929 85 72; admission Sfr4, concerts Sfr20; ☎ 2-5pm Sat & Sun May-Oct, 2-5pm Tue & Thu Jul & Aug), a sacred music centre with displays on traditional Fribourgeois chants and host to choral concerts. The newer church (1910) has an unusual cemetery where wooden crosses dating from the 1980s to present feature carvings of the deceased's job in life. From Jaun the road climbs up to the **Jaunpass**, just inside Bern canton.

Northeast of Charmey is the mountain lake of **Schwarzsee** (Black Lake; www.schwarzsee.ch), elevation 1046m, a magical setting for winter skiing and summertime hiking. About 2km north of the village is Karl Neuhaus' **Eis Paläste** (Ice Palace; ☎ 026 419 11 80; adult/under 16 Sfr6/3; ☎ 2-9.30pm Wed-Sun Dec-Mar), a fantastical construction of turrets, bridges, domes, grottoes and crystal palaces between pine trees – built solely from ice. Illuminated at night, an evening stroll along the sand paths (not to mention a picnic in an igloo) is magical.

Another fascinating trip is to drive past La Valsainte to the end of the road, from where a three-hour marked trail leads to the lake.

CANTON DE NEUCHÂTEL

The focus of this heavily forested 800 sq km canton (population 166,500), northwest of its Fribourg counterpart, is Lac de Neuchâtel – the largest lake entirely within Switzerland. Canton capital Neuchâtel sits plump on its northern shore and the gentle Jura Mountains rise to the north and west. Watch-making has been a mainstay industry since the 18th century and the canton's two other large towns – La Chaux-de-Fonds and Le Locle – remain firmly on the so-called 'Watch Valley' tourist trail.

Together with Biel and Murten lakes, Neuchâtel falls into the Pays de Trois Lacs (Land of Three Lakes) trio. With France bang next door, French is *the* language of this rural land.

NEUCHÂTEL

pop 31,740 / elevation 430m

Its Old Town sandstone elegance, the airy Gallic nonchalance of its café-life and the gay lakeside air that breezes along the shoreline of its glittering lake makes Neuchâtel disarmingly charming. The small university town – complete with spirited *commune libre* (free commune) – is compact enough to discover on foot while the French spoken here is said to be Switzerland's purest.

Information

BOOKSHOP

Payot Librairie (Rue du Seyon; ☎ 1.30-6.30pm Mon, 9am-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) Maps, guidebooks and English-language fiction.

DID YOU KNOW

Neuchâtel's town observatory gives the official time-check for all of Switzerland.

LAUNDRY

Salon Lavoir Lavmatic (Rue des Moulins 27; ☎ 8am-8pm)

POST

Central Post Office (Place du Port; ☎ 7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 032 889 68 90; www.neuchateltourism.ch; Hôtel des Postes, Pl du Port; ☎ 9am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat Sep-Jun, 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9-4pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul & Aug)

Sights

Eight *promenades touristiques* (tourist walks) are marked around town and an electric **train** (☎ 032 889 68 90; Pl du Port; adult/child Sfr6/3; ☎ tours Sat & Sun May, Jun & Sep, daily Jul & Aug) ferries tired/tiny feet around the main sights, which takes around 45 minutes.

OLD TOWN & CHÂTEAU

The streets are lined by fine, shuttered 18th-century mansions and studded with fanciful gold-leaved fountains topped by anything from a banner-wielding knight, **Fontaine du Banneret** (Rue Fleury), to a maiden representing Justice, **Fontaine de la Justice** (Rue de l'Hôpital) – see a copy on the street and the original in the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire.

Heading uphill along Rue du Château, walk through the medieval city gate to view the **Tour des Prisons** (☎ 032 717 71 02; Rue Jehanne de Hochberg 5; admission Sfr1; ☎ 8am-6pm Apr-Sep). Scale it for lake and Alpine views. Inside the largely Gothic **Église Collégiale** a mix of Romanesque elements (notably the triple apse) looms large. Facing the main entrance is a statue of Guillaume Farel, who brought the Reformation to town, following which the cathedral was obliged to swap sides.

