

Switzerland

Switzerland is an easy country to swallow; it melts in your mouth as smoothly as the rich chocolates and creamy cheeses it is famous for. With a kind of slap-you-in-the-face natural beauty Hollywood filmmakers salivate over and a reputation as a summer and winter sports paradise, it's pretty hard to not get hooked. Switzerland is where people first skied for fun, and along with heavenly powder pistes and ultraglam resorts (think St Moritz), the country dishes up enough adrenalin-pumping fuel to keep your inner junkie satiated for weeks (think out-of-this-world hiking or flying through the sky on a pair of manmade wings).

Okay, so all the clichés you've heard about Switzerland are likely true. It's pretty damn easy to envision rosy-faced goat herders yodelling to a clinking cowbell melody amid sky-scraping peaks. But even though they've perfected the whole G-rated Matterhorn look, don't mistake the Swiss for a bunch of Goody Two-Shoes. This is the country, after all, that invented absinthe and LSD. It's as well known for secret bank accounts and shady business deals as for fondue and droopy-roofed chalets. Small, fiercely independent and culturally complex (there are four official languages, Swiss German, French, Italian and Romansch), the Swiss have expensive tastes. Cities like Geneva (the most cosmopolitan), Zürich (the most outrageous), Bern (the most charming) and Lucerne (the most beautiful) heave with heady artistic activity, legendary nightlife and some of the planet's highest living standards.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 41,285 sq km
- **Capital** Bern
- **Currency** Swiss franc (Sfr); A\$1 = Sfr0.91; €1 = Sfr1.56; ¥100 = Sfr1.07; NZ\$1 = Sfr0.75; UK£1 = Sfr2.26; US\$1 = Sfr1.22
- **Famous for** cheese, the Matterhorn, banking
- **Official Languages** French, German, Italian, Romansch
- **Phrases** *gruezi* (hello, good day), *merci viel-mal* (thank you very much), *adieu* (goodbye), *sprechen sie Englisch?* (do you speak English?)
- **Population** 7.4 million
- **Telephone Codes** country code ☎ 41; international access code ☎ 00



HIGHLIGHTS

- Gasp at gargantuan mountain vistas, partake in white-knuckle adrenalin adventures or spend a night in the hay in the gorgeous **Jungfrau region** (p1081).
- Play in the mighty Matterhorn's shadow in everyone's favourite Swiss ski town, **Zermatt** (p1062).
- Immerse yourself in **Bern's** (p1045) elegant medieval charm and pulsating party scene.
- Soak up seriously sexy ambience sipping wine at a lakeside café in Switzerland's sultry Italian canton, **Ticino** (p1064).
- Eat lunch in the revolving restaurant at the top of the **Schilthorn** (p1083), dominated by mammoth Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau (Ogre, Monk and Virgin) mountain views.

ITINERARIES

- **One week** Start in vibrant Zürich. Shop famous Bahnhofstrasse or hit a hip new martini bar. Head to the Jungfrau region next, and explore some kick-ass (think James Bond racing an avalanche down a sheer snowy rock face) Alpine scenery. Take a pit stop in beautiful Lucerne before finishing up in fabulously medieval Bern.
- **Two weeks** As above, then head west for French immersion lessons in international Geneva or cosmopolitan Lausanne. Spend a few nights in Neuchâtel and

Freiburg cantons, stopping to taste *the* cheese in Gruyères. Zip down to Zermatt or across to St Moritz to partake in a little skiing. Loop east to experience Switzerland's Italian side.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Although there are plenty of crystal clear, sunny days, winters in Switzerland can be cold, snowy and sometimes (especially around Zürich) rather grey, with temperatures between 2°C and 6°C. Summers mix sunshine with rain. Temperatures range from 20°C to 25°C, except in Ticino, which has a hotter, Mediterranean climate. You will need to be prepared for a range of temperatures, depending on your altitude.

Visit Switzerland from December to April for winter sports, and May to October for general sightseeing and hiking. Alpine resorts all but close down in late April, May and November. See also Climate Charts (p1100).

HISTORY

The first inhabitants of the region were a Celtic tribe, the Helvetii. The Romans arrived in 107 BC via the Great St Bernard Pass, but were gradually driven back by the Germanic Alemanni tribe, which settled in the region in the 5th century AD. Burgundians and Franks also came to the area, and Christianity was gradually introduced.

The territory was united under the Holy Roman Empire in 1032, but central control was never tight, and neighbouring nobles fought each other for local influence. Rudolph I spearheaded the Germanic Habsburg expansion and gradually brought the squabbling nobles to heel.

The Swiss Confederation

Upon Rudolph's death in 1291, local leaders saw a chance to gain independence. The forest communities of Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden formed an alliance on 1 August 1291, which is seen as the origin of the Swiss Confederation (their struggles against the Habsburgs are idealised in the legend of William Tell). This union's success prompted other communities to join: Lucerne (1332), followed by Zürich (1351), Glarus and Zug (1352), and Bern (1353).

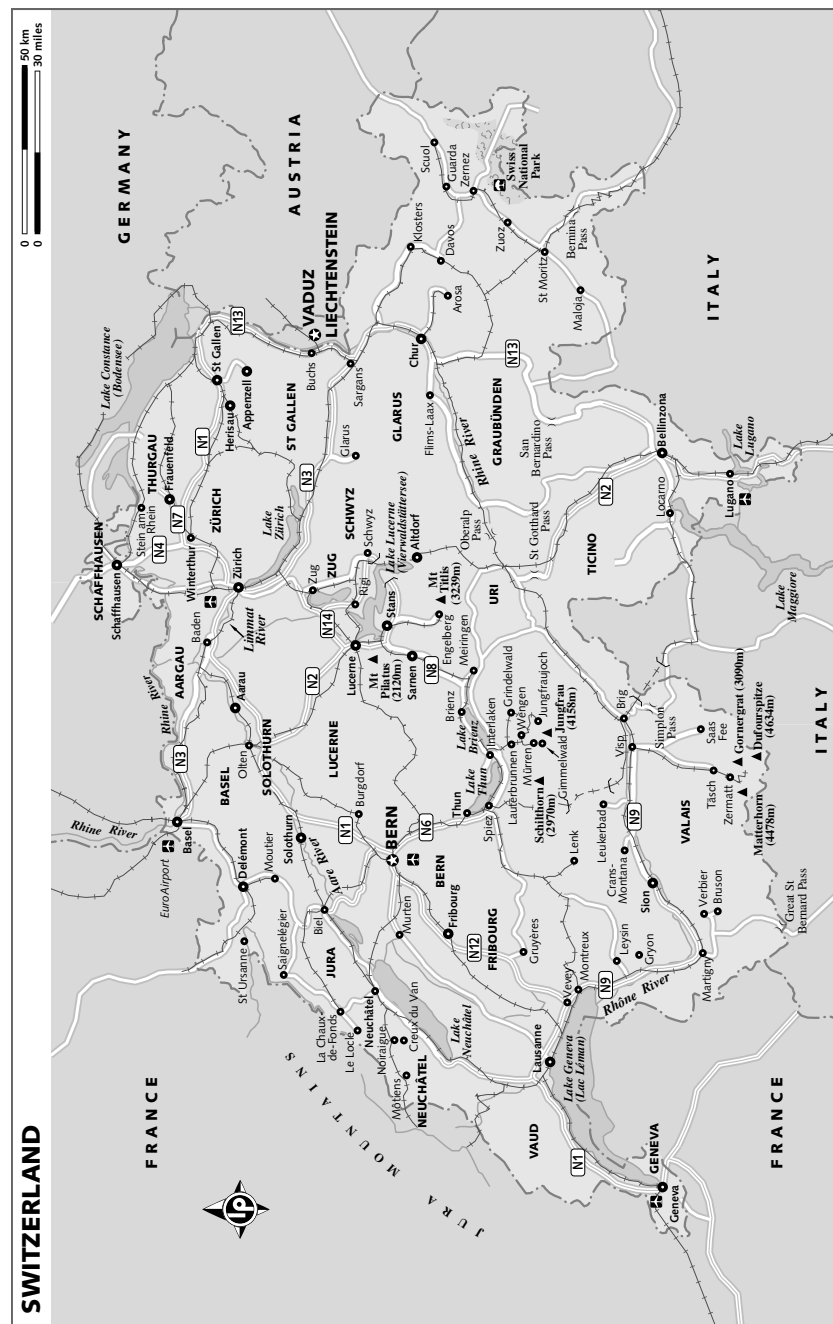
Encouraged by successes against the Habsburgs, the Swiss acquired a taste for

HOW MUCH?

- **Hostel dorm bed** Sfr28
- **Bottle of absinthe** Sfr50
- **100km by train** Sfr30
- **City bus ride** Sfr2-3
- **Local telephone call** Sfr0.60

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** Sfr1.74
- **1L bottled water** Sfr2
- **Half-pint of beer** Sfr4
- **Souvenir T-shirt** Sfr20
- **Kebab** Sfr9



territorial expansion. More land was seized. Fribourg, Solothurn, Basel, Schaffhausen and Appenzell joined the confederation, and the Swiss gained independence from the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I after their victory at Dornach in 1499.

Eventually, the Swiss over-reached themselves. They took on a superior force of French and Venetians at Marignano in 1515 and lost. Realising they could no longer compete against larger powers with better equipment, they declared their neutrality. Even so, Swiss mercenaries continued to serve in other armies for centuries, and earned an unrivalled reputation for skill and courage.

The Reformation during the 16th century caused upheaval throughout Europe. The Protestant teachings of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin spread quickly, although the inaugural cantons remained Catholic. This caused internal unrest that dragged on for centuries.

The French Republic invaded Switzerland in 1798 and established the Helvetic Republic. The Swiss vehemently resisted such centralised control, causing Napoleon to restore the former confederation of cantons in 1803. Yet France still retained overall jurisdiction. Following Napoleon's defeat by the British and Prussians at Waterloo, Switzerland finally gained independence.

The Modern State

Throughout the gradual move towards one nation, each canton remained fiercely independent, to the extent of controlling coinage and postal services. The cantons lost these powers in 1848, when a new federal constitution was agreed upon, with Bern as the capital. The Federal Assembly was set up to take care of national issues, but the cantons retained legislative (Grand Council) and executive (States Council) powers to deal with local matters.

Having achieved political stability, Switzerland could concentrate on economic and social matters. Poor in mineral resources, it developed industries dependent on highly skilled labour. A network of railways and roads was built, opening up previously inaccessible regions of the Alps and helping the development of tourism.

The Swiss carefully guarded their neutrality in the 20th century. Their only in-

volvement in WWI was organising units of the Red Cross (founded in Geneva in 1863 by Henri Dunant). Switzerland did join the League of Nations after peace was won, but only on the condition that its involvement was financial and economic rather than military. Apart from some accidental bombing, WWII left Switzerland largely unscathed.

While the rest of Europe was still recovering from the war, Switzerland was able to forge ahead from an already powerful commercial, financial and industrial base. Zürich developed as an international banking and insurance centre, while the World Health Organization (WHO) and many other international bodies set up headquarters in Geneva. Its much-vaunted neutrality led it to decline to actually join either the UN or EU, but the country became one of the world's richest and most respected.

Then, in the late 1990s, a series of scandals forced Switzerland to begin reforming its famously secretive banking industry. In 1995, after pressure from Jewish groups, Swiss banks announced that they had discovered millions of dollars lying in dormant pre-1945 accounts, belonging to Holocaust victims and survivors. Three years later, amid allegations that they had been sitting on the money without seriously trying to trace its owners, the two largest banks, UBS and Credit Suisse agreed to pay US\$1.25 billion in compensation to Holocaust survivors and their families.

Banking confidentiality dates back to the Middle Ages here, and was enshrined in law in 1934, when numbered, rather than named, bank accounts were introduced. However, in 2004, the country made another concession to that veil of secrecy, when it agreed to tax accounts held in Switzerland by EU citizens.

The year 2001 was truly Switzerland's annus horribilis. The financial collapse of the national airline Swissair, a canyoning accident in the Bernese Oberland killing 21 tourists, an unprecedented gun massacre in the Zug parliament and a fatal fire in the Gotthard Tunnel within 12 months all prompted intense soul-searching.

However, when devastating floods washed through the country in 2005 causing several deaths and an estimated Sfr2

IT ALL HAPPENED IN SWITZERLAND

- Albert Einstein came up with his theories of relativity and the famous formula 'E=MC²' in Bern in 1905.
- Switzerland gave birth to the World Wide Web at the acclaimed CERN (European Centre for Nuclear Research) institute outside Geneva.
- Val de Travers, near Neuchâtel, claims to be the birthplace of the mythical green alcohol absinthe.
- The first acid trip took place in Switzerland. In 1943, chemist Albert Hofmann was conducting tests for a migraine cure in Basel when he accidentally absorbed the lysergic acid diethylamide, or LSD, compound through his fingertips.
- Of the 800-or-so films a year produced by India's huge movie-making industry, more are shot in Switzerland than in any other foreign country. 'For the Indian public, Switzerland is the land of their dreams', film star Raj Mukherjee has said. Favourite destination shoots include the Berner Oberland, Central Switzerland and Geneva.
- Switzerland's central Alpine region possesses one of Europe's richest traditions of myth and legend. Pontius Pilate is said to rise out of the lake on Mt Pilatus, near Lucerne, every good Friday (the day he condemned Jesus Christ) to wash blood from his hands – and anybody who witnesses this event will allegedly die within the year. Tiny 'wild folk' with supernatural powers, called Chlyni Lüüt, were once reputed to inhabit Mt Rigi, also near Lucerne. Their children's spleens were removed at birth, giving them the ability to leap around mountain slopes.

billion damage, there were fewer anguished cries about what was going wrong with Switzerland and more pragmatic debate on what should be done.

Switzerland swung to the conservative right in its parliamentary government in 2003, and today recognises that it's facing universal challenges; it has begun to reach out more to the world. In 2002 it finally became the 190th member of the UN. In 2005 it joined Europe's 'Schengen' passport-free travel zone (effective 2007) and, in theory, opened its borders to workers from the 10 new EU members.

It still isn't a member of the EU itself and, although the French-speaking regions would like it, doesn't look like becoming one anytime soon. However, in many ways Switzerland no longer views isolation as quite so splendid.

PEOPLE

Switzerland's name may stand for everything from knives to watches, but don't expect this nation to take a stand for anyone other than itself. Militarily neutral for centuries, and armed to the teeth to make sure it stays that way, in Switzerland it's the Swiss Way or the highway.

With a population of 7.4 million, Switzerland averages 174 people per square kilometre. Zürich is the largest city (population 338,794) followed by Geneva (179,426), Basel (161,800) and Bern (120,596). Most people are of Germanic origin, as reflected in the breakdown of the four national languages. Around 20% of the population are residents but not Swiss citizens.

The Swiss are polite, law-abiding people who usually see no good reason to break the rules. Living quietly with your neighbours is a national obsession. Good manners infuse the national psyche, and politeness is the cornerstone of all social intercourse. Always shake hands when being introduced to a Swiss, and kiss on both cheeks to greet and say goodbye to friends. Don't forget to greet shopkeepers when entering shops. When drinking with the Swiss, always wait until everyone has their drink and toast each of your companions, looking them in the eye and clinking glasses. Drinking before the toast is unforgivable, and will lead to seven years of bad sex...or so the superstition goes. Don't say you weren't warned.

In a few mountain regions such as Valais, people still wear traditional rural costumes, but dressing up is usually reserved for

festivals. Yodelling, playing the alp horn and Swiss wrestling are also part of the Alpine tradition.

RELIGION

The country is split pretty evenly between Protestantism (40%) and Roman Catholicism (46%). Most of the rest of the population are recorded as 'unaffiliated'. The dominant faith varies between cantons. Strong Protestant areas are Bern, Vaud and Zürich, whereas Valais, Ticino and Uri are mostly Catholic. Most Swiss pay a *kirchensteuer* (church tax) – a percentage of their income tax that the government distributes to the churches through state subsidies.

ARTS

Many foreign writers and artists, such as Voltaire, Byron, Shelley and Turner have visited and settled in Switzerland. Local and international artists pouring into Zürich during WWI spawned the dadaist movement there.

Paul Klee (1879–1940) is the best-known native painter. He created bold, hard-lined abstract works. The writings of philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), in Geneva, played an important part in the development of democracy. Critically acclaimed postwar dramatists and novelists, Max Frisch (1911–91) and Friedrich Dürrenmatt (1921–90), entertained readers with their dark satire, tragi-comedies and morality plays. On the musical front, Arthur Honegger (1892–1955) is Switzerland's most recognised composer.

The Swiss have made important contributions to graphic design and commercial art. Anyone who's ever used a computer will have interacted with their fonts, from Helvetica to Fruitiger to Univers. The father of modern architecture, Le Corbusier (1887–1965), who designed Notre Dame du Haut chapel at Ronchamps in France, Chandigarh in India and the UN headquarters in New York, was Swiss. One of the most-acclaimed contemporary architectural teams on earth, Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, live and work in Basel. Winners of the prestigious Pritzker Prize in 2001, this pair created London's acclaimed Tate Modern museum building.

Gothic and Renaissance architecture are prevalent in urban areas, especially Bern. Rural Swiss houses vary according to region, but are generally characterised by ridged roofs with wide, overhanging eaves, and balconies and verandas enlivened by colourful floral displays, especially geraniums.

To the chagrin of many, Switzerland also sports some pretty artistic graffiti. Giant intricately spray-painted patterns (along with less savoury pieces) grace buildings scattered along railway tracks near train stations.

ENVIRONMENT

Mountains make up 70% of Switzerland's 41,285 sq km. Farming of cultivated land is intensive and cows graze on the upper slopes as soon as the retreating snow line permits.

The Alps occupy the central and southern regions of the country. The Dufourspitze (4634m), a peak on the Monte Rosa Mountains, is the highest point, although the Matterhorn (4478m) is more famous.

Glaciers account for a 2000-sq-km area. The Aletsch Glacier is Europe's largest valley glacier at 169 sq km.

The St Gotthard Mountains, in the centre of Switzerland, is the source of many lakes and rivers, including the Rhine and the Rhône. The Jura Mountains straddle the border with France, and peak at around 1700m. Between the two systems is the Mittelland, also known as the Swiss Plateau, a region of hills crisscrossed by rivers, ravines and winding valleys.

The most distinctive Alpine animal in Switzerland is the ibex, a mountain goat that has huge curved and ridged horns. There are about 12,000 of them left in the country.

Switzerland has just one national park, the Swiss National Park. At just 169 sq km it is quite small but offers opportunities for walking and ibex viewing.

Switzerland has long been an environmentally aware nation. Its citizens diligently recycle household waste and cities encourage the use of public transport. The policy in the mountains is to contain rather than expand existing resorts.

Global warming could have a serious impact on Switzerland because of the effect on

Alpine glaciers. Since the 1950s the federal government has introduced various measures to protect forests, lakes and marshland from environmental damage and, in 1991, it signed the Alpine Convention, which seeks to reduce damage caused by motor traffic and tourism.