Behind the church is the 15th-century **château** (☎ 032 889 60 00; admission free; ☎ guided tours hourly btwn 10am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun Apr-Sep) with a pretty shady courtyard you can wander in. Summertime guided tours (45 minutes) allow you to poke your nose around the castle's innards.

SOUNDS OF SILENCE

Silence is sweet for the 26 Carthusian monks who live in almost complete silence in Switzerland's only such still-functioning monastery, the solitary 13th-century **Chartreuse de la Valsainte**, 6km north of Charmey as the crow flies. Behind high walls, well away from the outside world, the cream-robed fathers and brothers here lead a spartan life dedicated to prayer and manual work. They rise at 5.30am, those assigned the duty of chopping wood, for heating, in the surrounding forests are allowed a simple breakfast of cheese. The rest wait until midday to eat. Once a week, the community is allowed 'out', the monks dividing into two groups for a 3½-hour hike – and chat – in the green surrounds. Sunday recreation is the only other opportunity for shared debate.

The 62-cell monastery cannot be visited. Only men can attend Sunday mass at 7.45am in the chapel, but the **Chapelle de la Valsainte** (☎ 026 927 11 37), outside the compound, is open to all.

MUSÉE D'ART ET D'HISTOIRE

The **Art & History Museum** (☎ 032 717 79 25; www.mahn.ch in French; Esplanade Léopold Robert 2; adult/under 16 Sfr7/free, Wed free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is notable for three clockwork androids made between 1764 and 1774 by watchmaker Jaquet Droz. The Writer can be programmed to dip his pen in an inkpot and write up to 40 characters, while the Musician plays up to five tunes on a real organ. The Draughtsman is the simplest, with a repertoire of six drawings. The androids are activated on the first Sunday of the month at 2pm, 3pm and 4pm.

Activities

The port buzzes with summer fun. Pl du 12 Septembre is one big playground, while

Marine Service Loisirs (☎ 032 724 61 82; Port de la Ville; ☎ May-Sep) rents out motor boats (Sfr55 per hour), pedalos (Sfr20 per hour), aquabikes (Sfr20 per hour) and two- or four-seated pedal-powered buggies to cruise along the silky-smooth quays. **Neuchâtel Roule** (☎ 032 717 77 75, 076 417 50 91; www.neuchatelroule.ch in French; Faubourg du Lac 3), with a seasonal **portside kiosk** (☎ 7.30am-9.30pm Jun-Oct), rents bicycles for free (Sfr15 or €20 deposit) and the **Société de Navigation sur les Lacs de Neuchâtel et Morat** (see p112) organises lake cruises.

Festivals & Events

Parades, costumes and drunken revelry ensure fun at the **Fête des Vendanges** (Grape Harvest Festival), the last weekend in Sep-

LIFE IN THE COMMUNE

Neuchâtel's so-called **Commune Libre du Neubourg et Aalentours** (Free Commune of Neubourg and Surroundings; www.leneubourg.ch in French) – a good mate of Paris' Montmartre (a self-declared free commune since 1920) – boils down to a good excuse to party. Founded in 1979, it embraces a trio of Old Town streets – Rue de Neubourg, Rue des Fausses-Brayes and colourfully frescoed Rue des Chavannes, otherwise dubbed Rue des Peintres (Painters' St) with the free-thinking motto 'voir d'un œil sentier de l'autre' (look with one eye, feel with the other) scribed as a footnote on the unofficial street sign pinned up next to the official one.

Various jazz festivals, February's Fête de la Chandeleur, June's Fête de l'Été et de al Musique, not to mention the annual Fête des Vendages in late September when the wine flows like there's no tomorrow, are but some of the spirited festivals celebrated with gusto by the bohemian souls behind the commune.

tember. Jazz, pop and rock set the lakeside jiving during June's open-air **FestiNeuch** (www.festineuch.com in French).