FOOD & DRINK

Lactose intolerants will struggle in this dairy-obsessed country, where cheese is a way of life. The best-known Swiss dish is fondue, in which melted Emmentaler and gruyère are combined with white wine, served in a large pot and eaten with bread cubes. Another popular artery-hardener is *raclette*, melted cheese served with potatoes. *Rösti* (fried, buttery, shredded potatoes) is German Switzerland's national dish, and is served with everything.

Many dishes are meaty, and veal is highly rated throughout the country. In Zürich it is thinly sliced and served in a cream sauce (*Gschmeltzeltes Kalbsfleisch*). *Bündnerfleisch* is dried beef, smoked and thinly sliced. Like their northern neighbours, the Swiss also munch on a wide variety of Wurst (sausage).

Wine is considered an essential accompaniment to lunch and dinner. Local vintages are generally good quality, but you might never have heard of them, as they are rarely exported. The main growing regions are Italian- and French-speaking areas, particularly in Valais and by Lakes Neuchâtel and Geneva.

Buffet-style restaurant chains, such as Manora, have a huge selection of freshly cooked food at low prices. Migros and Coop are the main supermarket chains. Street stalls are a good place to pick up cheap eats – you'll find kebabs and sandwiches everywhere. If you're fond of kebabs (as we are), the stalls on Zürich's Niederdorfstrasse (p1073) are some of our favourites in the country. Bratwurst and pretzel stands (sometimes the pretzels are even stuffed with meats and cheeses) also abound in German cantons.

Restaurants sometimes close between meals (generally from 3pm to 5pm), although this is becoming rare in large cities, and tend to have a closing day, often Monday. Cafés usually stay open all day. Bars are open from lunch time until at least

midnight. Clubs get going after 10pm and close around 4am.

In cities and larger towns there are dedicated vegetarian restaurants. Most eateries also will offer a small selection of nonmeat options, including large salad plates.

Finally, Switzerland makes some of the most delectable chocolate in the world – don't miss it!

BERN

pop 120,596

One of the planet's most underrated capitals, Bern is a fabulous find. With the genteel, old soul of a Renaissance man and the heart of a high-flying 21st-century gal, the city is at once medieval and modern. The 15th-century old town is gorgeous enough to sweep you off your feet and make you forget the century (it's definitely worthy of its 1983 Unesco World Heritage site protection order). But edgy vintage boutiques, artsy-intellectual bars and raging nightlife will slam you back into the present.

Bern was founded in 1191 by Berchtold V and named for the unfortunate bear (*bärn* in local dialect) that was his first hunting victim. The bear remains the heraldic mascot of the city today. Attractions include checking out Paul Klee's, visiting Einstein's home and taking a swift float down the Aare River's blue-green waters.

ORIENTATION

The compact centre of old town is contained within a sharp U-bend of the Aare River. The train station is on the western edge within easy reach of all the main sights, and offers bike rental and airline check-in.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Stauffacher (☎ 031 311 24 11; Neugasse 25; ☎ 8am–6.30pm Mon–Fri, to 4pm Sat) English-language bookshop.

Discount Card

BernCard (per 24/48/72hr 5fr/17/27/33) Admission to the permanent collections of all museums, plus free public transport and discounts on city tours.

Emergency

Police station (☎ 031 321 21 21; train station)

Internet Access

Inside Internet Bar (☎ 031 313 81 91; Aarberggasse 46; per hr Sfr7-9; ☎ 11am-12.30am Mon-Sat, noon-10pm Sun) Fully stocked bar and groovy atmosphere.

Medical Services

Emergency doctor, dentist, pharmacist (☎ 090 057 67 47; ☎ 24hr)

University hospital (☎ 031 632 21 11; Fribourgstrasse; ☎ 24hr) West of the centre, has a casualty department.

Post

Main post office (Schanzenstrasse; ☎ 7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Tourist Information

Bern tourist office (☎ 031 328 12 28; www.berne-tourism.ch; train station; ☎ 9am-8.30pm daily Jun-Sep, 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat & 10am-5pm Sun Oct-May) Offers two-hour city tours by coach (Sfr25, daily April to October, Saturday November to March) and foot (Sfr14, daily June to September) in summer. Its free booklet, *Bern aktuell*, has plenty of useful information. There's another tourist office by the bear pits.

Bern Youth Guide (www.youthguide.ch) This online service has some excellent tips and links.

Travel Agencies

STA Travel (☎ 031 302 03 12; Falkenplatz 9; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Budget and student travel agency.

SIGHTS Old Town

Pick up a city map from the tourist office (Sfr1) and start exploring. Don't pay too much attention to the map though. The best places are often found on detours down skinny side alleys. Stumble into a funky

retro cellar shop, selling penis-shaped peppermint candies alongside chunky silver rings. Keep an eye out for a gallery selling all sorts of shells and bright beaded necklaces or a hideaway bar of the trendiest proportions.

Classic not-to-be-missed stops on your conventional map include the **ogre fountain**, in Kornhausplatz, depicting a giant enjoying a meal of wriggling children. The **Zeitglockenturm**, dividing Marktgasse and Kramgasse, is a colourful clock tower with revolving figures that herald the chiming hour.

The unmistakably Gothic, 15th-century cathedral **Münster** (☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 11.30am-5pm Sun) is worth stepping into. It features imposing, 12m-high, stained-glass windows and an elaborate main portal.

Just across the Aare River are the **bear pits** (Bärengaben). Though bears have been the entertainment at this site since 1857, it's really depressing to see such majestic beasts doing tricks for treats in such a cramped, concrete environment – this author had to turn away pretty quickly.

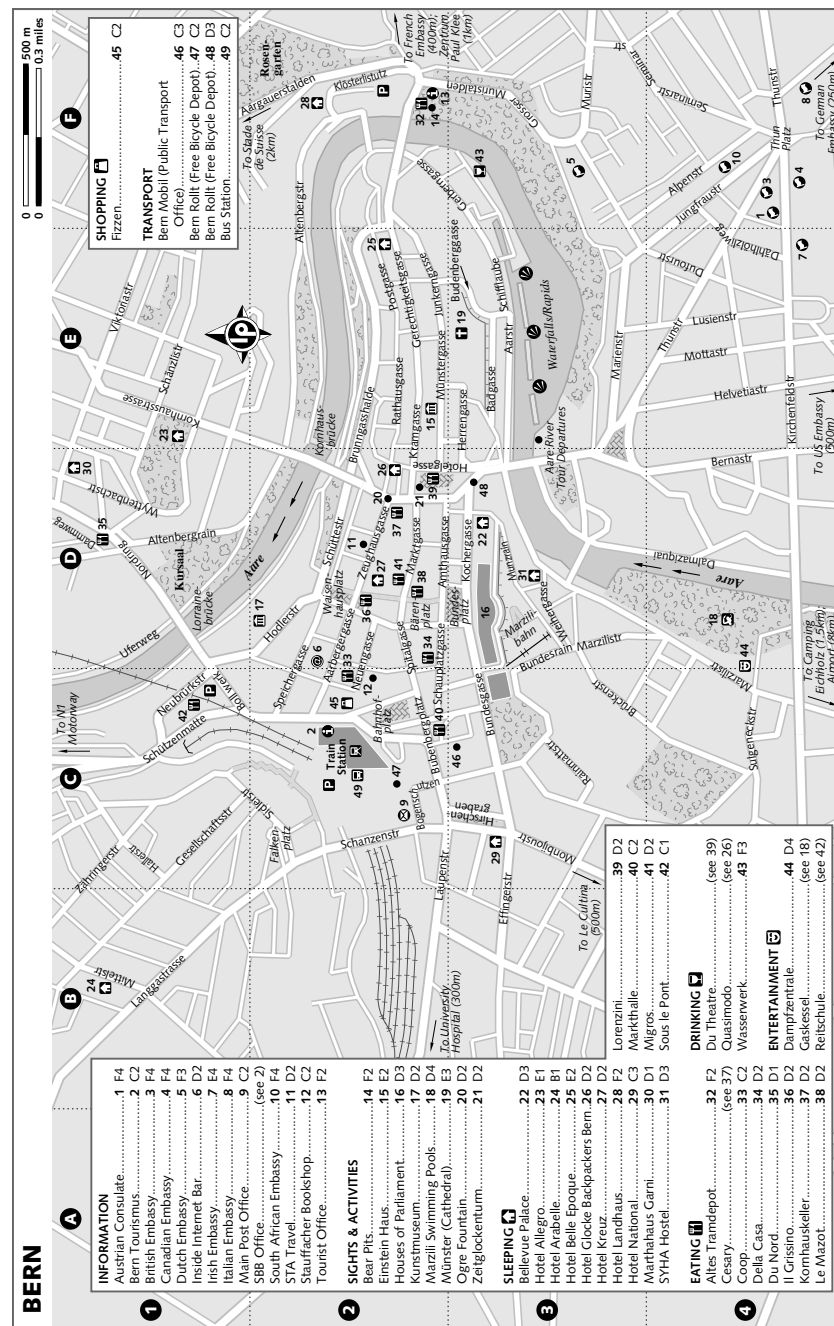
Einstein Museum

The world's most famous scientist developed his theory of relativity in Bern in 1905, and the small **Einstein Haus** (☎ 031 312 00 91; www.einstein-bern.ch; Kramgasse 49; adult/student & senior Sfr6/4.50; ☎ 10am-7pm Apr-Oct, 1-5pm Tue-Fri, noon-4pm Sat Feb, Mar & Nov–mid-Dec, closed mid-Dec–Jan) has been given a facelift recently to celebrate the centenary of that discovery.

The humble apartment where Einstein lived with his young family while working as a low-paid clerk in the Bern patent office has been redecorated in the style of the time. Numerous multimedia displays now flesh out the story of the subsequent general equation – $E=MC^2$, or energy equals mass multiplied by the speed of light squared – which fundamentally changed humankind's understanding of space, time and the universe.

Paul Klee Centre

Renzo Piano's remarkable building, the **Zentrum Paul Klee** (☎ 031 359 01 01; www.zpk.org; adult/concession/child Sfr14/12/6, extra Sfr2 for special exhibitions; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun, to 9pm Thu) is Bern's Guggenheim. Curving up and down



like ocean waves, it forms three 'hills' on the outskirts of town. The structure's middle hill houses the main exhibition space, showcasing 4000 rotating works from Paul Klee's prodigious and often-playful career. Interactive computer displays built into the seating mean you can get the low-down on all the Swiss-born artist's major pieces.

The other two 'hills' are given over to conferences, concerts, administration and a hands-on children's museum (admission Sfr15).

Houses of Parliament

The 1902 **Houses of Parliament** (Bundeshäuser; ☎ 031 332 85 22; www.parliament.ch; Bundesplatz; admission free; ☎ tours 9am, 10am, 11am, 2pm, 3pm & 4pm Mon-Fri, 11am Sat), home of the Swiss Federal Assembly, are impressively ornate, with statues of the nation's founding fathers, a stained-glass dome adorned with cantonal emblems and a huge, 214-bulb chandelier. Tours are offered when the parliament is in recess, otherwise you can watch from the public gallery. Bring a passport.

Kunstmuseum

One of Switzerland's most prized art collections is found in the permanent collection of the **Museum of Fine Art** (☎ 031 328 09 44; www.kunstmuseumbern.ch; Hodlerstrasse 8-12; adult/student Sfr7/5, special exhibitions Sfr8-18; ☎ 10am-9pm Tue, 10am-5pm Wed-Sun), including works by Italian artist Fra Angelico, Swiss artist Ferdinand Hodler, as well as pieces by Picasso and Dalí. Keep an eye out for interesting special exhibits.

ACTIVITIES

In summer the open-air **Marzili pools** (www.aaremarzili.ch; admission free; ☎ May-Sep), beside the **Aare River**, are the perfect place to get a tan; there's even a topless bathing area. If you're a strong swimmer take a dip in the river itself. The pools are a good starting point for a fast float downstream – beware the current can be very swift.

Red-signed bicycle routes run parallel to the river and the city provides free loans of bikes, via the scheme **Bern Rollt** (☎ 079 277 28 57; www.bernrollt.ch; ☎ 7.30am-9.30pm May-Oct), which has huts at Bahnhofplatz and the western end of Zeughausgasse. Identification and a refundable Sfr20 are required as a deposit.

SLEEPING Budget

Camping Eichholz (☎ 031 961 26 02; www.campingei.cholz.ch; Strandweg 49; camp sites per site/person/car Sfr9/7.50/3.50, bungalows per person from Sfr18; ☎ May-Sep; ☎) The best place to camp near Bern, sites are comfortable (not too rocky) and nestled by the river. It's about a half-hour walk from the centre (or take tram 9 to Wabern). The bungalows are basic, but a great get-back-to-nature choice regardless of your budget.

SYHA hostel (☎ 031 311 63 16; www.youthhostel.ch/bern; Weihergasse 4; dm Sfr35; ☎ reception 7-10am & 3-10pm, 5-10pm Dec-Feb) Removed from ambient city noise, this hostel sits pretty by the river. It is large and friendly, although the building is not particularly new.

Hotel Glocke Backpackers Bern (☎ 031 311 37 71; www.bernbackpackers.com; Rathausgasse 75; dm Sfr36, s/d with shared bathroom Sfr70/125; ☎ ☎ ☎) Backpackers usually head here first. It has a great lounge that's cosy and very sociable (think comfy couches and a big TV playing nightly movies). The simple dorms and rooms have firm mattresses, fluffy duvets and sinks. Self-caterers will appreciate the kitchen. The bar downstairs is another plus.

Marthahaus Garni (☎ 031 332 41 35; www.marthahaus.ch; Wyttenbachstrasse 22a; dm Sfr39, s/d/tr Sfr110/125/155, s/d with shared bathroom Sfr65/95; ☎ ☎) In a residential location, this five-storey building has the feel of a friendly boarding house. Clean, simple rooms have lots of white and a smattering of modern art, plus there's a communal kitchen and TV lounge. Take tram 9 to Viktoriaplatz.

Midrange & Top End

Hotel National (☎ 031 381 19 88; www.national.bern.ch; Hirschengraben 24; s/d/f Sfr85/130/180, s/d with shared bathroom from Sfr55/100; ☎ ☎) With its wrought-iron lift, springs of lavender and Persian rugs over newly surfaced (but still creaky) wooden floors, the charming National wouldn't feel out of place in Paris. Rooms are impeccable and personable; free Internet access is a plus.

Hotel Arabelle (☎ 031 301 03 05; www.arabelle.ch; Mittelstrasse 6; s/d from Sfr120/135; ☎ ☎) Rooms are small, but bright colour schemes and parquet floors lend enough character to make you forget their diminished stature. Take bus 12 to Mittelstrasse.

Hotel Kreuz (☎ 031 329 95 95; www.hotelkrenz-bern.ch in German; Zeughausgasse 26; s/d from Sfr120/170) This very modern hotel has smart rooms with all the creature comforts, a tiny bar with unique metal and stained-glass light fixtures and a restaurant serving Swiss-German fare (mains Sfr15 to Sfr30).

Hotel Belle Epoque (☎ 031 311 43 36; www.belle-epoque.ch; Gerechtigkeitsgasse 18; s/d from Sfr195/280; ☎ ☎) Standards are very high at this lovely and romantic old-town hotel with opulent Art Deco furnishings. Check out the TV tucked into steamer-trunk-style cupboard.

Hotel Allegro (☎ 031 339 55 00; www.allegro-hotel.ch; Kornhausstrasse 3; s/d from Sfr220/260; ☎ ☎ ☎) Décor ranges from sleek 'Asiatic' to brassy 'Broadway' and there's even a Paul Klee-themed suite at this unpretentious hotel. It's in a great location, just above old town, with fabulous views from its front rooms.

Bellevue Palace (☎ 031 320 45 45; www.bellevue-palace.ch; Kochergasse 3-5; s/d Sat & Sun from Sfr260/350, Mon-Fri Sfr350/460; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Bern's only five-star hotel is the first choice address for Bern's power brokers and international statesmen such as Nelson Mandela.

EATING

Wall-to-wall cafés and restaurants line the popular meeting places of Bärenplatz and Theaterplatz, as well as the more upmarket Gerechtigkeitsgasse. The restaurants listed here do not close between meals.

Restaurants

Le Mazot (☎ 031 311 70 88; Bärenplatz 5; mains Sfr11-30) Very cosy with dark wood panels, this place is a well-known specialist in Swiss food. There is a massive *rösti*, *raclette* and fondue menu. For those with small stomachs, half-portions are available. Sit outside in the glassed-in patio on warm days.

Il Grissino (☎ 031 311 00 59; Waisenhausplatz 28; mains Sfr12-25) With 'bump knees with your neighbour'-style seating (claustrophobics beware), this oft-packed pizza and pasta joint emits a boisterous vibe. Choose from more than 30 different pizzas; the large is big enough for two (unless you're super hungry).

Altes Tramdepot (☎ 031 368 14 15; Am Bärengraben; mains Sfr15-25) Locals don't let the touristy bear pit location keep them away and neither should you. This cavernous brewery

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Landhaus (☎ 031 331 41 66; www.landhausbern.ch; Altenbergstrasse 4; dm Sfr30, d/f from Sfr140/180, with shared bathroom from Sfr110; ☎ ☎ ☎) The dorms are stall-like and rather unappealing, but if you'd like the perks of staying in a classy hotel without the price, they're bearable. If you've got more dough, this historic hotel is fantastic. It has a stripped-back modern interior, with spiral wooden stairs and spacious individually renovated rooms. There's a relaxed, friendly atmosphere and a guest kitchen. The slick downstairs restaurant/bar (live jazz on Thursday evenings) adds lively ambience.

is a Bern favourite, serving Swiss specialties along with a variety of international dishes. The atmosphere is as inviting as the cuisine.

Cesary (☎ 031 318 93 83; Kornhausplatz 11; mains Sfr15-30) New and trendy, this super-swank Italian restaurant and lounge attracts a well-dressed crowd. After work it's all about the suits and ties, but when dark descends so do the little black dresses and Gucci purses. Stop by for an aperitif and people watching from the comfort of a suave white leather stool.

Du Nord (☎ 031 332 23 38; Lorrainestrasse 2; mains Sfr17-35) A trendy and alternative crowd flocks to this laid-back, gay-friendly restaurant in the Lorraine quarter for well-prepared, modern international cuisine, drinks at the bar and occasional gigs.

Lorenzini (☎ 031 310 50 67; Hotelgasse 10; mains Sfr20-55) A bit of a Bern institution, the Lorenzini complex of wine bars and an Italian restaurant is popular with young professionals looking for coffee and salad or a full meal of homemade pasta. The patio is perfect for people watching.

Della Casa (☎ 031 311 21 42; Schaufplatzgasse 16; mains Sfr28-40; ☎ 8am-11.30pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat) One of the best, albeit meat-obsessed, places in town, it is an old, cosy eatery with floral curtains, leadlight lamps and traditional Swiss specialties.

Kornhauskeller (☎ 031 327 72 72; Kornhausplatz 18; mains from Sfr32) Dine under tall vaulted arches covered in frescos in the stunning subterranean restaurant or sip cocktails with Bern's beautiful people in the bar on

the mezzanine level – make sure to check out the historic stained-glass windows.