Sleeping

Hôtel de l'Ecluse (☎ 032 729 93 10; www.hoteldelecluse.ch; Rue de l'Ecluse 24; s/d from Sfr100/150; P) Squished in between commercial buildings, yes, but this fine house boasts modernised rooms with brass beds, elegant décor and kitchenettes. Breakfast is served in the bar and there are a couple of terraces for guests to lounge in.

Hôtel Alpes et Lac (☎ 032 723 19 19; www.alpesetlac.ch in French; Pl de la Gare 2; s/d Sfr125/180, with lake view Sfr150/210; P) Opposite the station, this stately 19th-century hotel dating from 1872 markets its 30 comfortable modernised rooms with Wi-Fi (Sfr5 per 30 minutes, Sfr11 for 24 hours) as *bon chic contemporain*. Weekend rates are competitive.

Hôtel Beau Rivage (☎ 032 723 15 15; www.beau-rivage-hotel.ch in French; Esplanade du Mont Blanc 1; s/d from Sfr210/255, mains/menu Sfr38/49; P) Overlooking the lake and sculpture-studded gardens, this majestic ship of a hotel is ab fab – as are the culinary wonders of chef Jean-Baptiste Molinari. Breakfast costs Sfr24.

Hotel Palafitte (☎ 032 723 02 03; www.palafitte.ch; Route des Gouttes-d'Or 2; pavilion on the lake/shore Sfr490/660; P) If cutting-edge technology and architecture are your thing then Neuchâtel's other five-star wonder – a work of art 3km west of Neuchâtel centre in Monruz – will thrill. Stylish self-contained pavilions tout plasma TV screens, Jacuzzi and remote-control everything. Lakeside units have a terrace, fully-equipped office and bathrooms spilling into the lake. Breakfast costs Sfr30.

Eating

Local specialities include tripe and *tomme neuchâteloise chaude* (baked goat cheese starter).

Le Brasserie Jura (☎ 032 725 14 10; Rue de la Treille 7; lunch menu Sfr16.50, mains Sfr15-35; ☎ Mon-Sat) With a name like Jura Brasserie, this hot spot couldn't be more local. Food is cooked to fill. *Tripes à la Neuchâteloise* (Neuchâtel-style tripe) is the menu star and vegetarians are well catered for with vegetable rôsti, veg-stuffed ravioli or six-cereal ravioli doused in goat cheese sauce.

Maison des Halles (☎ 032 724 31 41; www.maison-deshalles.com; Pl des Halles; mains from Sfr35; ☎ Tue-Sat) Gourmands plump for tasty *Maison des Halles* inside a turreted 16th-century mansion. Cuisine is French.

La Maison du Prussien (☎ 032 730 54 54; www.hotel-prussien.ch; Au Gor du Vauseyon, Rue des Tunnels 11; mains from Sfr30; ☎ Mon-Sat) This one-time brewery in a grand old house, enclosed by woods and cradled by the impetuous babbling of a nearby brook, is a treat – and it has great rooms too. Hop aboard Cormondrèche-bound bus No 1 from Pl Pury, get off at Beaugard and head down the stairs to your right following the signs.

Hôtel DuPeyrou (☎ 032 725 11 83; www.dupeyrou.ch in French; Ave DuPeyrou 1; starters/mains Sfr20/50, menus Sfr79-139; ☎ Tue-Sat) DuPeyrou presides like a mini-Versailles over manicured gardens. Built between 1765 and 1770, it regales with gastronomic dining in an 18th-century ambience.

Pinte de Pierre-à-Bot (☎ 032 725 33 80; Rue Pierre-à-Bot 106; starters/mains Sfr10/25, fondue for 2 Sfr28-32) It is a short drive from the town centre but worth it. Built in 1928 as the town's golf clubhouse, the green was moved in the 1970s and the

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TOURIST INFORMATION

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To N5 Motonway, Chaumont (1km), Valangin (2km), Hauterive (3km), Marin (6km), Murten (26km), Biel-Bienne (32km)		
To La Maison du Prussien (1km), Hotel Palafitte (3km), La Chaux de Fonds (19km)		
To Pinte de Pierre-à-Bot (2.5km)		

clubhouse turned into a restaurant – famed for its 20 fondues including ones with Guinness, champagne, curry and 1000 herbs. *Fondue Neuchâteloise* is a mix of local Gruyère, garlic and kirsch.