Quick Eats & Self-Catering

Markthalle (Bubenberplatz 9; meals Sfr5-8) Slurp down pizza, kebabs and spaghetti standing at a Formica table or perched on bar stools in this buzzing central arcade filled with all sorts of cheap eateries.

Sous le Pont (☎ 031 306 69 55; Schützenmatte; snacks & light meals Sfr5-15; ☎ 11.30am-2pm & 6pm-midnight Tue-Fri; 6pm-2am Sat) Organic meat and lots of vegetarian options are offered in the semichaotic surrounds of Reitschule. Every Wednesday, there's a speciality evening showcasing a different cuisine.

Self-caterers can buy up big at **Coop** (Neuen-gasse; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) and **Migros** (Markt-gasse 46; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat), which also have cheap self-service restaurants (Sfr3 to Sfr7).

DRINKING

See the *Bern Guide* available from the tourist office, for details on Bern nightlife.

Du Theatre (☎ 031 311 17 71; Hotelgasse 10) Part of the upmarket Lorenzini complex, this chic lounge bar has a cool 30-something crowd parked on its plump 1970s leather sofas.

Quasimodo (☎ 031 311 13 81; Rathausgasse 75) Backpackers staying at the Hotel Glocke will like the convenience of this techno bar-club downstairs. Arrive after 10pm and you'll find the small dance floor packed with swaying, sweaty revellers from all parts of the globe, including Switzerland.

Wasserwerk (☎ 031 312 12 31; www.wasserwerk.club.ch; Wasserwerk-gasse 5) The main techno venue in town, this has a bar, club and sometimes live music. It boasts that both Moby and the Prodigy played here in their heyday.

ENTERTAINMENT

Gaskessel (☎ 031 372 49 00; www.gaskessel.ch; Sandrainstrasse 25) Inside this graffiti-covered domed building in Marzili is a countercultural centre, with lots of trance, rap and some popular gay evenings.

Dampfzentrale (☎ 031 311 63 37; www.dampfzentrale.ch; Marzilistrasse 47) This refined performing arts centre combines jazz, funk and soul music gigs with avant-garde art exhibitions and dance. It's in a pleasant riverside spot and serves a brilliant Sunday brunch.

Reitschule (☎ 031 306 69 52; www.reitschule.ch; Schützenmatte) While determinedly cleaning up its act and trying to keep the drugs out, this infamous – and ramshackle – centre for alternative arts, music and theatre still retains a bit of its old charisma, attracting local slackers, students and curious tourists.

Sports

Bern's new 32,000-seat **Stade de Suisse** (www.stadedesuisse.ch) was built over the demolished former Wankdorf Stadium. It will be one of the four Swiss venues when Austria and Switzerland co-host football's Euro 2008 championship.

SHOPPING

From luxury boutiques to family-run tobacco stores selling Cuban cigars and creative flasks, Bern has its shopping bases covered. There are loads of stores in old town – check out the area around Kornhausplatz as well as Markt-gasse and Spieg-gasse. Some of the most unique boutiques (for men and women) are hidden in underground cellars, so be sure to wander down at least a few flights of stairs.

Fizzen (☎ 031 311 1116; Bollwerk 17) For decent second-hand garb (along with loads of crazy coloured condoms) visit this locally recommended place.

There is an open-air market on Bärenplatz each Tuesday and Saturday (daily in summer). On the first Saturday of the month there is a craft market in front of the cathedral.

If truly local souvenirs interest you, grab a Toblerone chocolate – it's made in Bern.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are daily flights to Lugano, London, Paris, Amsterdam and other European destinations from Bern-Belp airport. Postbuses depart from the western side of the train station.

Three motorways intersect in the northern part of the city. The N1 runs from Neuchâtel in the west and Basel and Zürich in the northeast. The N6 connects Bern with Thun and the Interlaken region in the southeast. The N12 is the route from Geneva and Lausanne in the southwest.

Trains connect to most Swiss towns, including Basel (Sfr36, 70 minutes, hourly),

Geneva (Sfr49, 1¼ hours, hourly), Interlaken (Sfr25, 50 minutes, hourly) and Zürich (Sfr47, 70 minutes, hourly).

GETTING AROUND

Bern-Belp airport (BRN; ☎ 031 960 21 11; www.alpar.ch) is 9km southeast of the city centre. A frequent bus links the airport to the train station (Sfr15, 20 minutes).

Bus and tram tickets cost Sfr1.90 (maximum six stops) or Sfr2.80. A city day pass and regional network is Sfr12. If you're planning on clubbing, **Moonliner** (www.moonliner.ch) night buses depart Friday and Saturday nights from Bahnhofplatz at 12.45am, 2am and 3.15am; passes aren't valid and fares start at Sfr5. Tickets can be purchased at all bus stops.

Many taxis wait by the train station. They charge Sfr6.50 plus Sfr3.10 per kilometre (Sfr4 after 8pm and on Sunday).

From May to October there are free loans of city bikes outside the train station. Bring ID and a Sfr20 deposit.

FRIBOURG, NEUCHÂTEL & THE JURA

From the evocative medieval cantonal capitals of Fribourg and Neuchâtel to the mysterious green hills and deep dark forests of the Jura, the country's northwest corner proffers a wealth of sights and escapes well off the beaten track, yet is still an easy day trip from Bern. Be it marvelling at majestic ice creations or following the call of the devilish green fairy into the wayward Val de Travers, travelling here promises a brilliant sensory experience.

NEUCHÂTEL

pop 31,004

Spend an afternoon cruising Neuchâtel's open-air cafés, walking along its glittering lake and feasting your eyes on the charming sandstone elegance of its old town and your stress will melt away. The canton's compact capital is really just a laid-back French-style resort surrounded by vineyards. If you're looking to do a little shopping, the central pedestrian zone is packed with all sorts of souvenir shops and funky, reasonably priced boutiques. The pedestrian zone and

Place Pury (the local bus hub) are about 1km from the train station; walk down the hill along Ave de la Gare.

The **tourist office** (☎ 032 889 68 90; www.ne.ch/tourism; Place du Port; ☎ 9am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat Sep-Jun, to 7pm Mon-Sat, 4-7pm Sun Jul & Aug) is in the main post office by the lake.

Sights & Activities

The 12th-century **Chateau de Neuchâtel** (☎ 032 889 60 00; 45min tours free; ☎ 10am-4pm Apr-Sep) and the adjoining **Collegiate Churches** are the centrepieces of old town. The striking cenotaph of 15 statues dates from 1372. Nearby, the **prison tower** (☎ 032 717 76 02; Rue J de Hochberg 5; admission Sfr1; ☎ 8am-6pm Apr-Aug) offers broad views of the town and lake.

Visit the **Musée d'Art et d'Histoire** (Museum of Art & History; ☎ 032 717 79 20; Esplanade Léopold-Robert 1; adult/student Sfr9/6, free Wed; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), on the waterfront, to see 18th-century beloved clockwork figures.

Sleeping

Oasis Neuchâtel (☎ 032 731 31 90; auberge.oasis@bluewin.ch; Rue du Suchiez 35; dm/d Sfr24/60; ☎ Apr-Oct) Glorious views and friendly accommodation are this independent hostel's trademarks. It's about 2km from the centre; take bus 1 (Cormondèche) to Vauseyon and follow the signs towards Centre Sportive.

Hôtel de l'Ecluse (☎ 032 729 93 10; www.hotel.delecluse.ch; Rue de l'Ecluse 24; s/d from Sfr100/150; ☎ ☎) Elegant rooms in this fine house sport brass beds and kitchenettes. Breakfast is served in the bar and there are a couple of terraces for guests to lounge on.

Hôtel Alpes et Lac (☎ 032 723 19 19; www.alpesetlac.ch; Place de la Gare 2; s/d from Sfr125/180; ☎ ☎ ☎) A stately 19th-century hotel across from the train station. Digs are comfortable enough to chill in and offer mod cons such as wi-fi (Sfr5/11 per 30 minutes/24 hours). There are two restaurants (one Swiss, one Chinese).

Eating

Local specialities include fresh trout, tripe and *tome neuchâteloise chaude*, a baked cheese starter.

La Creperie (☎ 032 725 17 71; Rue de Hôpital 7; crepes from Sfr6.50) Tables are practically piled on top of each other at this cluttered little spot in the heart of town. It's nearly always

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. (However, 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 preprohibition 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 root of absinthe's devilish nature). But in March 2005, Switzerland lifted its absinthe ban and 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. When we got a group of friends together back home to sample the stuff, reports of trails and light and floaty feelings started coming in after the first glass.

full. There are dozens upon dozens of sweet and savoury crepes, including one with absinthe. The coffee is strong and as French as the ambience.

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

Appareils de Chauffage (☎ 032 721 43 96; Rue des Moulins 37; mains from Sfr15) Grab a board game from the bar and settle in for a few hours at this funky café serving quality coffee and a range of spirits and beer. There are Swiss and international dishes on the menu.

Café des Halles (☎ 032 724 31 41; Rue du Trésor 4; pizzas Sfr 20, mains Sfr35) In an impressive historic house dating back to 1569, this place is the gourmet's central choice. The cooking is mainly French, but also includes scrumptious pizzas and pastas. Dine outside on the large shaded terrace overlooking the main square. The set three-course dinners for Sfr45 are good value.

Coop (Rue de la Treille 4) Self-caterers can stock up on local wine, cheeses and absinthe at this branch of the Coop chain.

Entertainment

La Case à Chocs (☎ 032 721 20 56; www.case-a-chocs.ch; Quai Philippe Godet 16; concerts Sfr10-15; ☎ Thu-Sun) An alternative venue in a converted brew-

ery with live music, occasional cinema and art shows. Check the website for details.

Getting There & Around

There are fast trains to Geneva (Sfr42, 70 minutes, hourly) and Bern (Sfr19, 35 minutes, hourly). Postbuses heading to the Jura leave from the station.

Local buses cost Sfr1.80 to Sfr2.80 per trip.

VAL DE TRAVERS

Hikers come to Val de Travers to marvel at the enormous **Creux du Van** abyss. This spectacular crescent-moon wall, a product of glacial erosion, interrupts the habitually green rolling countryside in startling fashion – it is just 1km long, but plunges 440m to the bottom (the first 200m is a sheer stony drop). The Creux is most easily reached on foot from Noiraigue, which can be reached by hourly train from Neuchâtel (Sfr6.60, 20 minutes). The round-trip hike can take up to five hours depending on the route.

If you're in search of the truth about absinthe, visit the distillery in **Môtiers** (see the boxed text, above). Trains run from Neuchâtel (Sfr10.40, 35 minutes).

FRIBOURG

pop 32,553

Medieval Fribourg (dating back to the 12th century) boasts the usual cathedrals and art museums, but for something different focus on the beer.

With two great breweries in town you can't go wrong. Head to **Brasserie du Cardinal** (☎ 058 123 16; www.cardinal.ch; Passage du Cardinal; tours Sfr10; ☎ 8.30-10am & 1.30-3pm Mon-Thu) to sample one of Switzerland's best-known lagers, brewed here since 1788. Tours demonstrate how water, malt and hops are turned into nine different types of Cardinal beer.

Small-time microbrewery **Brasserie Artisanale de Fribourg** (☎ 026 322 80 88; Rue de la Samaritaine 19; ☎ 8am-5pm Sat) is 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 produces just 50 hectolitres a year. Pay Sfr4 for a bottle of its golden German-style Barbeblanche or Barberousse with subtle caramel and honey aromas.

Imaginative and luxurious **Auberge aux 4 Vents** (☎ 026 347 36 00; www.aux4vents.ch; Res Balzi Grandfrey 124; s/d Sfr120/170, s/d/tr/q with shared bathroom from Sfr50/100/140/160; ☎ ☎), just outside the city limits, is our sleeping pick. The eight rooms are individually designed. We especially liked room 'bleue', featuring dreamy blue flowery period furnishings and a tub on rails that rolls out through the window for a bath beneath stars. The highly recommended conservatory-style restaurant overlooks a stunning medieval Fribourg panorama. To get to the '4 Winds', 2km north in Grandfrey, drive north along Rue de Morat and turn right immediately before the train bridge.

Fribourg is easily accessible by train from Bern (Sfr14, 30 minutes, hourly).

GRUYÈRES

Known above all for the cheese by the same name, beautiful **Gruyères** attracts busloads of tourists who gawk at the fine 15th- to 17th-century homes and the 13th-century fairytale castle on the hill. We'd suggest you follow their example.

The secret behind gruyère cheese is revealed at the **Maison du Gruyère** (☎ 026 921 84 00; www.lamaisondugruyere.ch; adult/student/child Sfr5/4/2; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, to 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.

Cheese is produced in a couple of traditional mountain chalets along the **Sentier des Fromageries**, a trail leading through

green Gruyère pastures. Ask at the Maison du Gruyère for the brochure outlining the two-hour walk (about 8km).

The **Musée HR Giger** (☎ 026 921 22 00; adult/child Sfr10/5; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar), housed in a 16th-century mansion, is a shrine to HR Giger's expansive imagination – fans of the *Alien* movies will especially relish the place – along with all things occult and bizarre. Be sure to check out the very Giger-style bar across the road afterwards.

A restored 19th-century manor, **Le Pâquier** (☎ 026 912 20 25; www.lepâquier.ch; Rue de la Gare 10, Le Pâquier; s/d/tr Sfr60/90/120; ☎ ☎), 3.5km northwest of Gruyères, is a good sleeping bet.

The cosy, cowbell-strewn **Chalet de Gruyères** (☎ 026 921 21 54; www.chalet-gruyeres.ch; Rue du Château 53; fondues & raclettes Sfr28) serves a great *croûte en fromage* (hot, open-faced cheese sandwich); meringues come with the thickest gruyère double cream ever.

There are trains from Fribourg (Sfr16.80, 40 minutes, hourly). The town is a 10-minute walk uphill from its station.

JURA CANTON

Its grandest towns are little more than enchanting villages and this northwestern corner of the country remains undiscovered. Deep, mysterious forests and impossible green clearings succeed one another across the low mountains of the Jura and some 1200km of marked paths across the canton give hikers plenty of scope.

The capital is Delémont, but there is little reason to linger. Instead, head west to the delightful medieval village of **St Ursanne** instead. Along with a 12th-century Gothic church, there are clusters of ancient houses, a 16th-century town gate and lovely stone bridge. The town is on the Doubs River's banks and kayaking is popular in summer. **Le Clip** (☎ 032 461 37 22; Place du Mai 1, St Ursanne; trips Sfr45) runs exciting half-day trips.

Hôtel Demi-Lune (☎ 032 461 35 31; www.hotels-suisse.ch/demi-lune in French; Rue Basse 2, St Ursanne; s/d from Sfr75/125) has classy rooms overlooking the river.

Trout is the local speciality and you can get a good version at **La Cicogne** (☎ 032 461 35 45; St Ursanne; mains from Sfr20), an unpretentious spot opposite the church.

From Delémont there are trains to St Ursanne (Sfr6.60, 17 minutes, hourly).

GENEVA

pop 179,426

If one city on the planet could truly say it fits the whole world on its hand, surely it would be Geneva (Genève in French, Genf in German). Strung along the sparkling shores of Europe's largest Alpine lake, this is about as international as it gets. Its people chatter in every language under the sun (in fact almost 40% of them are not Swiss) and this cosmopolitan city of bankers, diplomats and transients likes to boast that 'it belongs not so much to Switzerland as to the world'. This rings pretty true: the UN, WHO, International Red Cross, International Labour Organisation...you name them, they're in Geneva. In fact, the place is home to some 200-odd top-dog governmental and nongovernmental international organisations.

ORIENTATION

The Rhône River runs through Geneva, dividing it into *rive droite* (right bank) and *rive gauche* (left bank). On the northern side is the main train station, Gare de Cornavin; south of the river lies the old town. In summer, Geneva's most visible landmark is the Jet d'Eau, a giant fountain on the southern shore.

INFORMATION

Emergency

Police Station (☎ 117; Rue de Berne 6)

Internet Access

For a list of free-access public wi-fi terminals in Geneva, see www.espritdegeneve.ch.
Internet Café de la Gare (☎ 022 731 51 87; per 10/30mins Sfr2/4, per hr Sfr6; ☎ 8.30am-10pm Mon-Thu, 9.30am-11pm Fri & Sat, 9.30am-10pm Sun) In the train station, on the Place de Montbrillant side.

Internet Resources

City of Geneva (www.ville-ge.ch)

International Geneva Welcome Centre (www.cagi.ch)

Medical Services

Cantonal hospital (☎ 022 372 33 11; Rue Micheli-du-Crest 24)

Permanence Médico Chirurgicale (☎ 022 731 21 20; Rue de Chantepoulet 1-3) A private 24-hour clinic.

Servette Clinique (☎ 022 733 98 00; Ave Wendt 60) Emergency dental treatment.

Telephone advice service (☎ 111) For medical information.