Central supermarkets:

Coop (Rue de la Treille 4)

Marché Migros (Rue de l'Hôpital 12)

Entertainment

Paradox (☎ 032 721 33 77; www.paradoxclub.com in French; Rue du Râteau; 🕒 10.30pm–4am Thu–Sat, à l'étage 5pm–1am or 2am Tue–Sun) Funk, deep house, mental groove...anything goes at this trendy steel space with dance floor downstairs, bar à l'étage (1st-floor bar).

William's Shakespeare (☎ 032 725 85 88; Rue des Treux 7) Modest disco-pub in the commune.

La Case à Chocs (☎ 032 721 20 56; www.case-a-chocs.ch in French; concerts Sfr10–15; Quai Philippe Godet 16; 🕒 Thu–Sun) Alternative venue in a converted brewery with live music, occasional cinema and art shows.

La Maison du Concert (☎ 032 724 21 22; www.mai.souduconcert.ch in French; Rue de l'Hôtel de Ville 4) Revitalised old theatre with plans to open a bistro.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

From May or June to October, **Société de Navigation sur les Lacs de Neuchâtel et Morat** (☎ 032 729 96 00; www.navig.ch in French; Port de la Ville) runs boats to/from Estavayer-le-Lac (Sfr16.20, 1¼

hours), Yverdon-les-Bains (Sfr25, 2½ hours), Murten (Sfr18.20, 1¼ hours) and Biel (Bienne; Sfr26, 2½ hours).

TRAIN

From the **train station** (Ave de la Gare), a 10-minute walk northeast of the Old Town, hourly trains run to/from Geneva (Sfr37, 1¼ to 1½ hours), Bern via Kerzers (Sfr17.60, 35 minutes), Basel (Sfr34, 1½ hours), Biel (Sfr11.40, 20 minutes) and other destinations. Around two per hour run to/from Yverdon (Sfr13.40, 20 minutes).

Getting Around

Local buses hit transport hub Pl Pury where **Transports Public du Littoral Neuchâtelois information & ticket kiosk** (TN; ☎ 032 720 06 58; www.tnneuchatel.ch in French; Pl Pury; 🕒 7am–6pm Mon–Fri, 8.30–11.30am Sat) is located. Tickets cost Sfr1.70 to Sfr2.50 (Sfr0.40 more from the driver), depending on the length of the journey. Bus No 6 links the train station and Pl Pury.

AROUND NEUCHÂTEL

Day trips from Neuchâtel abound.

Inland

Chaumont (1160m) is a beautiful spot to soak up views across the three lakes to the Alps. From Neuchâtel ride bus No 7 to La Coudre, then take the 13-minute panoramic **funicular**

THE CONCRETE KING

Few know that Le Corbusier (1887–1965, see p35), invariably perceived as French rather than Swiss, was born in La Chaux-de-Fonds at Rue de la Serre 38. Charles Edouard Jeanneret (the groundbreaking architect's real name) spent his childhood in the clock-making town whose concrete, Soviet-style grid-plan clearly found its way somewhere into his young psyche.

After brief stints in the Orient and Berlin, Le Corbusier returned to La Chaux in 1912 to open an architectural office and build Villa Jeanneret-Perret, otherwise called La Maison Blanche ('the white house'), for his parents. The architect who, a few years later would become a serious pal of Germany's Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus movement, lived in the house until 1917 when he left Switzerland for Paris' bright lights. Two years later his parents, unable to afford the upkeep of the house, left.

La Maison Blanche (www.villa-blanche.ch; Chemin de Pouillerel) is one of 11 points on a Corbusier trail that La Chaux's **Tourist Office** (☎ 032 889 68 95; info.cdf@ne.ch; Capacité 1, Pl Le Corbusier), a five-minute walk north of the train station along Ave Léopold Robert, has information on. Derelict for years, Le Corbusier's family home was made a historic monument in 1979 and adopted in 2000 by the Association Maison Blanche which has restored the modern architecture treasure and opened it to visitors.