Post

Main post office (Rue du Mont-Blanc 18; ☎ 7.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat)

Tourist Information

Genève tourist office (☎ 022 909 70 00; www.genève-tourisme.ch; Rue du Mont-Blanc 18; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon, 9am-6pm Tue-Sat)

Travel Agencies

American Express (Amex; ☎ 022 731 76 00; Rue du Mont-Blanc 7; ☎ 8.30am-5.45pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat)

STA Travel (☎ 022 329 97 33; Rue Vignier Leschol 3; ☎ 9.15am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

City Centre

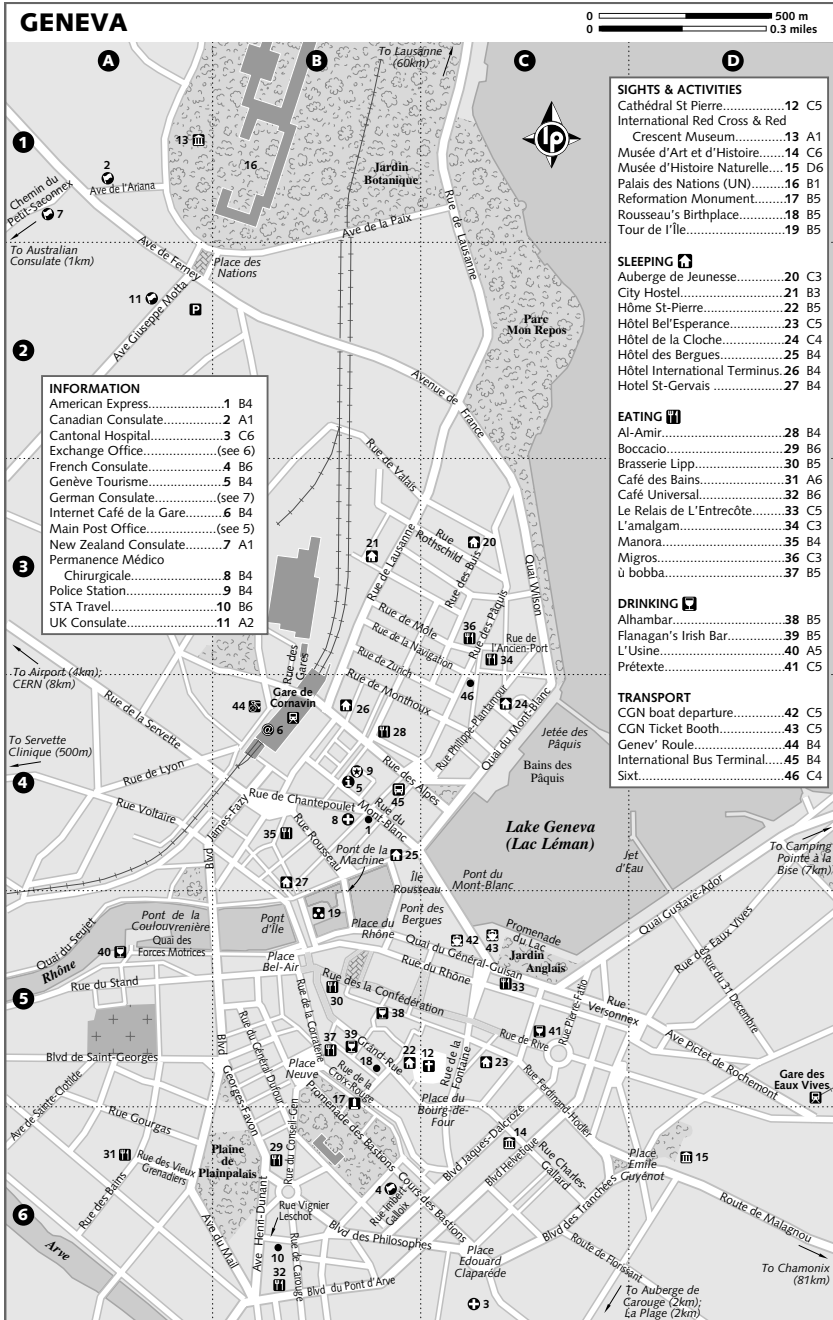
The city centre is so compact it's easy to see many of the main sights on foot. Start a scenic walk through the old town at the **Île Rousseau**, home to a statue in honour of the celebrated freethinker. Head west along the southern side of the Rhône until you reach the 13th-century **Tour de L'Île**, once part of the medieval city fortifications. Then walk south down the narrow, cobbled Rue de la Cité until it becomes Grand-Rue. **Rousseau's birthplace** is at No 40.

A short detour off Grand-Rue leads you to the part-Romanesque, part-Gothic **Cathédrale St Pierre**, where John Calvin preached from 1536 to 1564. The cathedral rests on a significant **archaeological site** (☎ 022 311 75 74; Cour de St Pierre 6; adult/student Sfr5/3; ☎ 10-11.30am & 2-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, noon-5pm Sun). A visit reveals some fine 4th-century mosaics and a 5th-century baptismal font.

You'll find the **Jet d'Eau** on the lake's southern shore. Calling this a fountain is an understatement. The water shoots up with incredible force (200km/h, 1360HP), to create a 140m-high plume. At any one time there are seven tonnes of water in the air, and much of it falls on spectators who venture out on the pier.

United Nations

The Art Deco **Palais des Nations** (☎ 022 907 48 96; Ave de la Paix 9-14; tours adult/student Sfr8.50/6.50;



☞ 9am–6pm daily Jul–Aug, 10am–noon & 2–4pm daily Apr–Jun & Sep–Oct, 10am–noon & 2–4pm Mon–Fri Nov–Mar) is the European arm of the UN and the home of 3000 international civil servants. You can see where decisions about world affairs are made on the hour-long tour (bring your passport to get in). Afterwards check out the extensive gardens – don't miss the towering grey monument coated with heat-resistant titanium donated by the USSR to commemorate the conquest of space.

Museums

There are plenty of museums (many free) to keep you busy on a rainy day. The **International Red Cross & Red Crescent Museum** (☎ 022 748 95 25; Ave de la Paix 17; admission free; ☞ 10am–5pm Wed–Mon) is a compelling multimedia trawl through atrocities perpetuated by humanity in recent history. Against the long litany of war and nastiness, documented in films, photos, sculptures and soundtracks, are set the noble aims of the organisation.

Musée d'Art et d'Histoire (☎ 022 418 26 00; Rue Charles-Galland 2; admission free; ☞ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun) has a vast collection of paintings, sculptures, weapons and archaeological displays. **Musée d'Histoire Naturelle** (Museum of Natural History; ☎ 022 418 63 00; Rte de Malagnou 1; admission free; ☞ 9.30am–5pm Tue–Sun) is the place to check out every species of tiger known to man, stuffed for perpetuity. It's a good place to bring the kids.

Parks & Gardens

Geneva has more parkland than any other Swiss city, much of it along the lakefront. In the north of the city is the impressive **Jardin Botanique** (Botanic Gardens; admission free; ☞ 8am–7.30pm Apr–Oct, 9.30am–5pm Nov–Mar) with exotic plants and an aviary.

South of Grand-Rue is **Promenade des Bastions**, containing a massive monument to the Reformation: the giant figures of Bèze, Calvin, Farel and Knox are flanked by smaller statues of other important figures and depictions of events instrumental in the spread of the movement.

CERN

Eight kilometres west of the centre, **CERN** (European Centre for Nuclear Research; ☎ 022 767 84 84; www.cern.ch; Rte de Meyrin; admission free; ☞ 9am–5.30pm Mon–Sat), is a laboratory for research into particle physics funded by 20 nations.

The lab routinely spins out new creations – including the World Wide Web. Its educational Microcosm exhibition covers particle accelerators and the Big Bang; enthusiasts can take a guided tour at 9am or 2pm (take your passport and book ahead). Take bus 9.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Geneva Festival**, a 10-day event in early August, features parades, fireworks and live music, most of it along the lake. On 11 December, **L'Escalade** celebrates the foiling of an invasion by the Duke of Savoy in 1602 with a costumed parade and day of races around the old town.

SLEEPING Budget

Pick up the annual *Info-Jeunes Genève* guide at the tourist office for a complete list of hostels.

Hôte St-Pierre (☎ 022 310 37 07; www.hotelstpierre.ch; Cour St-Pierre 4; dm Sfr27, s/d with shared bathroom Sfr40/60; ☞) It's women only at this hostel founded by the German Lutheran Church in 1874. The place sees a lot of returning guests – little wonder considering its amazing views from the rooftop terrace and cosy home-away-from-home persona.

City Hostel (☎ 022 901 15 00; www.cityhostel.ch; Rue de Ferrier 2; 3- or 4-bed dm Sfr31, 2-bed dm Sfr35, s/d Sfr58/85; ☞ ☒ ☞) This organised hostel is spanking clean and its two-bed dorms give travellers a chance to double up on the cheap. Facilities include kitchen, laundry and TV room.

Also recommended:

Camping Pointe à la Bise (☎ 022 752 12 96; Chemin de la Bise 19; camp sites per adult/ten/car Sfr 7.50/7/6.50; ☞ Apr–Oct) Camping spots in an appealing lakeshore location. Take bus E to get there.

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 022 732 62 60; www.yh-geneva.ch; Rue Rothschild 28–30; dm Sfr26, d from Sfr75; ☞ reception 6.30–10am & 2pm–1am Jun–Sep, 6.30–10am & 4pm–midnight Oct–May; ☞)

Midrange & Top End

Hotel St-Gervais (☎ 022 732 45 72; www.stgervais-geneva.ch; Rue des Corps-Saint 20; r Sfr115, with shared bathroom Sfr85) Just like an old-fashioned auberge, rooms tout tartan carpets, wood furnishings and crisp white linen at this delightful hotel near the train station. There's

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hôtel de la Cloche (☎ 022 732 94 81; hotelcloche@freesurf.ch; Rue de la Cloche 6; s/d from Sfr50/85; ☞) Hôtel de la Cloche – an old-fashioned hotel in a bourgeois home – is a dying breed. And more is the pity. Monsieur Chabbey runs this small, one-star hotel with grace and panache, opening the door as a butler welcoming one home. Likewise, it is Monsieur Chabbey who delivers breakfast to each room from 8am every morning (each of the eight rooms have a table and chairs), sorts out the bill and so on. Elegant fireplaces, period furnishings, wooden floors and the odd chandelier add a touch of grandeur. Some rooms with wrought-iron balconies face the Jet d'Eau.

wi-fi available and it's stumbling distance from the train station.

Hôtel International Terminus (☎ 022 906 97 77; www.international-terminus.ch; Rue des Alpes 20; s/d/tr from Sfr120/160/180; ☞ ☒ ☞) This three-star hotel has absurdly low rates for Geneva, making it one of the best-value places near the train station (in winter a double room can go for even less). Rooms are well appointed, some come with swanky red carpets, and all come with cable TV.

Hôtel Bel'Espérance (☎ 022 818 37 37; www.hotel-bel-espérance.ch; Rue de la Vallée 1; s/d from Sfr120/160; ☞) This hotel is small, simple and slightly worn, but rooms are quiet and clean, there's a shared kitchen and the place is just a few minutes' walk from the old town. The flower-filled rooftop terrace, with table and chairs for lounging, is a delight when it's warm and sunny.

Auberge de Carouge (☎ 022 342 22 88; Rue Ancienne 39; s/d/tr/q Sfr130/180/210/250; ☞) With its tree-shaded garden and the artsy scene of Théâtre de Carouge around the corner, this hotel oozes old-world appeal. Its room count is just a couple over a dozen, so get in quick.

Hôtel des Bergues (☎ 022 908 70 00; www.hotel-desbergues.com; Quai des Bergues 33; s/d from Sfr600/730; ☞ ☒) Even the most basic rooms at this national monument drip marble and are decorated with copies of works by Claude Monet. The Suite Royal (a serious steal at just Sfr6600 per night!) is a sight to behold – a 134-sq-metre apartment with Jacuzzi,

DVD, private terraces, dressing room, dining room and, just in case, bullet-proof windows.

EATING

Geneva is the cuisine capital of Switzerland, with a wide range of choices.

Restaurants

In the old town, terrace cafés and restaurants crowd along the medieval Place du Bourg-ded-Four.

Boccaccio (☎ 022 329 45 22; blvd Georges-Favon 45; mains Sfr14–25) This popular Geneva restaurant is done up like an Italian village with murals on the walls. A business crowd packs the place at lunch. The menu focuses on pizza, pasta and salads. Sit outside during summer.

L'amalgam (Rue de L'Ancien-Port 13; mains Sfr15–20) Locals flock to this locals'-favourite café for its rotating menu of simple food; decorations include African art, palms and ochre tones. The mood is decidedly mellow. It's a tiny joint with no phone.

Café Universel (☎ 022 781 18 81; blvd du Pont d'Arve 26; mains Sfr15–30) With heavy chandeliers, monster mirrors and 1920s posters, this place is chic and French. It draws an arty crowd into its tightly packed interior.

ù bobba (☎ 022 310 53 40; Rue de la Corratierie 21; mains Sfr15–42) A cultured crowd gathers at this dining spot, decked in red and gold and oozing attitude. Particularly hot is its u jardinù bobba, one of Geneva's best roof terraces. Inventive mains range from veal medallions with pistachio nuts (Sfr42) to Gorgonzola-dunked gnocchi (Sfr25).

Café des Bains (☎ 022 321 57 98; www.cafedesbains.com; Rue des Bains 26; mains Sfr20–40) Beautiful objects and an eye for design are trademarks of this fusion restaurant where Genevan beauties flock. The king prawns pan-fried with green pepper, sweet Thai basil and mango and served with a mint and apricot moussé certainly won our hearts. Veggie options are plentiful and excellent.

Le Relais de L'Entrecôte (☎ 022 310 60 04; Rue du Rhône 49; starters/mains Sfr10/25) If entrecôte and fries (some say the best steak and chips in Geneva) are your cup of tea then this busy bistro wedged between designer shops is for you. Try to snag the table with lake view.

Brasserie Lipp (☎ 022 311 10 11; Rue des la Confédération 8; plat du jour Sfr20–28, mains Sfr35) Eternal

favourite with the Genevois; come for a drink and snack or full meal – everything from oysters to a perch fillet. There's an outdoor terrace in summer. It's on the 2nd floor of the shopping arcade.

Quick Eats & Self-Catering

Rue de Fribourg, Rue de Neuchâtel, Rue de Berne and the northern end of Rue des Alpes are loaded with kebab, falafel and quick-eat joints. Eat in or take away at the following places:

Migros (Rue des Pâquis; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat) Head to this supermarket to stock up on supplies. You'll also find baguettes (Sfr2) and sandwiches (Sfr4) in its self-service restaurant.

Manora (Rue de Cornavin 4; mains Sfr5-15) Rather tasty buffet food, including extensive salad and dessert bars, are served at this quick-eat Swiss chain.

Al-Amir (Rue de Berne 22; kebabs Sfr8) This hole-in-the-wall Lebanese takeaway serves the best kebab in town.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

The latest nightclubs, live-music venues and theatre events are well covered in the weekly *Genève Agenda* (free from the tourist office). Try strolling around the Quartier des Pâquis (between the train station and the lake); it's packed with pubs and bars.

La Plage (☎ 022 342 20 98; Rue Vautier 19) The Beach in Carouge is a timeless watering hole with bare wood tables, checked lino floor, green wood shutters and tables outside.

Alhambra (☎ 022 312 13 13; www.alhambra.com; Rue de la Rôtisserie 10; ☎ noon-2pm Mon, noon-2pm & 5pm-1am or 2am Tue-Fri, 5pm-2am Sat, 11am-midnight Sun) With a buzzing atmosphere, an eclectic music programme and the best Sunday brunch in town, Alhambra provides an oasis of theatricality in an otherwise staid shopping district.

Flanagan's Irish Bar (☎ 022 310 13 14; Rue du Cheval-Blanc 4) Popular with the city's English-speakers and expats, this pub keeps Guinness flowing into the wee hours.

L'Usine (☎ 022 328 08 18; Place des Volontaires 4) In a converted factory, it's something of a city party-base. The drinking is fairly cheap and the entertainment ranges from dance nights and concerts to cabaret, theatre and other nocturnal diversions.

Prétexte (☎ 022 310 14 28; Rue du Prince 9; admission Sfr10; ☎ 11pm-5am Thu-Sat) With a healthily kitsch décor, two bars and a dance floor, this opulent place is the main gay club.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Geneva airport (GVA; ☎ 022 717 71 11; www.gva.ch) is an important transport hub and has frequent connections to every major European city. **EasyJet** (code EZ; ☎ 084 888 82 22; www.easyjet.com) is a popular budget carrier with flights to many European destinations.

Next to Jardin Anglais is a ticket booth for **Compagnie Générale de Navigation** (CGN; ☎ 022 312 52 23; www.cgn.ch), which operates a May to September steamer service to all towns and major villages bordering Lake Geneva (Lac Léman), including those in France. Destinations include Lausanne (Sfr30, 3½ hours, hourly) and Montreux (Sfr42, 4½ hours, hourly). Eurail and Swiss Pass holders are valid on CGN boats or there are CGN boat day passes for Sfr55.

International buses depart from **Place Dorcière** (☎ 022 732 02 30; Place Dorcière), off Rue des Alpes. There are buses to London (Sfr145, 17 hours, twice weekly) and Barcelona (Sfr100, 10 hours, twice weekly).

An autoroute bypass skirts Geneva, with major routes intersecting southwest of the city: the N1 from Lausanne joins with the E62 to Lyon (130km) and the E25 heading southeast towards Chamonix.

Sixt (☎ 022 732 90 90; Place de la Navigation 1) generally has the best daily rates for last-minute car hire.

Trains run to most Swiss towns including Zürich (Sfr78, three hours, hourly) and Interlaken (Sfr65, three hours, hourly).

There are regular international trains to Paris (Sfr105 by TGV, 3½ hours, eight times daily), Hamburg (Sfr285, 10 hours, daily), Milan (Sfr84, four hours, daily) and Barcelona (Sfr105, nine hours, daily).

GETTING AROUND

Getting from the airport is easy with regular trains into Gare de Cornavin (Sfr2.60, six minutes). Bus No 10 (Sfr2.20) does the same 5km trip. A taxi costs Sfr25 to Sfr35.

There are free bikes available from **Genève Roule** (☎ 022 740 13 43; www.geneveroule.ch; Place de Montbrillant 17; ☎ 7.30am-9.30pm May-Oct). Bring your ID and Sfr20 for a deposit.

Buses, trams, trains and boats service the city, and ticket dispensers are found at all stops. Tickets cost Sfr1.80 (within one zone, 30 minutes) and Sfr2.20 (two zones, one hour). A day pass costs Sfr6 for the city or Sfr12 for the whole canton. Tickets and passes are also valid for CGN boats that travel along the city shoreline.

LAKE GENEVA REGION

Switzerland's Riviera lines the shores of Europe's largest lake – known to many as Lake Geneva, to Francophones as Lac Léman – and rivals its French counterpart as a magnet for the rich and famous. Amid a climate mild enough for palm trees to grow, are swanky yet charming little resort towns such as Vevey and Montreux. There's also the marvellous emerald spectacle of tightly ranked vineyards spreading in terraces up the steep hillsides.

LAUSANNE

pop 115,916

In a fabulous location overlooking Lake Geneva, Lausanne is an enchanting beauty with several distinct personalities: the former fishing village, Ouchy, with its summer beach-resort feel; Place St-François, with stylish, cobblestone shopping streets; and Flon, a warehouse district of bars, galleries and boutiques. It's also got a few amazing sights. One of the country's grandest Gothic cathedrals dominates its medieval centre.

The **tourist office** (☎ 021 613 73 21; www.lausanne-tourisme.ch; Place de la Navigation 4; ☎ 9am-6pm) is next door to the Ouchy metro station. You can buy the Lausanne Card here (Sfr15, valid two days), which allows unlimited travel anywhere in the city by bus and train.

Sights & Activities

MUSÉE DE L'ART BRUT

Perhaps the most alluring **museum** (☎ 021 647 54 35; www.artbrut.ch in French; Ave de Bergières 11; adult/student Sfr8/5; ☎ 11am-1pm & 2-6pm Tue-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat & Sun) in the country, the collection here is a fascinating amalgam of 15,000 works of art created by untrained artists – psychiatric patients, eccentrics and incarcerated criminals. The works offer a striking

variety, at times a surprising technical capacity and in some cases an inspirational world-view. Biographies and explanations are in English. The museum is about 600m northwest of the Place St Francois.

CATHEDRALE DE LAUSANNE

This glorious Gothic **cathedral** (☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-7pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, to 5.30pm Oct-Mar) is arguably the finest in Switzerland. Built in the 12th and 13th centuries, highlights include the stunningly detailed carved portal, vaulted ceilings and archways, and carefully restored stained-glass windows.