Mediterranean-inspired **Villa Turque** (☎ 032 912 31 31; www.ebel.ch in French; Rue du Doubs 167; admission free; 🕒 11am–4pm 1st & 3rd Sat of every month), the other La Chaux house Le Corbusier designed, was taken over by the self-dubbed 'architects of time', Ebel luxury watch-makers, in 1986.

THE GREEN FAIRY

It was in the deepest darkest depths of Couvet in the Val de Travers – otherwise dubbed the Pays des Fées (Fairyland) – that absinthe was first distilled in 1740 and produced commercially in 1797 (although it was a Frenchman called Pernod who made the bitter green liqueur known with the distillery he opened just a few kilometres across the French–Swiss border in Pontarlier).

From 1910, following Switzerland's prohibition of the wickedly alcoholic and ruthlessly bitter aniseed drink, distillers of the so-called 'devil in the bottle' in the Val de Travers moved underground. In 1990 the great-grandson of a pre-prohibition distiller in Môtiers came up with Switzerland's first legal aniseed liqueur since 1910 – albeit one which was only 45% proof alcohol (instead of 50% to 75%) and which scarcely contained thujone (the offensive chemical found in wormwood, said to be the root of absinthe's devilish nature). An *extrait d'absinthe* (absinthe extract) quickly followed and in March 2005, following Switzerland's lifting of its absinthe ban, the **Blackmint – Distillerie Kübler & Wyss** (☎ 032 861 14 69; www.blackmint.ch; Rue du Château 7, Môtiers) distilled its first true and authentic batch of the mythical *fee verte* (green fairy) from valley-grown wormwood. Mix one part crystal-clear liqueur with five parts water to make it green.

(☎ 032 720 06 00; one way/return Sfr4.60/9.20) up the mountain.

About 2km beyond Neuchâtel, **Valangin** presents a white turreted **château** (☎ 032 857 23 83; adult/child Sfr5/3; 🕒 10am–noon & 2–5pm Tue–Thu, Sat & Sun Apr–mid-Dec). Inside you'll find period furniture, arms, artwork and Neuchâtel lacework which you can watch being made on the first Sunday of each month from 2pm to 5pm. Take Villars-bound TN bus line V from Pl Pury to Valangin (seven minutes).

Clocks and Le Corbusier are the only reasons to push northwest to **La Chaux-de-Fonds** (population 38,500), the canton's largest city (and Switzerland's highest). The drab grid-plan town was a household name in Europe as the centre of precision watch-making in the 18th and 19th centuries and stills manufactures timepieces today. Its **Musée International d'Horlogerie** (☎ 032 967 68 61; www.mih.ch in French; Rue des Musées 29; adult/12–18yr/family Sfr10/6/22; 🕒 10am–5pm Tue–Sun) tells the tale. Hourly trains run from Neuchâtel to/from La Chaux-de-Fonds (Sfr10.40, 30 minutes).

Along the Lake

Family-scale vineyards have clothed the hills on the northwest shore of Lac de Neuchâtel since the 10th century. Neuchâtel tourist office has a list of cellars where wine can be sampled.

At Hauterive, 3km northeast of Neuchâtel, **Laténium** (☎ 032 889 69 17; www.latenium.ch in French; adult/7–16yr/family Sfr9/4/20; 🕒 10am–5pm Tue–Sun) is an archaeological trip back in time from local prehistory to the Renaissance.

Take bus No 1 from Pl Pury to the Musée d'Archéologie stop.

Southbound, **Château de Vaumarcus** (☎ 032 836 36 10; www.chateauvaumarcus.ch in French; admission by guided tour adult/child/family Sfr8/5/20; 🕒 2–5pm Wed–Sat, 11am–5pm Sun Apr–Aug) is a keep with witches-hat turrets and wooded vineyard surrounds rescued from ruin in the 1980s. It now houses the excellent restaurant, **Le Cour du Peintre** (starters/mains Sfr10/30, lunch menus Sfr19–48). Charles the Bold allegedly slept here in March 1476, and you can take his room, the only guest space in the house (doubles Sfr290), complete with Louis XIII furniture, modern bath and four-poster bed. Guided castle tours include admission to the castle-based Fondation Marc Jurat, an art foundation that hosts changing contemporary art, sculpture and installation exhibitions.

Val de Travers

Hikers march from Vaumarcus to the Val de Travers to marvel at the enormous abyss known as the **Creux du Van** (Rocky Hole – *van* is a word of Celtic origin meaning rock). This spectacular crescent moon wall, a product of glacial erosion, interrupts the habitually green rolling countryside hereabouts in startling fashion. This enormous gulf on the cantonal frontier with Vaud is 1km long and plunges 440m to the bottom (the first 200m is a sheer stony drop).

The Creux is most easily reached on foot from Noiraigue, 22km southeast of Neuchâtel along the N10 or by hourly train from Neuchâtel (Sfr6.60, 20 minutes). The

round-trip hike can take up to five hours depending on the route you follow.

Continuing along the N10 or on the same train from Neuchâtel (Sfr10.40, 35 minutes), you reach **Môtiers** with its pretty castle, absinthe distillery and **Maison des Mascarons** (☎ 032 861 35 51; Grande-Rue 14; adult/child Sfr5/2; ☎ 2.30-5.30pm Tue, Thu, Sat & Sun May–mid-Oct), a local arts, crafts and history museum. Immediately south from here another great ring walk (around 4½ hours) takes you through the **Gorges de la Poëta Raisse** to high green plains, forest and, finally, a crest at 1448m.

MONTAGNES NEUCHÂTELOISES

The west of the canton is dominated by the low mountain chain of the Jura, which stretches from the canton of the same name (right) to the northeast and into Canton de Vaud in the southwest. Cross-country skiers, walkers and cyclists will find the hills here – the Montagnes Neuchâtelaises – inspirational.

Le Locle

pop 10,315 / elevation 950m

Incredibly, the whole lucrative Swiss watch business began ticking in this straggly town when Daniel Jean-Richard (1665–1741) established a cottage industry in the manufacture of timepieces here. His name continues to be lent to luxury watches manufactured by Jean Richard (www.danieljeanrichard.ch) in nearby La Chaux-de-Fonds.

Grand 18th-century rooms filled with all manner of clocks make the **Musée de l'Horlogerie du Locle** (Watchmaking Museum; ☎ 032 931 16 80; www.mhl-monts.ch in French; Route des Monts 65; adult/10-18yr/family Sfr7/4/17; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, 2-5pm Tue-Sun Nov-Apr), inside Château des Monts, tick.

About 2km west, a series of underground mills carved out of the rock to exploit subterranean water flowing into the Doubs River makes for an unusual day out at the 17th-century **Moulins Souterrains du Le Col-des-Roches** (☎ 032 931 89 89; www.lesmoulins.ch in French; admission by guided tour adult/child/family Sfr12/7/28; ☎ 10am-5pm May-Oct, 2-5pm Tue-Sun Nov-Apr), 2km west of Le Locle. Take the Le Locle–La Brévine bus to get here.

Le Locle is 8km by train (Sfr3.20, six minutes, at least hourly) from La Chaux-de-Fonds.

Les Brenets & Saut du Doubs

A scenic excursion lies 6km from Le Locle. Le Doubs River, which springs forth inside France, widens out at the peaceful village of **Les Brenets**, just inside Swiss territory. For the next 45km on its serpentine northwestern course from here, the river forms the border between the two countries before making a loop inside Switzerland and then returning to French territory.