MUSÉE OLYMPIQUE

Lausanne is home to the International Olympic Committee, and sports aficionados can immerse themselves in archival footage, interactive computers and memorabilia at the information-packed **Musée Olympique** (☎ 021 621 65 11; www.olympic.org; Quai d'Ouchy 1; adult/student/child Sfr14/9/7; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Wed & Fri-Sun, 9am-8pm Thu May-Sep, closed Mon Oct-Apr).

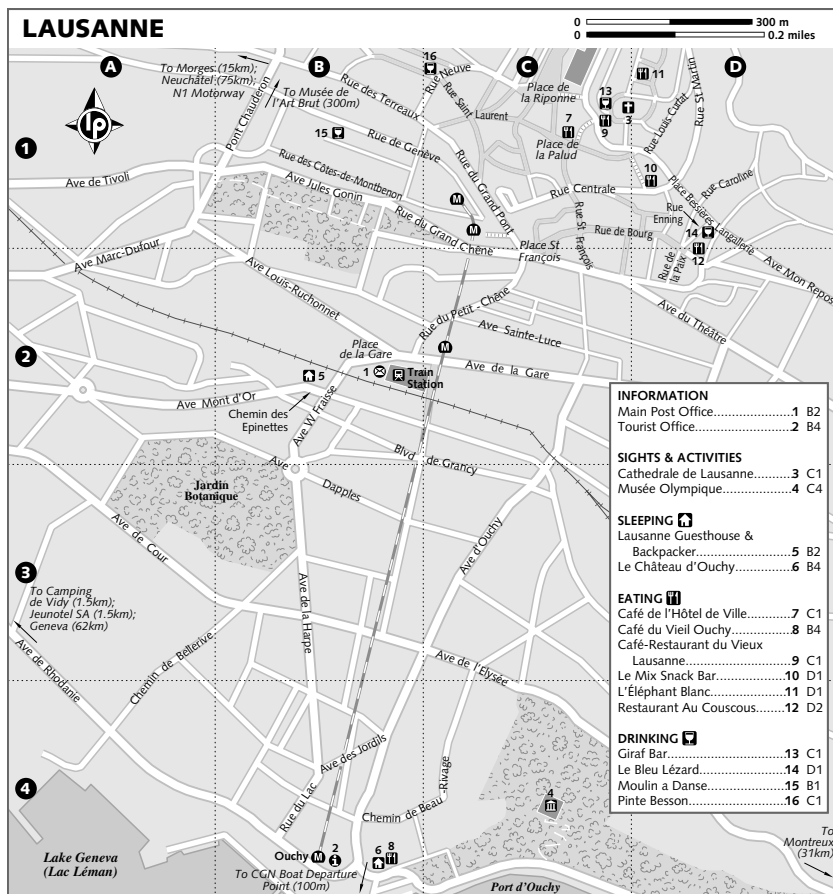
Sleeping

Camping de Vidy (☎ 021 622 50 00; www.campin.glausannevidy.ch; Chemin du Camping 3; camp sites per site/tent/car Sfr8/12/3.50) This camping ground is on the lake just to the west of the Vidy sports complex. Sites are well maintained and it's popular with families in summer. Get off bus 2 at Bois de Vaux.

Jeunotel SA (☎ 021 626 02 22; www.jeunotel.ch; Chemin du Bois-de-Vaux 36; dm Sfr30, s/d with shared bathroom Sfr60/80; ☎ bus 2) The cheaper rooms feel rather dismal with exposed block walls, but the place caters to young Swiss staying for weeks at a time and the bar can become lively at night, making it a good spot to practice another language.

Lausanne Guesthouse & Backpacker (☎ 021 601 80 00; www.lausanne-guesthouse.ch; Chemin des Epinettes 4; dm Sfr35, s/d with shared bathroom Sfr81/88; ☎ bus 2) This tastefully renovated 1894 townhouse perched high on a hill has stunning views. The garden terrace is great for summertime chilling and meeting other backpackers. The entire place is nonsmoking. Parking costs Sfr10.

Le Château d'Ouchy (☎ 021 616 74 51; www.chateaudouchy.com; Place du Port 2; s/d from Sfr125/240; ☎ bus 2) A whimsical castle (mostly built in the 19th century around the original medieval tower, complete with dungeon) with



rooms furnished in Louis XIII style but, sadly, showing signs of age.

Eating

Le Mix Snack Bar (☎ 078 808 79 68; Rue Central 29; mains from Sfr4.50) Small and smoky with cheery orange walls, this low-key place fills up at lunch when locals flock in for a sandwich, kebab, burger or coffee.

Café de l'Hôtel de Ville (☎ 021 312 10 12; Place de la Palud 10; mains from Sfr10) This café tempts you to linger over steamy cups of coffee and trashy French tabloids for hours on end. It's a favourite with students and travellers chowing on organic dishes surrounded by the buzz of animated conversation. At night come for drinks.

L'Éléphant Blanc (☎ 021 312 71 77; Rue Cité-Devant 4; mains Sfr18-25; ☹ Mon-Fri) On warm days tables spill out of the restaurant and onto the footpath in front of this tiny and popular student haunt. It's a good place to fill your stomach before boozing.

Café du Vieil Ouchy (☎ 021 616 21 94; Place du Port 3, Ouchy; mains Sfr18-37; ☹ Thu-Mon) The sunny terrace is the perfect spot for a summer meal of *rôsti* and other Swiss classics. In winter linger over a creamy fondue inside cosy timber environs.

Café-Restaurant du Vieux Lausanne (☎ 021 323 53 90; Rue Pierre Viret 6; mains from Sfr20; ☹ lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner only Sat) The French and Swiss cooking comes in generous portions at this old stalwart, although meat is the central

theme. In summer you can sit beneath the narrow pergola out the back.

Drinking & Entertainment

Lausanne is one of the country's busier cities for nightlife. Look for the free listings booklet *What's Up* in many bars.

Le Bleu Lézard (☎ 021 321 38 35; Rue Enning 10) World-music jam sessions and film nights make this cave-like basement bar a happening spot. Cure your Sunday hangover with the all-day brunch.

Pinte Besson (☎ 021 312 59 69; Rue de l'Alé 4) The city's oldest tavern has been serving local wines to Lausannois punters since 1780. The place oozes the atmosphere of another age and makes no concessions to modern modishness.

Giraf Bar (☎ 021 323 53 90; Escaliers du Marché; ☹ closed Sun & Mon) This tiny smoke-filled bar fills up on a Friday or Saturday night. The giraffe-skin motif is repeated inside on lampshades and the music can reach back to the 1980s.

Mad – Moulin à Danse (☎ 021 312 11 22; www.mad.ch in French; Rue de Genève 23; admission Thu-Sun Sfr20; ☹ Wed-Sun) A typical large club that's generally packed on weekends, it relies on music theme nights to keep things interesting. The downstairs cellar bar has free admission on Wednesday. On Sunday's the club hosts Trixx Club for gays and lesbians.

Getting There & Around

Buses service most destinations (Sfr1.80 for up to three stops, or Sfr2.80 one-hour unlimited stops in central Lausanne). The metro connects Ouchy with the train station and costs the same as the buses.

There are trains to/from Geneva (Sfr20, 50 minutes, three hourly), Bern (Sfr30, 70 minutes, one or two hourly) and Interlaken Ost (Sfr55, two hours, two hourly). For boat services see p1058.

VEVEY

pop 15,400

It's easy to see why Charlie Chaplin chose to spend the last 25 years of his life in Vevey. The swanky little place (one of Switzerland's two main Riviera resorts), with a colourful old square bumped up against the lake, is located in beautiful country. It also has a number of unique shops and lazy-day cafés. On summer Saturdays the sprawling

square turns into a bustling marketplace with traditionally dressed merchants selling local handicrafts and wines.

For sleeping try the **Riviera Lodge** (☎ 021 923 80 40; www.rivieralodge.ch; Place du Marché; dm Sfr26, d with shared bathroom Sfr80; ☹ ☹) in a hip 19th-century townhouse near the waterfront. The hostel's rooftop terrace has great views. The futuristic lounge makes a good reading nook. At the time of research guests received free bus tickets to the Château de Chillon and 50% off admission.

Le National (☎ 021 923 76 25; Rue du Torrent 9; mains Sfr10-20) is a great place to eat and drink. Chill at the cool bar with leaning glass-topped tables and stools or, for the more lounge-inclined, spots by the window. The restaurant serves a mix of international dishes.

MONTREUX

pop 22,800

In 1971 Frank Zappa was doing his thing in the Montreux casino when the building caught fire, casting a pall of smoke over Lake Geneva and inspiring the members of Deep Purple to pen their classic rock number *Smoke on the Water*.

The showpiece of the Swiss Riviera has been an inspiration to writers, artists and musicians for centuries. Famous one-time residents include Lord Byron, Ernest Hemingway and the Shelleys. It's easy to see why – Montreux not only boasts stunning Alps views and tidy rows of pastel buildings, it's also home to Switzerland's most extraordinary castle, the ever-popular Château de Chillon.

Each year the town hosts the **Montreux Jazz Festival** (☎ 021 963 82 82; www.montreuxjazz.com) in early July. It runs for two weeks. Free concerts take place every day, but count on Sfr40 to Sfr100 for one of the big gigs.

Sights

Switzerland's most popular fortress, **Château de Chillon** (☎ 021 966 89 10; www.chillon.ch; adult/student/child Sfr8.50/6.50/4; ☹ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mar & Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb) was originally constructed on the shores of Lake Geneva in the 11th century. It caught the public imagination when Lord Byron wrote *The Prisoner of Chillon* about Bonivard, a prior chained in the dungeons for almost four years in the 16th century.

You can easily spend a couple of hours touring the tower, courtyards, dungeons and staterooms containing weapons, frescoes and furniture.

The castle is a pleasant 45-minute walk along the lakefront from Montreux. Otherwise take trolley bus 1 (Sfr2.60, Veytaux stop), which passes by every 10 minutes.

Sleeping & Eating

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 021 963 49 34; Passage de l'Auberge 8, Territet; dm from Sfr32; ☹ mid-Feb–mid-Nov) This waterfront hostel has a cheery atmosphere and simple rooms. Dorms come with as few as two beds. Catch bus No 1 from the train station.

Hôtel Masson (☎ 021 966 00 44; www.hotelmasson.ch; Rue Bonivard 5; s/d Sfr150/230; ☹) In the hills just west of Montreux, this one-time vintner's mansion is on the Swiss Heritage list of the country's most beautiful hotels. The grounds are luxurious, and the place reeks of old-world European charm. A small sauna and Jacuzzi are extra perks.

La Rose des Sables (☎ 021 961 15 46; Ave des Alps; mains from Sfr3; ☹ lunch) Inexpensive sandwiches, croissants, quiches and a mouth-watering chocolate selection make this charming patisserie a lovely lunch option.

Café du Grütli (☎ 021 963 42 65; Rue du Grand Chêne 8; mains Sfr20-30; ☹ Tue-Sat) Head to this eatery, hidden away in the old part of town, for good home cooking – ranging from *rösti* with ham to hearty meat dishes and the inevitable fondue.

Getting There & Away

There are trains to Geneva (Sfr26, 70 minutes, hourly) and Lausanne (Sfr9.80, 25 minutes, three hourly). Make the scenic journey to Interlaken via the GoldenPass Panoramic, with changes at Zweisimmen and Spiez (Sfr60, three hours, daily; rail passes valid).

GRYON & LEYSIN

Leave the beaten track and soak up the Swiss Alpine experience in untouristy **Gryon** (1130m), southeast of Montreux. It's close to the ski fields of Villars, some great meadow hiking trails and home to the fantastic **Swiss Alp Retreat** (☎ 024 498 33 21; Chalet Martin; www.gryon.com; dm/d from Sfr18/52; ☹). The hostel, run by a Swiss-Australian couple, has a laid-back vibe and gets rave

reviews from travellers. It runs a number of popular excursions, including summer glacier skiing trips (Sfr125). Ask about ski-and-stay packages in winter.

To reach Gryon you will need to take a train from Lausanne to Bex (Sfr18, 40 minutes, hourly) and then the cogwheel train to the village (Sfr5.80, 30 minutes, hourly). The hostel is a five-minute walk from the train stop. Follow the signs.

Another tranquil Alpine spot, **Leysin** attracts skiers, snowboarders, hikers and meditators. In a 19th-century guesthouse the **Hiking Sheep** (☎ 024 494 35 35; www.hiking.sheep.com; dm/d with shared bathroom from Sfr27/74; ☹) is another longtime favourite with backpackers. It has breathtaking views from its balconies, a pine-forested backyard and great vibes. Don't miss the hammocks. All sorts of activities can be arranged.

Leysin is accessible by a cogwheel train from Aigle (Sfr8.40, 30 minutes, hourly); there are trains to Aigle from Lausanne (Sfr29, 30 minutes, hourly).

VALAIS

It's pretty hard not to be seduced in Matterhorn country, where endless panoramic vistas and breathtaking views win over even the toughest critics. An area of extraordinary natural beauty, the Valais boasts the 10 highest mountains in Switzerland – all over 4000m. It's also home to one of the most popular, and best, skiing and boarding destinations in Europe, Zermatt. When the snow melts and the valleys turn lush and green the opportunities for hiking are boundless.

ZERMATT

pop 5500

One word says it all: Matterhorn. Synonymous with Switzerland, the Alps' most famous peak (4478m) keeps solitary vigil over this skiing, mountaineering and hiking hotspot.

On 13 July 1865 Edward Whymper led the first successful ascent of the mountain. The climb took 32 hours but the descent was marred by tragedy when four team members crashed to their deaths in a 1200m fall down the North Wall.

Skiers and snowboarders prefer going down to climbing up. The town doubled in size during the ski boom of the 1960s and '70s. For the rich and stylish, Zermatt is a place to see (as well as ski) and be seen (skiing or otherwise).

Orientation & Information

Zermatt is small, easy to navigate and car-free. The main street is Bahnhofstrasse, but street names are rarely used.

You can go online for free (or bring your laptop for a wi-fi moment) at **Papperla Pub** (right). The **tourist office** (☎ 027 966 81 00; www.zermatt.ch; Bahnhofplatz 5; ☹ 8.30am–noon & 1.30–6pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–noon & 4–6pm Sat & Sun late Sep–mid-Jun, 8.30am–6pm Mon–Sat, 8.30am–noon & 1.30–6pm Sun mid-Jun–Sep) has all the local info.

Sights & Activities

Views from the cable cars and gondolas are pretty much uniformly breathtaking. The cogwheel train to **Gornergrat** (3090m) is one of the highlights. The mountain railway (Sfr36 one way) takes 25 to 43 minutes and there are two to three departures an hour. For the best views of the Matterhorn sit on the right-hand side. Alternatively, it takes around five hours to walk up from Zermatt to Gornergrat.

A walk in the **cemetery** is a sobering experience for any would-be mountaineer, as numerous monuments tell of untimely deaths on Monte Rosa and the Matterhorn.

Alpin Center (☎ 027 966 24 60; www.zermatt.ch/alpincenter; Bahnhofstrasse 58; ☹ 8am–noon & 2–6pm mid-Nov–Apr & Jul–Sep) contains the ski and snowboard school and the mountain-guides office (*Bergführerbüro*). For climbing the Matterhorn guides recommend previous experience, one week's preparation, and the small matter of Sfr1130 per person. Also ask here about Haute Route ski touring and heli-skiing. In the off-season you can reach them by phone only (between 9am and 11am and 2pm and 5pm Monday to Friday).

SKIING & SNOWBOARDING

Zermatt has numerous demanding slopes to test the experienced and intermediate skier in three main skiing areas: **Rothorn**, **Stockhorn** and **Matterhorn Glacier Paradise** (formerly Klein Matterhorn). In all, there are 245km of ski runs and free ski buses sim-

ply transferring between areas. February to April is peak time but in early summer the snow is still good and the lifts are less busy. Beginners have fewer options on the slopes.

The Klein Matterhorn is topped by the highest cable car station in Europe (3820m), providing access to the highest skiing on the Continent. It also has the most extensive summer skiing in Switzerland (up to 21km of runs) and is the starting point for skiing at the Italian resort of Cervinia. The No 7 run down from the border is an exhilarating, broad avenue, great for intermediates and above. Be aware bad weather can close the lifts leading up to the Klein Matterhorn on either side. Runs can be icier on the Italian side too (the skiing in Cervinia is best in March), but there are plenty of options. Don't leave it too late to get the lifts back up, or you could find yourself staying overnight!

A day pass for all ski lifts in Zermatt (excluding Cervinia) costs Sfr67/57/34 for adults/seniors & students/children and Sfr75/64/38 including Cervinia.

Sleeping & Eating

Be warned, many hotels and restaurants close between seasons.

Hotel Bahnhof (☎ 027 967 24 06; www.hotel.bahnhof.com; dm Sfr33, s/d with shared bathroom from Sfr67/88; ☹ closed around mid-Oct–mid-Dec) A long-time mountaineers' mecca, the hotel has an impressive industrial-size kitchen, large dorms, and doubles with balconies facing the Matterhorn. It is directly opposite the station and gets good marks for cleanliness and service.

Hotel Blauherd (☎ 027 967 22 91; www.hotels-suisse.ch/blauherd; Wieststrasse; s/d Sfr95/190; ☹) Rooms are clean and cosy at this friendly chalet-style hotel. The buffet breakfast is generous and you can use the pool in the nearby Hotel Cristiania. Staff will pick you up at the train station – it's a bit of a walk from the centre of town.

Restaurant Weisshorn (☎ 027 967 57 52; Am Bach 6; fondue Sfr25-28; meal Sfr40-50; ☹ mid-Jun–Sep & mid-Nov–Apr) The garish mural of Chichenitza, the Mexican temple, contrasts with the glowing orange Matterhorn table lamps. The food range is just as odd, from nachos and *quesadillas* (flour tortillas with savoury fillings) to fondue.

Drinking & Entertainment

Papperia Pub (☎ 027 967 40 40; Steinmattstrasse 34; ☎ 2.30pm-2am year-round) This is *the* après-ski pub in Zermatt, especially during the slow season (like January). Around the circular bar arranged on a couple of levels are high tables with stools or, if you prefer, low lounges. A DJ is usually in action and there's no shortage of ski resort drinking hijinks.

Broken Bar Disco (☎ 027 967 19 31; Bahnhofstrasse 41; ☎ 10pm-4am year-round) Down in a vaulted cellar of the Hotel Post, this is a popular dance dive where you can jive on a keg and expend any energy leftover after the day on the slopes. The Hotel Post is home to various other bars and eateries.

Getting There & Around

Zermatt is car-free. Dinky little electric vehicles are used to transport goods and serve as taxis and so on around town. Leave your vehicles in the huge open parking area in Täsch (Sfr7.50 per day), or one of the several covered garages there and take the train (Sfr7.80, 12 minutes) into Zermatt.

Trains depart from Brig, stopping at Visp en route. It's a steep, scenic journey (one way/return Sfr37/65, 80 minutes, hourly). Swiss Passes are valid. There is no discount for Eurail Pass holders. The only way out is to backtrack, but if you're going to Saas Fee you can divert there from Stalden-Saas. The popular and scenic *Glacier Express* travels between St Moritz and Zermatt (see p1069).

LEUKERBAD

If you're looking for a little thermal rest and relaxation, this is the place to get it. Leukerbad, west of Brig, is home to Europe's largest thermal centre. The majestic mountain walls encasing the village like an amphitheatre grander than anything the Romans could have conceived make an awe-inspiring backdrop for outdoor bathing meditations.

There are no less than 10 different places to take to the waters, but the biggest and best is **Burgerbad** (☎ 027 472 20 20; www.burgerbad.ch; Rathausstrasse; admission Sfr21; ☎ 8am-8pm Sun-Thu, to 9pm Fri & Sat) with indoor and outdoor pools, whirlpools and water massage jets. If you tire of soaking, ride the cable car up the sheer side of the northern ridge of

mountains to Gemmi Pass (2350m; one way/return Sfr15.50/24). It's a good area for hiking. To walk to the top of the pass takes two hours.

Weisses Rössli (☎ 027 470 33 77; off Dorfplatz; s/d with shared bathroom Sfr50/100) is an attractive place with a helpful friendly host. There is a restaurant serving Valais specialities on the ground floor.

Leukerbad is 16km north of Leuk, which is on the main rail route from Lausanne to Brig. A blue postbus goes from outside the Leuk train station to Leukerbad (Sfr10.40, 30 minutes, hourly) usually at 42 minutes past the hour; last departure is 7.42pm.

TICINO

Sip chardonnay in a colourful piazza café in the late afternoon and shiver as the Mediterranean air whips hot and spicy across your sun-speckled head. Check out the peacock-proud posers, clad in a style that is so *this* season, propelling their scooters in and out of frenetic village traffic. Melodic notes and lots of hand gestures, steaming plates of pasta, creamy gelatos. Did you cross the border into Italy? No, this is just the Switzerland Heidi failed to mention.

South of the Alps, Ticino (Tessin in German) has a distinct look. The canton manages to perfectly fuse Swiss cool with Italian passion, as evidenced by a lusty love for Italian comfort food and full-bodied wines that's balanced by a healthy respect for rules and regulations.

BELLINZONA

pop 17,100

Ticino's capital is a quiet stunner. Strategically placed at the conversion point of several valleys leading down from the Alps, Bellinzona is visually unique. Inhabited since Neolithic times, it is dominated by three grey-stone, fairy-tale medieval castles that have attracted everyone from Swiss invaders to painters such as JMW Turner. Turner may have liked the place, but Bellinzona has a surprisingly low tourist profile, in spite of its castles together forming one of only six Unesco World Heritage sites in Switzerland.

The **tourist office** (☎ 091 825 21 31; fax 091 825 38 17; www.bellinzonaturismo.ch; Viale Stazione 18; ☎ 9am-

6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat), in the post office, can provide information on Bellinzona and the whole canton.

You can roam the ramparts of the two larger castles, **Castelgrande** or **Castello di Montebello**, both of which are still in great condition and offer panoramic views of the town and countryside.

The rooms at the **Hotel San Giovanni** (☎ 091 825 19 19; www.hotelzimmer.ch; Via San Giovanni 7; s/d with shared bathroom Sfr50/90) feel cluttered and bland, but it's the cheapest decent option around town.

The only place to sleep just inside the old town (part of the city wall stands menacingly behind it) is the pleasant **Albergo Croce Federale** (☎ 091 825 16 67; fax 091 826 25 50; Viale Stazione 12; s/d Sfr100/150). Rooms are straightforward but light, and the restaurant downstairs is cheerful.

Osteria Ticinese (☎ 091 825 16 73; Via Orico 3; pasta Sfr11-15, mains Sfr13-16) dishes up hearty portions of standard Italian fare in cheerful environs. It gets really crowded around lunch.

Bellinzona is on the train route connecting Locarno (Sfr7.20, 25 minutes, twice hourly) and Lugano (Sfr11.40, 30 minutes, twice hourly).

LOCARNO

pop 14,400

The rambling red enclave of Italianate townhouses, piazzas and arcades ending at the northern end of Lake Maggiore, coupled with more hours of sunshine than anywhere else in Switzerland, give this laid-back town a summer resort atmosphere. Locarno gained notoriety when it hosted the 1925 Peace Conference intended to bring stability to Europe after WWI.

Piazza Grande is the centre of town. You can gulp down shots and smoke Cuban cigars while checking your email at the Latino-style **Pardo Bar** (☎ 091 752 21 23; Via della Motta 3; per hr Sfr20; ☎ 11am-1am). In the nearby casino complex is the **tourist office** (☎ 091 751 03 33; locarno@ticino.com; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun).

Sights & Activities

Don't miss the formidable **Madonna del Sasso**, up on the hill with panoramic views of the lake and town. The sanctuary was built after the Virgin Mary allegedly appeared in a vision in 1480. It features a church with

15th-century paintings, a small museum and several distinctive statues. There is a funicular from the town centre, but the 20-minute climb is not demanding (take Via al Sasso off Via Cappuccini) and you pass some shrines on the way.

In August more than 150,000 film buffs hit town for the two-week **Festival Internazionale di Film** (International Film Festival; ☎ 091 756 21 21; www.pardo.ch; Via Luini 3). Cinemas are used during the day but at night films are shown in the open-air on a giant screen in the Piazza Grande.

Sleeping & Eating

Vecchia Locarno (☎ 091 751 65 02; www.hotel-vecchia-locarno.ch; Via della Motta 10; s/d with shared bathroom Sfr50/95) Rooms are gathered around a sunny internal courtyard, evoking Mediterranean flavours. The simply furnished digs are comfortable. Ask for one with views over the old town and hills.

Grand Hotel Locarno (☎ 091 743 02 82; www.grand-hotel-locarno.ch; Via Sempione 17; s/d Sfr160/340; ☎ ☎ ☎) Grand in name and looks, this is an old-style relic of *belle époque* proportions. Rooms in this historic building are a trifle faded but the best of them still retain the elegance of a bygone era.

Lake Maggiore has a great variety of fresh and tasty fish. Look out for *persico* (perch) and *corigone* (whitefish).

Osteria Chiara (☎ 091 743 32 96; Vicolo della Chiara 1; mains Sfr15-30) Tucked away on a cobbled lane, this has all the cosy feel of a grotto. Sit at tables beneath the pergola or by the fireplace for chunky dishes of, say, *malfatti con zucca al timo* (big gnocchi-style pasta with pumpkin and thyme). From the lake follow the signs up Vicolo dei Nessi.

For self-caterers on Piazza Grande there's a Coop supermarket and a Migros De Gustibus snack bar.

Drinking

Sport Bar (Via della Posta 4) A fairly run-of-the-mill place by day, this rough-and-tumble bar with a red-walled dance space out the back and beer garden on the side is an extremely popular hangout with Locarno's young and restless.

Getting There & Away

The St Gotthard Pass provides the road link (N2) to central Switzerland. There are trains

from Brig (Sfr50, 2½ hours, hourly) that pass through Italy en route. You change trains at Domodossola across the border, so take your passport.

LUGANO

pop 26,100

Switzerland's southernmost tourist town is a sophisticated slice of Italian life, with colourful markets, upmarket shops, pedestrian-only piazzas and lakeside parks. Resting on the shore of Lake Lugano, with Mounts San Salvatore and Bré rising on either side, it's also a great base for lake trips, water sports and hillside hikes.

The old town is a 10-minute walk down the hill to the east. On the lake side of the Municipio building is the **tourist office** (☎ 091 913 32 32; info@lugano-tourism.ch; Riva Albertoli; ☹ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun, closed Sat & Sun Dec-Feb).

Sights & Activities

Wander through the mostly porticoed lanes woven around the busy main square, Piazza della Riforma (which is even more lively when the Tuesday and Friday morning markets are held). Via Nassa is the main shopping street and indicates there is no shortage of cash in this town.

The simple Romanesque **Chiesa di Santa Maria degli Angioli** (St Mary of the Angels; Piazza Luini; ☹ 8am-5pm), against which a now-crumbling former hotel was built, contains two frescoes by Bernardino Luini dating from 1529. Covering the entire wall that divides the church in two is a grand didactic illustration of the Crucifixion. The closer you look, the more scenes of Christ's Passion are revealed, along with others of him being taken down from the cross and the Resurrection. The power and vivacity of the colours are astounding.

Chomp into some cocoa culture at the **Museo del Cioccolato Alprose** (☎ 091 611 88 56; www.alprose.ch; Via Rompada 36, Casalano; adult/child Sfr4/1; ☹ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun). As well as getting a chocolate-coated history lesson, you can watch the sugary substance being made. Get there by the Ferrovia Ponte Tresa train (Sfr6).

Alternatively, take a **boat trip** to one of the many photogenic villages hugging the shoreline of Lake Lugano. One of the most popular is car-free **Gandria**, a tiny hillside

village with historic homes and shops, and narrow winding alleyways right down to the water. If you hit town at meal times you can tuck into a traditional Ticinese dish in one of the many **grotti**.

Sleeping

Many hotels close for at least part of the winter.

Hotel & Hostel Montarina (☎ 091 966 72 72; www.montarina.ch; Via Montarina 1; dm Sfr25, s/d Sfr80/120; ☹ mid-Mar–Oct; P) Behind the train station is this charming hotel, whose best rooms are airy, with timber floors and antiques. The nearby hostel has rooms with four to 16 bunk beds. A buffet breakfast is available for Sfr12.

Hotel Pestalozzi (☎ 091 921 46 46; www.attuale.com/pestalozzi.html; Piazza Indipendenza 9; s/d from Sfr85/160; ☹) A renovated Art Nouveau building, this is a good central deal. Rooms have a fresh feel, with crisp whites and blues dominating the decoration. The cheapest share bathrooms and don't have air-con.

Hotel Federale (☎ 091 910 08 08; www.hotel-federale.ch; Via Regazzoni 8; s Sfr160, d Sfr190-260; P) If you can afford the grand top-floor doubles with lake views, this place beats many multi-stellar places hands-down. A short luggage-laden stumble from the train station, it is in a quiet spot with immaculately kept rooms and friendly staff. There is wi-fi in the lobby.

Eating & Drinking

Head to the pedestrian-only piazzas to tempt the tastebuds, with *panini* (bread rolls; Sfr5) and *gelati* (Sfr3) from street stalls, or larger meals in the pizzerias and cafés spilling onto the streets.

L'Antica Osteria del Porto (☎ 091 971 42 00; Via Foce 9; mains Sfr25-35) Savour local fish and Ticinese dishes such as *brasato di manzo al Merlot con polenta gratinata e legume* (grilled beef with polenta and vegetables). The terrace overlooking the Cassarate stream is pleasant, and you also have lake views.

Soho Café (☎ 091 922 60 80; Corso Pestalozzi 3; ☹ 10am-1am Mon-Fri, 4pm-1am Sat) This place is buzzing and chill at the same time. Filled with Lugano's beautiful people, stop by the orange-lit bar for a drink before slipping into a chair for catch-up chat with friends. DJs keep the music loud enough

to groove too, but quiet enough to have a conversation.

Entertainment

Desperados (☎ 091 921 11 97; Via al Forte 4; ☹ 10pm-5am) This late-night disco bar is hot, cramped and sweaty – in other words the perfect nightclub. The entrance is on a tiny square off Vicolo Orfanotrofio.

Getting There & Around

Lugano is on the same road and rail route as Bellinzona. Two postbuses run to St Moritz (Sfr74, four hours, daily in summer but only Friday, Saturday and Sunday in winter). Swiss Pass holders will still pay Sfr11 and everyone needs to reserve their seats the day before at the bus station, the train information office or by calling ☎ 091 807 85 20. Buses leave from the bus station on Via Serafino Balestra, though the St Moritz bus also calls at the train station.

GRAUBÜNDEN

Rural charm, untamed beauty and some of the world's most haute couture skiing are on the menu in Graubünden (Grisons, Grigioni, Grishun). It's easy to get off the trodden path here. The roads are mostly narrow, winding and often pocked. Great carpets of deep green felt seem to have been draped over the valleys and lower hills of this, the country's biggest canton. An outdoor adventurer's paradise, the region features more than 11,000km of walking trails, more than 600 lakes and 1500km of downhill ski slopes – including super swanky St Moritz and backpacker mecca Flims-Laax.

CHUR

pop 31,900

Chur, the canton's capital and largest town, is one of the oldest settlements in Switzerland, tracing its history back some 3000 years. Today it serves as a gateway for the region, although it's not a very obvious tourist attraction – buildings are stark and grey. For a town map see the **tourist office** (☎ 081 252 18 18; Grabenstrasse 5; ☹ 1.30-6pm Mon, 8.30am-noon & 1.30-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon Sat).

The **Kunstmuseum** (☎ 081 257 28 68; Postplatz; admission Sfr12; ☹ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun, 10am-noon & 2-8pm Thu) has a collection of

artwork by the three Giacomettis (Alberto, Augusto and Giovanni), and exhibits by local sci-fi artist HR Giger (of *Alien* fame).

The **Hotel Franziskaner** (☎ 081 252 12 61; fax 081 252 12 79; Kupfergasse 18; s/d from Sfr65/110) is located right on the old town square and can get a little rowdy on weekends but we think that just adds to its charm. Rooms are clean and plenty comfortable with simple pine furniture. The cheapest share bathrooms.

Easily Chur's most atmospheric old-time eatery, **Speiserestaurant Zum Alten Zollhaus** (☎ 081 252 33 98; Malixerstrasse 1; mains Sfr30) is the kind of place where black-and-white-clad waitresses bustle beneath centuries-old timber beams and serve up local and Swiss German dishes, including lots of fresh game meat in autumn.

A restless student population has led to high-density bar activity in the old town. The scene is on Untere Gasse, basically a row of bars. **Street Café** (☎ 081 253 714; Grabenstrasse 47) is one of the trendier hangouts for the earlier part of the evening.

Chur is connected to Zürich (Sfr40, 85 minutes, hourly) and St Moritz (Sfr38, two hours, hourly).

FLIMS-LAAX

They say if the snow ain't falling anywhere else, you'll surely find some around Flims-Laax. These towns, along with tiny Falera, 20km west of Chur, form a single ski area known as the Weisses Arena (White Arena), with 220km of slopes catering for all levels. Laax in particular is known as a mecca for snowboarders, who spice up the local nightlife too. The resort is barely two hours by train and bus (less by car) from Zürich airport.

There main **tourist office** (☎ 081 920 92 00; www.alpenarena.ch; Via Nova; ☹ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat-May-Oct, to 5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Apr) is in Flims-Dorf.

The ski slopes range as high as 3000m and are mostly intermediate or easy, although there are some 45km of more challenging runs. A one-day ski pass includes ski buses and costs Sfr62 (plus Sfr5 for the KeyCard that you use to access the lifts).

Laax was the first Swiss resort to allow snowboarders to use the lifts back in 1985, and remains a mecca for snowsurfers, with two huge half-pipes (one said to be the biggest in the world) and a freestyle park huddled

around the unfortunately named Crap Sogn Gion peak. The season starts in late October on the glacier and, depending on snowfalls, in mid-December elsewhere.

In summer try your hand at **river rafting** on a turbulent 17km stretch of the Vorderrhein between Ilanz and Reichenau. It will take you through the **Rheinschlucht** (Rhine Gorge), somewhat optimistically dubbed Switzerland's Grand Canyon, but impressive enough for all that. **Swissraft** (☎ 0819115250; www.swissraft.ch) offers half-/full-day rafting for Sfr109/160.

It may resemble an awful 1970s housing estate, but **Riders Palace** (☎ 081 927 97 00; www.riderspalace.ch; Laax Murschetg; dm Sfr30-60; d to Sfr200 per person; 📺) is actually a curious bit of designer cool for the snow party animal (hotel motto: sleeping is for dreamers). You can go for basic but comfortable bunk-bed accommodation or stylish rooms (with baths by Philippe Starck). The pricing system is a trifle complicated, and can include your ski pass. The so-called Multimedia rooms are doubles/triples with Playstation, DVD player and Dolby surround sound. The whole place is wi-fi wired and located 200m from the Laax lifts. Its lobby bar is open to the general public and picks up après-ski traffic that continues until well into the night, occasionally with live acts.

Postbuses run to Flims and the other villages in the White Arena area hourly from Chur (Sfr12.40 to Flims-Dorf, 30 minutes). A local free shuttle bus connects the three villages.

ST MORITZ

pop 4900

Just like rolled jeans and big sunglasses, ski resorts are constantly going into and out of style. A few years ago it was all about Aspen, but this season the name on everyone's lips in the rich-famous-royal (or maybe just young and super fabulous) clique is St Moritz. The place is definitely hot. And with its smugly perfect lake and aloof mountains, the town also looks a million dollars.

Orientation & Information

Hilly St Moritz Dorf is above the train station, with luxury hotels, restaurants and shops. To the southwest, 2km around the lake is the more downmarket St Moritz Bad; buses run between the two. St Moritz is

seasonal and becomes a ghost town during November and from late April to early June.

The train station near the lake rents out bikes in summer and changes money from 6.50am to 8.10pm daily. The **St Moritz tourist office** (☎ 081 837 33 33; stmoritz.ch; Via Maistra 12; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) has all the usual traveller info.

Activities

Skiers and snowboarders will revel in the 350km of runs on the slopes of **Corviglia-Marguns** (☎ 081 830 00 00; www.bergbahnenengadin.ch; day lift ticket Sfr63, ski & boot rental Sfr45). The choice for beginners is limited. There are also 160km of **cross-country trails** (equipment rental Sfr20) and 120km of marked **hiking paths**.

You can also try golf (including on the frozen lake in winter), tennis, in-line skating, fishing, horse riding, sailing, windsurfing and river rafting, to mention just a few. The tourist office has a list of prices and contacts.

Sleeping & Eating

Youth Hostel St Moritz Bad (☎ 081 833 39 69; www.youthhostel.ch/st.moritz; Via Surpunt 60; dm with half-board Sfr46; 📺) Backing on to the forest and cross-country ski course, this large, modern hostel has excellent facilities. There's mountain bike rental, compulsory half-board and a TV lounge. From the train station take the bus towards Maloja and get off at the Hotel Sonne. From here it is a six-minute walk.

Chesa Chantarella (☎ 081 833 33 55; www.chesa-chantarella.ch; Via Salastrains; s/d Sfr95/190; 🕒 Jun-Sep & Dec-Apr; 📺) High up over town, this is a charming, knock-about sort of place that also happens to house one of the town's better-value eateries for local cooking and fondue.

Hotel Waldhaus am See (☎ 081 836 60 00; www.waldhaus-am-se.ch; s/d Sfr170/320; 📺) Brilliantly located in grounds overlooking the lake and a short walk from the train station, this place has pleasant rooms, many with enticing views. It has its own sizzling restaurant too, with grilled meat specialities.

Jöhrli's Talvo (☎ 081 833 44 55; Via Gunels 15; mains Sfr10-20) This place, beyond Bad in nearby Champfèr, is the best valley restaurant, serving up fish and local dishes in rustic surroundings.