About a one-hour walk along **Lac des Brenets** (Lac de Chaillexon on the French side) the river will bring you to the **Saut du Doubs**, a splendid crashing waterfall where the river cascades 27m to a natural pool. Hikers might prefer a great 4½-hour loop. From Les Brenets, follow signs for Les Recrettes (most easily reached along a narrow asphalt road). From here you head across a clearing on the edge of the forest that stands on the steep slopes above the river to the **Belvédère** (1075m), a magnificent point high above a bend on the Doubs with views across to the gentle green countryside of France. Take the forest trail (impassable in winter) for about an hour to **Roches de Moron**, then head downhill through the woods to **Lac de Moron** and follow the trail along its southern shore. It gradually climbs away from the lake and river (about an hour) until you reach the Saut du Doubs waterfall. From here it's an easy hour's walk back to Les Brenets.

For non-walkers, **NLB** (☎ 032 932 14 14; www.nlb.ch) runs regular boats from Les Brenets to the waterfall up to 11 times a day from June to September (one way/return Sfr7/12), and three daily in April, May and October.

Trains from Le Locle to Les Brenets (Sfr3.20, seven minutes) are frequent.

CANTON DE JURA

The northernmost of the three cantons, clover-shaped Canton de Jura (840 sq km, population 69,100) is a more-rural-than-rural, mysterious peripheral region that has always come last. Its grandest towns – including its capital – are little more than enchanting villages, while deep forests and impossibly green clearings succeed one another across the low Jura mountains.

While the Jura mountain range proper extends south through Canton de Neuchâtel and Canton de Vaud into the Haut-

CENT SAVER

If you are intending to travel a lot by bus or train in a day, you should get a Carte Journalière Région CJ (Sfr16), allowing unlimited travel on Chemins de Fer du Jura (CJ) trains and buses for 24 hours. Canton aside, the Carte Journalière Arc Jurassien (Sfr25) also covers the Jura Bernois and as far south as Le Locle (opposite) and Les Brenets (opposite).

Jura in neighbouring France, it is here that its Jurassic heart lies. Saignelégier, 45km north of Neuchâtel in the south of the canton, is the main port of call for tourist information.

FRANCHES MONTAGNES

Settlers only began trickling into these untamed 'free mountains' in the 14th century. Heavily forested hill country marking the northern end of the Jura range, the area – undulating at roughly 1000m – is sprinkled with hamlets and is ideal for walking, mountain biking and cross-country skiing. The Doubs River kisses its northern tip.

At an elevation of 1000m and with a population of 2140, **Saignelégier** (www.saignelegier.ch), the main town, won't hold your interest for long unless you're in town for August's annual **Marché-Concours**, a horse show. The tourist office, **Jura Tourisme** (☎ 090 112 34 00; crs@jura.ch; Rue de la Gruère 1; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) covers the whole Jura and has ample information on accommodation options, including farm-based B&Bs.

For **cross-country skiing**, take your pick of a trio of hamlets: **Montfaucon**, 5km northeast; **Le Noirmont**, 6km southwest; or **Les Breuleux**, 7km south. **Goumois**, bang-slap on the Swiss–French border (officially in France) 8km west of Saignelégier, is a canoeing and rafting mecca. **Goumois Évasion** (☎ 03 81 44 21 30, 06 81 24 02 03; www.goumois.com in French; Chemin des Seignottes) organises canoeing, rafting and kayaking trips along the Doubs River to Soubey (€27, four to five hours) and St-Ursanne (€45, nine hours over two days) in the Swiss Jura. Straightforward canoe/kayak rental costs €6 for 1½ hours.

Saignelégier is on the train line between La Chaux-de-Fonds (Sfr13.40, 35 minutes, almost hourly) and Basel (Sfr26, 1½ with a change at Glovelier).

For panoramic views across the Jura, the Bieler See and the Alps, head to **St Imier**, 18km south of Saignelégier in the Jura Bernois, then follow the minor road south towards Villiers. The first turn left (east) takes you along a winding (and in winter snowbound) road to **Le Chasseral** (1607m), a launch pad for hang-gliders.

NORTHERN JURA

Three towns within easy reach of one another are strung out across northern Jura, never far from the French frontier.