Engiadina (☎ 081 833 32 65; Piazza da Scuola 2; fondue from Sfr32 per person) This comfortable, cosy spot is famous for fondue, and that's the best thing to eat here (it's Sfr38.50 per person with champagne). It's open year-round.

Drinking

Around 20 bars and clubs have dancing and/or music. While you bop to the beat your wallet might also be waltzing itself wafer-thin, because nights out in St Moritz can be nasty on the banknotes.

Bobby's Pub (☎ 081 834 42 83; Via dal Bagn) This vaguely pub-type place with undulating bar and a wide selection of beers attracts young snowboarding types in season, and just about everyone in town out of season, being one of the few places open year-round.

Getting There & Away

Two postbuses run to Lugano (Sfr74, four hours, daily summer; Friday, Saturday and Sunday winter). You must reserve a seat the day before. Call ☎ 081 837 67 64. The bus costs Sfr10 for those holding Swiss Travel passes.

The *Glacier Express* plies one of Switzerland's most famous scenic train routes, connecting St Moritz to Zermatt (Sfr138, 7½ hours, daily) via the 2033m Oberalp Pass. It covers 290km and crosses 291 bridges. Novelty drink glasses in the dining car have

sloping bases to compensate for the hills – remember to keep turning them around!

SWISS NATIONAL PARK

The road west from Müstair stretches 34km over the Ofenpass (Pass dal Fuorn, 2149m), through the thick woods of Switzerland's only **national park** (www.nationalpark.ch; 🕒 Jun-Oct) and on to **Zernez**, which is home to the **Chasa dal Parc Naziunal Svizzer** (National Park House; ☎ 081 856 13 78; www.nationalpark.ch; 🕒 8.30am-6pm, to 10pm Tue Jun-Oct). It is on the main road just as it leaves the east end of town and is open the same months as the park. It provides hiking details with locations to see particular animals.

There's no charge to enter the park and parking is free. Walkers can enter by trails from Zernez, S-chanf and Scuol. Deviating from the paths is not permitted. Regulations prohibit camping, littering, lighting fires, cycling, picking flowers, bringing dogs into the park, or disturbing the animals in any way. Fines of up to Sfr500 may be imposed for violations.

Sleeping & Eating

There are several hotel and restaurant options in Zernez and a couple in the park itself.

Il Fuorn (☎ 081 856 12 26; www.ilfuorn.ch; dm Sfr19, s/d from Sfr75/140, half-board extra Sfr30; 🕒 Jun-Oct) In the middle of the national park by the

A LITTLE ANIMAL MAGIC Sarah Johnstone

If you'd like a break from people and their playthings, the Swiss National Park provides an ideal spot far from the madding crowd. It's a place to enjoy the vast, untrammelled countryside.

The park was established in 1914, the first such park to be created in Europe. At 172.4 sq km, it is smaller than most American and Canadian national parks, but the command of conservation is more rigorously adhered to. The key principle is to keep things natural. This even means holding down the number of paths to a minimum, to lessen the impact of human curiosity.

Such care has led to a flourishing of flora and fauna. You can view a number of animals that are not usually seen – ibex, marmot, chamois and deer roam through the park at will.

A three-hour walk from S-chanf to Trupchun is especially popular in October, when you can get close to large deer. The Naturlehrpfad circuit near Il Fuorn gives an opportunity to see bearded vultures, released into the wild since 1991.

In summer 2005, one of the descendants of the handful of Slovenian brown bears released into the wild in northern Italy since the 1990s caused a storm by, er, wandering over the border into the Val Müstair near the Ofenpass (Pass dal Fuorn). He came to join the small number of wolves that have again been roaming the east of the canton since 2002. The appearance of the bear attracted floods of animal-spotters, but the hullabaloo was short-lived, as the bear wandered back into Italy. In September he was back and upsetting locals by killing a dozen or more sheep to keep hunger at bay.

main road, it is a handy hulk of a place with surprisingly pleasant rooms (unless you want to opt for the very basic dorm with huddled-together mattresses). Trout is big on the menu.

Hotel Bär & Post (☎ 081 851 55 00; www.baer-post.ch; s/d Sfr90/160) In business since 1905, this is one of the town's choicest options. The best rooms are really spacious, local stone pine predominates and there is also a sauna on the premises. The restaurant, decked out in typical timber style for the region, is a good place to sample local cooking (mains Sfr20 to Sfr40).

Getting There & Away

Train services regularly run from Zernez to St Moritz (Sfr16.80, 50 minutes), with stops at S-chanf, Zuoz and Celerina. Change trains at Samedan for the latter and for St Moritz.

ZÜRICH

pop 338,794

If you haven't actually visited Switzerland's most populous city, you are more likely to associate its name with being a boring banking capital than an up-and-coming urban hot-spot. That is a real shame, because contemporary Zürich has a kind of pulsating energy not readily found elsewhere in Switzerland. Now that its Street Parade has overtaken London's Notting Hill Carnival, Zürich is host to Europe's largest yearly street party. In addition to this its former industrial quarter has been transformed into a hip nightlife venue catering to a youngish crowd, and this happening 'Züri-West' district has the same buzz as Berlin's Prenzlauerberg or Mitte. The infamous 'gnomes', as the British like to call Zürich's bankers, are still in evidence, but sometimes they can astonish you by whizzing by on a Segway scooter.

ORIENTATION

Zürich is at the northern end of Lake Zürich (Zürichsee), with the city centre split by the Limmat River. Like most Swiss cities it is compact and easy to navigate. The main train station (Hauptbahnhof) is on the western bank of the river, close to the old centre.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Orell Füssli Bookshop (☎ 044 211 04 44; Bahnhofstrasse 70) Great source of fiction and travel books in English.

Travel Book Shop (☎ 044 252 38 83; Rindermarkt 20) Sells English-language travel books and maps.

Discount Card

ZürichCard (per 24/72hr Sfr15/30) Available from the tourist office and the airport train station, this provides free public transport, free museum admission and more.

Internet Access

Quanta (☎ 01 260 72 66; cnr Niederdorfstrasse & Mühlegasse; per hr Sfr10; ☎ 9am-midnight)

Medical Services

Bellevue Apotheke (☎ 044 252 56 00; Theaterstrasse 14) A 24-hour chemist.

Cantonal University Hospital (☎ 044 255 11 11; Rämistrasse 100) Casualty department.

Post

Main post office (☎ 044 296 21 11; Kasernenstrasse 95-97; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat) There's a more convenient location at the main train station.

Tourist Information

Zürich tourist office (☎ 044 215 30 00; www.zurich.tourism.ch; train station; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, to 6.30pm Sat & Sun) Arranges hotels, car rentals and excursions.

SIGHTS

Many things to see and do in Zürich don't cost a cent. In addition to the sights listed here there are numerous art galleries.

Old Town

Allocate at least a couple of hours to explore the cobbled streets of the pedestrian-only old town lining both sides of the river. You never know what a turn down an intimate alleyway might reveal – perhaps a 16th-century guildhall, a tiny boutique, cosy café or maybe courtyards and fountains.

Elegant **Bahnhofstrasse** is simply perfect for window-shopping and affluent Züricher-watching. The bank vaults beneath the street are said to be crammed with gold and silver. Above ground, you'll find luxury shops selling the best Switzerland can offer – from watches and clocks to chocolates, furs, porcelain and fashion labels galore.

ZÜRICH

0 400 m
0 0.2 miles

INFORMATION

Bellevue Apotheke.....	1	C5
Cantonal University Hospital.....	2	D4
Main Post Office.....	3	A3
Orell Füssli Bookshop.....	4	B4
Police Station.....	5	C4
Quanta.....	6	C4
Travel Book Shop.....	7	C4
Zürich Tourism.....	8	B3
Letten.....	12	B2
Männerbad.....	13	A4
St Peterskirche.....	14	B5
Velogate (Free Bikes).....	15	B3
Zic-Zac Rock-Garden.....	(see 23)	

SLEEPING 🛏

City Backpacker.....	16	C4
Goldenes Schwert.....	17	C4
Hotel Alexander.....	18	C4
Hotel Otter.....	19	C5
Hotel Plattenhof.....	20	D4
Hotel Rössli.....	21	C5
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On Sundays it seems as if all of Zürich takes an afternoon stroll around the lake; be sure to join in. There are sometimes human traffic jams, but it is definitely a worthwhile cultural experience. Wander down the west bank of the lake and concrete walkways give way to parkland in the **Arboretum**. On the eastern bank, the **Zürichhorn** park has sculptures and a Chinese Garden. In summer, the lakeside park buzzes with food stalls and entertainment, and there is a roped-off swimming area with a slide and diving board.

Churches

On the west bank of the Limmat River the 13th-century **Fraumünster** (cathedral; Münsterplatz; ☎ 9am–6pm May–Sep, 10am–5pm Oct–Apr) is Zürich's most noteworthy attraction, with some of the most distinctive and attractive stained-glass windows in the world. Across the river is the dual-towered **Grossmünster** (Grossmünsterplatz; ☎ 9am–6pm mid-Mar–Oct, 10am–5pm Nov–mid-Mar). This was where, in the 16th century, the Protestant preacher Huldrych Zwingli first spread his message of 'pray and work' during the Reformation – a seminal period in Zürich's history. The figure glowering from the south tower of the cathedral is Charlemagne, who founded the original church at this location. Back on the west bank, you'll find the 13th-century tower of **St Peterskirche** (St Peter's Church; St-Peterhofstatt; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Fri, to 3pm Sat) is hard to miss. It has the largest clock face in Europe (8.7m in diameter).

Museum of Fine Arts

After a major renovation in 2005, Zürich's **Kunsthaus** (☎ 044 253 84 84; www.kunsthaus.ch; Heimplatz 1; adult/student & senior Sfr12/7, free Sun; ☎ 10am–9pm Tue–Thu, to 5pm Fri–Sun) is looking better than ever, with its rich collection of Alberto Giacometti stick-figure sculptures, Monets, Van Goghs, Rodin sculptures and other 19th- and 20th-century art. Swiss artist Ferdinand Hodler is also represented.

ACTIVITIES

Zürich really comes into its own in its Mediterranean-like summer when green parks lining the lake are overrun with bathers, sun seekers, in-line skaters, footballers, lovers, picnickers, party animals, preeners and other hedonists. Between May and the

middle of September, **outdoor swimming areas** (admission Sfr6; ☎ 9am–7pm May & Sep, to 8pm Jun–Aug) are open around the lake and up the Limmat River. These are usually rectangular wooden piers with a pavilion covering part of the; most offer massages, yoga and saunas, as well as snacks. One favourite spot is **Letten** (Lettensteg), where Züri-West trendsetters swim, barbecue, skateboard or just drink and chat on the grass and concrete. Here you'll also find a former S-Bahn carriage from Berlin that's been transformed into the crowded **Bar Offen** – one of Zürich's premier summer bars.

Also highly recommended is **Männerbad** (Schanzengraben), tucked away on the Venice-like Schanzengraben canal, behind the Hallenbad and below the Old Botanic Gardens. It's men-only by day; but women are welcome to join them in the evening at the fantastic **Rimini Bar** (☎ 044 211 95 94) – another hot spot.

Use of city bikes is free of charge from **Velogate** (platform 18, main train station; ☎ 7.30am–9.30pm). Bring photo ID and a Sfr20 deposit.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

On the third Monday in April, Zürich celebrates the arrival of warmer weather with **Sechseläuten**. Many professionals in Switzerland belong to work-associated guilds that offer them a certain level of protection and security in their jobs – similar to joining a union. During Sechseläuten guild members parade the streets in historical costume and tour the guildhalls, playing music. A fireworks-filled 'snowman' (the Böög) is ignited at 6pm.

Zürich lets its hair down in August with the techno **Street Parade**, attracting well over half a million ravers. All-night parties around the city follow a three-hour parade.

In February, just after Ash Wednesday, the city celebrates **Fasnacht**, with parades and festive costumes. **Zürcher Festspiele**, from mid-June to mid-July, offers a programme of music, dance and theatre.

SLEEPING

Zürich has a bizarre love affair with theme hotels – everything from rock rooms to animal-print rooms to dada rooms and the 'in bed with Ronald McDonald' rooms. Cheaper hotels fill early, so book ahead.

Budget

City Backpacker (☎ 044 251 90 15; www.city-backpacker.ch; Niederdorfstrasse 5; dm Sfr31, s/d Sfr66/92) You climb a hell of a lot of stairs to reach reception in this bustling favourite, but it's worth the trek. Smack in the middle of old town, the hostel offers sparkling dorms and doubles, self-catering kitchen and coin laundry. With lounge chairs and sky-scraping city views, the summer rooftop terrace is the best spot in Zürich to wind down at sunset with a few cold beers.

SYHA Hostel (☎ 043 399 78 00; www.youthhostel.ch; Mütschellenstrasse 114, Wollishofen; dm Sfr38, s/d Sfr99/116; ☎) Expensively overhauled in 2005, this huge hostel now features a swish reception/dining hall and sparkling modern bathrooms. Dorms remain quite small, though. Take tram 7 to Morgental or S-Bahn to Wollishofen.

Martahaus (☎ 044 251 45 50; www.martahaus.ch; Zähringerstrasse 36; dm Sfr 38, s/d Sfr115/150, with shared bathroom Sfr85/100) With 1970s black leather lounges in the spacious breakfast room-cum-lounge and a roof terrace, this is a fun, friendly place to stay. Other features include a bar, laundry and gym. Negatives include street noise and tiny, shared bathrooms.

Dakini (☎ 044 291 42 20; www.dakini.ch; Brauerstrasse 87; s/d from Sfr65/90; ☎) This relaxed B&B attracts a bohemian crowd of artists and performers, academics and trendy tourists who don't bat an eyelid at its location near the red-light district. Five bedrooms in two apartments share kitchen and bathroom. Take tram 8 to Bäckeranlage.

Midrange & Top End

Hotel Alexander (☎ 044 251 82 03; www.hotel-alexander.ch; Niederdorfstrasse 40; s/d from Sfr95/140; ☎ ☎) It's smack in the centre of old town, and the rooms are sparkling clean with polished floorboards, white walls and nice touches like chocolates on the pillows. The bathrooms stand out with huge showers and a Mediterranean tile motif. Breakfast is included, there's wi-fi and an attached takeaway spot to quell late night munchies.

Hotel Otter (☎ 044 251 22 07; www.wueste.ch; Oberdorfstrasse 7; s/d Sfr100/130) This flamboyantly quirky hotel is by far our favourite place to stay in town. The 17 rooms are each fantastically unique – one's a safari lodge, another a

religious grotto, and then there's the Arabian-themed room. Not to be missed. The location, on fashionable Oberdorfstrasse, is very central, too.

Hotel Plattenhof (☎ 044 251 19 10; www.plattenhof.ch; Plattenstrasse 26; s/d from Sfr165/205; ☎) This place manages to be cool without looking pretentious. It features a youthful, vaguely Japanese style, with low beds and mood lighting in its newest rooms. Even the older rooms are stylishly minimalist. Take tram 6 to Platte.

Hotel Rössli (☎ 044 256 70 50; www.hotelroessli.ch; Rössligasse 7; s/d from Sfr180/210) There's a calming, ascetic quality to this boutique hotel with its white walls and furnishings only occasionally disrupted by greys, mint greens or pale blues. It also has an elegant bar.

Also recommended: **Goldenes Schwert** (☎ 044 250 70 80; www.gayhotel.ch; Marktgasse 14; s/d from Sfr130/165) Gay hotel with some elaborately themed rooms; the top floor gets the least noise from the downstairs disco.

Zic-Zac Rock-Hotel & Zic-Zac Rock-Garden (☎ 044 261 21 81; www.ziczac.ch in German; Marktgasse 17; d Sfr160, with shared bathroom Sfr75/120; ☎) Novelty place featuring rock-star rooms in bold colours and an attached restaurant that is a slice of Americana in Switzerland (mains Sfr15 to Sfr25).

EATING

Zürich has a thriving café culture and hundreds of restaurants serving all types of local and international cuisine. A good place to start exploring is Niederdorfstrasse and the backstreets nearby, which are filled with wall-to-wall cafés, restaurants and bars of every description. Most restaurants stay open from early morning to late evening.

Restaurants

Spaghetti Factory (☎ 044 251 94 00; Niederdorfstrasse 5; pasta Sfr15–22) With a fun, buzzing atmosphere, this restaurant serves delicious bowls of its namesake dish (22 choices). The spaghetti with pesto sauce is delicious. The place often has long lines. Portions are just right.

Zeughauskeller (☎ 044 211 26 90; Bahnhofstrasse 28a; mains Sfr15–30) The menu at this huge, atmospheric beer hall offers 20 different kinds of sausages in eight languages, as well as numerous other Swiss specialities of carnivorous and vegetarian varieties.

Mollino Pizzeria Ristorante (☎ 044 261 01 17; Limmatquai 16; mains Sfr18-25) Head to this lively restaurant for mouth-watering pizzas, delicious cappuccino and exquisite lake views. Sit outside when it's warm, inside amid the cheery frescos when it's blustery.

Sprüngli (☎ 044 244 47 11; Bahnhofstrasse 21; chocolates from Sfr2, mains Sfr19-28) The mother of all chocolate shops, it's a Zürich legacy and must for chocoholics. Choose from a huge range of truffles and cakes from downstairs display cases, or mingle with the well-heeled crowd in the elegant 1st-floor tearooms for a rather special experience.

Café Du Pont (☎ 044 211 66 77; Beatenplatz 4; mains Sfr20-30) There's no question this is a kitschy spot that takes the movie scene a little overboard – all the entrées are named for classic films and TV screens periodically play previews. Still the cavernous place (think industrial) has a feisty vibe. The mostly American menu serves lots of Tex-Mex, pasta, burger and seafood dishes with better than average results. A favourite with the expat community, it's also a good (and noisy) spot to bring the family.

Josef (☎ 044 271 65 95; Gasometerstrasse 24; mains Sfr20-48) A Züri-West stalwart, Josef frequently changes its décor and Swiss-Italian menu, but always has a good wine list and remains constantly popular with the 'in' set, even if just for a drink.

Quick Eats

Cheap eats abound around the train station, especially in the underground Shopville. Niederdorfstrasse has a string of snack bars offering pizza, kebabs and Asian food for about Sfr9.

Sternen Grill (Bellevueplatz/Theatrestrasse 22; snacks Sfr5-8) This is the city's most famous – and busiest – sausage stand; just follow the crowds streaming in for a tasty grease fest.

Tibits by Hiltl (☎ 044 260 32 22; Seefeldstrasse 2; dishes per 100g Sfr3.70) Tibits is where with-it, health-conscious Zürchers head for a light bite when meeting friends. There's a tasty vegetarian buffet, as well as fresh fruit juices, coffees and cake.

Schoffel (☎ 044 261 20 70; Schoffelgasse 7; mains Sfr8-16) On weekend mornings, locals flock to this café for a leisurely coffee and newspaper read within the cheery yellow modern-art-filled walls. Soups, salads and big bowls of yogurt and fruit are on the menu.