Delémont

pop 11,490 / elevation 413m

Canton de Jura's capital moored alongside the Scheulte River is modest. Its Old Town preserves a whiff of years gone by, with uneven houses topped by improbably tall tiled roofs peeping over 18th-century **Église de St Marcel** and the so-called **château** (really a grand stately manor). The **Musée Jurassien d'Art et d'Histoire** (☎ 032 422 80 77; Rue du 23 Juin 52; adult/child Sfr6/free; ☎ 2-5pm Tue-Sun) displays a hodgepodge of local paintings, religious art and objects from various Jura churches and traditional household furnishings. Motorists can follow the signs 3km north out of town to the **Chapelle de Vorbourg**, a dramatically located centre of pilgrimage.

St Ursanne

pop 870 / elevation 430m

A pretty 30-minute motor west of Delémont takes you through beautiful countryside to the most delightful village in the canton – medieval St Ursanne on the north bank of the Doubs River. As early as the 7th century a small centre of worship existed here on the site of the present grand, 12th-century **Église Collégiale**, a mostly Gothic church with a splendid Romanesque portal on its southern flank and an intriguing crypt. The Gothic cloister is a cool, soothing retreat. Around the church are clustered ancient houses, the 16th-century town gates and a lovely stone bridge over the Doubs River. For tourist information, accommodation and the low-down on kayaking on the Doubs, hit **Jura Tourisme** (☎ 032 461 37 16; Rue du Quartier 18).

Trains link St Ursanne train station, 1km east of the town centre, with Delémont (Sfr6.60, 20 minutes) and Porrentruy (Sfr4.60, 12 minutes) and buses pool

MONKS' HEADS

For eight centuries, villages around the Bellelay Abbey in the Jura Bernois (just across the border from Canton de Jura, 8km north of Tavannes on the N30 highway between Moutier and St Imier) have produced a strong, nutty flavoured cheese. Until the French Revolution it went by the name of Bellelay or monks' cheese. In 1792 revolutionary troops marched in, obliging the monks of Bellelay to take their leave. The troopers found a pile of these cylindrical cheeses in the cellars and dubbed them *têtes de moine* (monks' heads). Perhaps they had in mind the curious way in which one 'slices' them. A knife is used to scrape shavings off the top of the cheese in a circular motion, vaguely reminiscent of the monks' tonsure. Nowadays, the *tête de moine* is produced all over the Jura and a nifty device, the *girolle* has been invented to slice it.

along narrow country roads to and from nearby villages. Walking trails are a dime a dozen; to foot it to Porrentruy pick up the steep and picturesque uphill trail north to the Col de la Croix (789m).

Porrentruy

pop 6750 / elevation 425m

From Col de la Croix, the road dips down quickly through forest and into a plain to the last Jura town of importance before heading into France – pretty Porrentruy. Fine old buildings line the main street, Grand Rue, against a dramatic backdrop of the bulky **château** (really a set of buildings raised at different periods). Thirteenth-century **Tour de Refouss** stands aloof amid the various 18th-century structures now occupied by government offices.

The tastiest time to visit **Porrentruy** (www.porrentruy.ch in French) is during its **Fête de la**

Saint Martin, a centuries' old feast on the second Sunday after All Saints' Day in November, marking the end of the rural working year. Now, as then, the festival is a fabulous excuse to gorge yourself on all sorts of sausages, cold meats and puddings. **Jura Tourisme** (☎ 032 466 59 59; www.juratourisme.ch in French & German; Grand Rue 5; 🕒 9am-noon & 1.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) have more information.

Accommodation is abundant and includes **Hôtel de la Poste** (☎ 032 466 18 27; Rue des Malvoisins 15; s/d from Sfr80/150), which has a bunch of reasonable rooms and a bar open until 3am; and the more upmarket Churchill Pub – and club-clad, three-star **Hôtel du Cheval Blanc** (☎ 032 466 15 15; Rue du 23 Juin 15; s/d from Sfr100/170). All over town, bakeries cook up sensational *gâteau de fromage* (cheesecake) on Friday morning.

Trains proceed fairly regularly southeast to St Ursanne and Delémont. Buses serve neighbouring villages in the Ajoie plains.