DRINKING

Late-night pubs, clubs and discos clutter Niederdorfstrasse and adjoining streets. Zürich's former industrial area has become one of its hippest neighbourhoods: the much-vaunted 'Züri-West' quarter starts roughly west of the train station. Langstrasse, directly behind the station, is a minor red light district with loads of popular bars clustered along its side streets. Its safe to wander through, although you may be offered drugs or sex.

Wüste Bar (☎ 044 251 22 07; Oberdorfstrasse 7) One of our top choices, this small and groovy spot underneath the Otter Hotel has plush red seats and a cowhide bar. There's sometimes live music.

Oliver Twist (☎ 044 252 47 10; Rindermarkt 6) English-speakers gravitate towards this pub, which serves Irish, British, Australian and South African beers. It's a smoky, noisy place, often standing-room-only and somewhat of a meat market.

Café Odeon (☎ 044 251 16 50; Am Bellevue) Lenin and James Joyce once downed drinks at this swish, smoky bar with marble walls and chandeliers. Come for the Art Nouveau interior, but ignore the quite ordinary food.

Boos Lounge (Schweizergasse 6) This place was packed when we stopped by, and it was early on a Monday afternoon. Slick and modern, it's a top choice for an after-work cocktail amid mod red walls, multihued lighting and a disco ball.

ENTERTAINMENT

Züritipp is the city's events magazine, available around town and from the tourist office. Generally dress well and expect to pay Sfr15 to Sfr30 admission to enter Zürich's clubs.

Supermarket (☎ 044 440 20 05; www.supermarket.li; Geroldstrasse 17; admission from Sfr15) Zürich's number one club is smaller than the name suggests, but boasts three cosy lounge bars around the dance floor, a covered back courtyard and an interesting roster of DJs playing house music.

Indochine (☎ 044 448 11 11; www.club-indochine.ch; Limmatstrasse 275; ☎ from 10pm Thu-Sat) Models and rich kids mingle between the dimly lit fat Buddhas of this faux opium den. Zürich's equivalent to London's China-white or Paris' Buddha Bar.

Labyrinth (☎ 044 440 59 80; Pfingstweidstrasse 70) Zürich's top gay club features half-naked pole-dancing narcissists flaunting their six packs and lots of eye-candy at the bar. Take tram 4 to Förlibuckstrasse.

Kaufleuten (☎ 044 225 33 22; www.kaufleuten.com in German; Pelikanstrasse 18) A club with a long history and hot reputation at the top end of the market. Dress to impress, as everyone in here looks like they walked out of a model shoot or film set. The place boasts that Prince and Madonna were once guests. Tram 2 or 9 to Sihlstrasse will get you there.

Labor Bar (☎ 044 272 44 02; www.laborbar.ch; Schiffbaustrasse 3; ☎ from 10pm Fri & Sat, from 9pm Sun) The set for local celebrity Kurt Aeschbacher's TV show, this is the epitome of retro chic, with lots of Plexiglas and diffused coloured light. It's always filled with beautiful people; Friday is Celebrieties and Sunday 'for gays and friends'.

Rote Fabrik (☎ 044 481 91 43; www.rotfabrik.ch in German; Seestrasse 395) A long-standing Zürich institution, this club has managed to hold its own throughout the years. It stages everything from rock concerts to original-language films, theatre and dances, and has a bar and restaurant. Take bus 161 or 165 from Bürkliplatz.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Unique Zürich airport (ZRH; ☎ 043 816 22 11; www.zurich-airport.com) is 10km north of the city centre. It's a small international hub with two terminals.

The N3 approaches Zürich from the south along the shore of Lake Zürich. The N1 is the fastest route from Bern and Basel and is the main entry point from the west.

There are direct trains to Stuttgart (Sfr61, three hours, daily), Munich (Sfr86, 4½ hours, daily), Innsbruck (Sfr66, four hours) and Milan (Sfr72, four hours, daily), as well as many other international destinations. There also are departures to most of the Swiss towns, including Lucerne (Sfr22, 50 minutes, hourly), Bern (Sfr48, 70 minutes, hourly) and Basel (Sfr32, 65 minutes, hourly).

GETTING AROUND

Trains make the 10-minute trip from the airport to the main train station (Sfr5.40) around every 10 minutes. Taxis cost around Sfr50.

There is a comprehensive, unified bus, tram and S-Bahn service in the city, which includes boats plying the Limmat River. Short trips under five stops are Sfr2.30. A 24-hour pass, including travel to and from the airport, is Sfr10.80. For unlimited travel within the canton, including extended tours of the lake, a day pass costs Sfr28.40, or Sfr20 after 9am (9-Uhr-Pass).

Lake steamers depart from Bürkliplatz from early April to late October (Swiss Pass and Eurail valid, Inter-Rail 50% discount). Taxis in Zürich are expensive, even by Swiss standards, at Sfr6 plus Sfr3.50 per kilometre.

CENTRAL SWITZERLAND & BERNER OBERLAND

Welcome to the fairy-tale Alpine creation they call the Berner Oberland, a region so silver-screen perfect that you'll think you have conjured it up. Pretending that you are James Bond in *On her Majesty's Secret Service* pursuing villains down the sheer face of the Schilthorn, kicking plumes of white fluffy powder up into a deep-water blue sky – that can't be real! Well, Mark Twain *did* once write that no opiate compared with walking through the Berner Oberland...but super-hero fantasies aside, it is real. Travelling through the Berner Oberland is a lot like having your cake and eating it too. Not only are you able to spend endless mesmerizing hours staring at the sheer, outrageous beauty of those snow-white, jagged, craggy, so-big-they're-going-to-swallow-you-whole mountains that are found everywhere, but you can also play in them.

In summer the region turns into a recreation of Heidi's turf – all sparkling mountain lakes and tinkling cowbells. Sleep in the hay in tiny Gimmelwald or go hiking around eye-catching Mürren. Thrill-seekers and backpackers congregate around Interlaken (although it's also got loads for all types of travellers), with a reputation for offering every adventure sport under the sun. When you have had your fill of outdoor adventures, spend some time in soul-soothing Lucerne.

LUCERNE

pop 58,600

Lapped by a scenic lake and surrounded by mountains of myth, a picture of this once small fishing village and its wooden Kapellbrücke (Chapel Bridge) is enough to connote the very essence of Switzerland. One of Switzerland's major draw cards Lucerne is a collage of medieval bridges, old squares and watery vistas. Legend has it that an angel with a light showed Lucerne's first settlers where to build a chapel, and in good weather even an atheist might describe the city's location as heaven-sent.

Orientation & Information

The mostly pedestrian-only old town is on the northern bank of the Reuss River. The train station is centrally located on the southern bank. The **Internet Shop** (☎ 041 211 21 31; cnr Pilatusstrasse & Seebrücke; per hr Sfr10; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, to 8pm Sun) is across from the train station. Beside platform three is **Lucerne tourist office** (☎ 041 227 17 17; www.luzern.org; Zentralstrasse 5; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7.30pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, to 6pm Nov-Mar).

Sights

If you plan to visit several of Lucerne's many museums, consider purchasing the Sfr29 Museum Pass, valid for one month. It lets you into all museums as often as you want.

OLD TOWN

Your first port of call should be the medieval old town with ancient rampart walls and towers, 15th-century buildings with painted façades and the two much-photographed covered bridges. **Kapellbrücke**, dating from 1333, is Lucerne's best-known landmark. It's famous for its distinctive water tower and the spectacular 1993 fire that nearly destroyed it. Though it has been rebuilt, fire damage is still obvious on the 17th-century pictorial panels under the roof. In better condition, but rather dark and dour, are the *Dance of Death* panels under the roofline of **Spreuerbrücke** (Spreuer Bridge).

PICASSO MUSEUM

You'll find yourself face-to-face with the artist at this **museum** (☎ 041 410 35 33; Furrengasse 21; adult/student Sfr8/6; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 11am-1pm & 2-4pm Nov-Mar). The main attraction is

nearly 200 photographs by David Douglas Duncan that show an impish Picasso at work and play in his Cannes home during the last 17 years of his life. The intimate black-and-white photos also portray his muse, Jacqueline, and his children. Don't expect to find much of Picasso's own work, other than a few ceramics and sketches, however.

ROSENGART COLLECTION

By contrast, the **Sammlung Rosengart** (☎ 041 220 16 60; www.rosengart.ch; Pilatusstrasse 10; adult/student Sfr15/9, combined with Picasso Museum Sfr18/16; ☎ 10am-6m Apr-Oct, 11am-5pm Nov-Mar) does contain a significant amount of Picasso's art. Showcasing the works retained by Angela Rosengart, a Swiss art dealer and friend of Picasso's, its ground floor is entirely devoted to the Spanish master. In the basement, there's a selection of sketches and small paintings by Paul Klee; upstairs you'll find works by Cezanne, Kandinsky, Miró, Modigliani, and a fine handful of works by Marc Chagall.

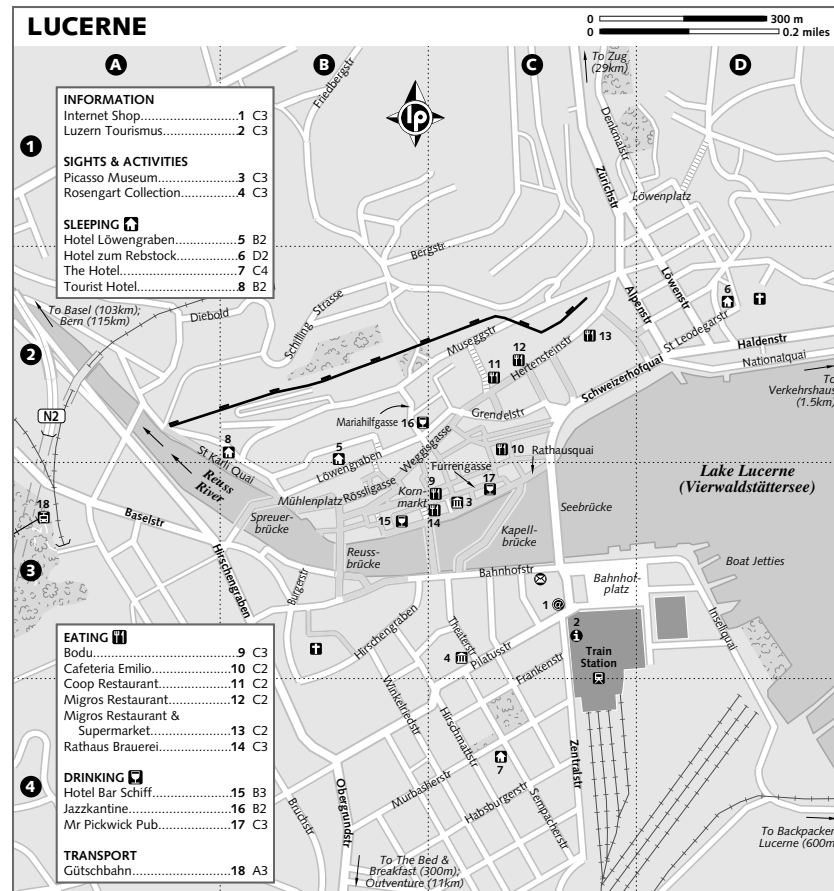
VERKEHRSHAUS

Planes, trains and automobiles are the name of the game in the huge, family-oriented **Transport Museum** (☎ 041 370 44 44; Lidostrasse 5; adult/student/child Sfr24/22/10; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar), east of the city centre, that's devoted to Switzerland's proud transport history. Space rockets, a communications display, simulators, a planetarium and an **IMAX theatre** (Sfr16 extra) all help make this Switzerland's most popular museum. For unrivalled views of the town and lake, take off 140m above the complex in the Hi-Flyer, a captive balloon you can ride for an extra Sfr20 (15 minutes' duration). Take bus 6, 8 or 24 from Bahnhofplatz.

Activities

If you're ready to face your fear factor contact **Outventure** (☎ 041 611 14 41; www.outventure.ch; Hansmatt 5, CH-6362, Stansstad), which has the usual adrenalin-junkie fixes on offer, including bungee jumping (Sfr160), tandem paragliding (Sfr150), canyoning (Sfr170) and glacier trekking (Sfr170). There's a daily shuttle from tourist office.

In addition there are options for scenic cruises on the lake, including aboard old-fashioned paddle steamers. Check out



www.lakelucerne.ch (in German) for more information or stop by the tourist office.

Festivals & Events

Lucerne's six-day **Fasnacht** celebrations are more boisterous and fun than Basel's carnival. The party kicks off on 'Dirty Thursday' with the emergence of the character 'Fritschli' from a window in the town hall, when bands of musicians and revellers take to the streets. The carnival moves through raucous celebrations climaxing on Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday), and is over on Ash Wednesday.

Sleeping

Lucerne has some great budget options, most of which are nicer than midrange places.

Backpackers Lucerne (☎ 041 360 04 20; www.backpackerslucerne.ch; Alpenquai 42; dm Sfr28, d Sfr66; ☎ reception 7-10am & 4-11pm) Backpackers love this lively, longtime favourite, with balconies overlooking the lake in a leafy spot. Clean and friendly, its facilities include kitchen and laundry. It's a 15-minute walk southeast of the train station.

Hotel Löwengraben (☎ 041 417 12 12; www.loewengraben.ch; Löwengraben 18; dm Sfr30, s/d from Sfr120/165; ☎) In a converted prison with basic, whitewashed, 'cell-like' rooms and some fancier suites (albeit with bars on the windows), the hotel is good for novelty value. There's also a trendy bar and nightclub. In the winter, prices drop by about Sfr20.

Tourist Hotel (☎ 041 410 24 74; www.touristhotel.ch; St Karliquai 12; dm Sfr35, s/d from Sfr90/120, with shared bathroom from Sfr70/100; ☒ ☒) A friendly budget hotel that feels more like an upmarket hostel, it offers spotless rooms painted in various bright colour schemes. Some have balconies. Look for the hotel on the waterfront, but away from the bustling tourist zone.

Bed & Breakfast (☎ 041 310 15 14; www.theBandB.ch; Taubenhäusstrasse 34; s/d with shared bathroom Sfr80/120; ☒ reception closed noon-3pm; ☒ ☒) Rooms at this B&B are stylish and cosy with white walls and parquet flooring. The shared bathroom is a lovely old-fashioned deal with tub. When it's crowded the place can have a great atmosphere. Take bus 1 to Eichhof.

Hotel zum Rebstock (☎ 041 410 35 81; www.hereweare.ch; St Leodegar-Strasse 3; s/d & tr from Sfr160/260; ☒) Spread over two houses – one with medieval wooden beams and low ceilings – Rebstock's excellent rooms are tastefully decorated in a range of styles from urban to rustic and colonial to romantic. In three of them, funky tile decorations have been used to turn the bathrooms into works of art.

Hotel (☎ 041 226 86 86; www.the-hotel.ch; Sem-pacherstrasse 14; st Sfr350-540; ☒) Be a film star in your own bedtime in architect Jean Nouvel's low-lit design hotel, which features a scene from a different art-house movie on the ceiling of each sleek matt-black suite. Breakfast is an extra Sfr25 per person.

Eating & Drinking

Many places in Lucerne double as bars and restaurants. Places open for breakfast and stay open until late in the evening. Self-caterers should head to Hertensteinstrasse, where cheap eats are plentiful. There's a Coop restaurant, two Migros restaurants and a supermarket.

Cafeteria Emilio (☎ 041 410 28 10; Ledergasse 8; mains Sfr6-14) You'll be rubbing shoulders with other diners at this tiny place, but it has a certain charm and you won't find cheaper pizzas, pastas and salads.

Rathaus Bräuerei (☎ 041 410 52 57; Unter der Egg 2; mains Sfr8-30) Sit outside by the water or inside amid the shiny copper beer tanks. This atmospheric restaurant serves big glasses of home brews and some of the most delicious

food in town. Cuisine ranges from local to Mexican to Vietnamese.

Mr Pickwick Pub (☎ 041 410 59 27; Rathausquai 6; sandwiches Sfr6.50, mains Sfr10-23) Visit this lively, often rowdy joint, for Brit beer, food and footy. The pub sandwiches are a real steal and there is pleasant outdoor riverfront seating.

Jazzkantine (☎ 041 410 73 73; Grabengasse 8; mains from Sfr15) A funky, arty and rather smoky haunt of the young and creative. There's cool music, counter meals, Saturday-night gigs and weeknight jazz workshops.

Bodu (☎ 041 410 01 77; Kornmarkt 5; mains Sfr18-45) This French brasserie is a local institution, celebrated for its Parisian-café interior, Bordeaux wines and excellent river views. It specialises in Provençal cuisine, but also branches out into dishes from Piedmont and even the Antilles.

Hotel Bar Schiff (☎ 041 418 52 52; Unter der Egg 8; soups & sandwiches Sfr8-12, mains Sfr20-40) Come for the daily happy hour when a drink and appetizer costs Sfr12.50, and sit at one of the outdoor tables overlooking the Reuss River. The esteemed restaurant is a good place to try the local speciality, *Kügelipastelli* – vol-au-vents stuffed with meat and mushrooms and topped with a rich sauce. It also does tasty fondue.

Loft (Haldenstrasse 21; ☒ Wed-Sun) With a steel-and-concrete minimalist design, this attracts a trendy, well-dressed but unpretentious young crowd. Danceable house, Latin, hip-hop and urban sounds are spun.

Getting There & Around

The N2/E9 motorway, which connects Basel and Lugano, passes by Lucerne. The N14 is the road link to Zürich. Trains connect Lucerne to Bern (Sfr30, 1½ hours, hourly), Geneva (Sfr70, 3¼ hours, hourly), Interlaken (Sfr26, two hours, hourly), Lugano (Sfr56, 2½ hours) and Zürich (Sfr19, 50 minutes, hourly).

INTERLAKEN

pop 15,000

Flanked by the stunning Lakes Thun and Brienz, and within yodelling distance of the mighty peaks of the Jungfrau, Mönch and Eiger, is ever-popular Interlaken. It's a great base for exploring the delights of the Jungfrau region. As it caters to backpackers like nowhere else in Switzerland, many

budget travellers make this their main stop in the country. Solo travellers looking to meet like-minded individuals will have a field day here. Interlaken also is a mecca for thrill seekers. Many a traveller leaves with a much lighter wallet after blowing mind-boggling amounts of cash on a range of white-knuckle, high-adrenalin sports. Most are not disappointed. If you're not into the backpacker scene, don't fear, the town is also home to a range of charming guesthouses and modern hotels.

Orientation & Information

Most of Interlaken lies between its two train stations, Interlaken Ost and West, which both offer bike rental and daily money-exchange facilities. The main shopping street, Höhweg, runs between the stations, and you can walk from one to the other in 20 minutes.

Near Interlaken West is the **main post office** (nr Marktgasse & Höhweg) and **Interlaken tourist office** (☎ 033 826 53 00; www.interlaketourism.ch in German; Höhweg 37; ☒ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, 10am-noon & 4-6pm Sun Jul & Aug, 8am-noon & 1.30-6pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat Sep-May).

Sights & Activities

EXTREME SPORTS

Interlaken is the world's second-biggest adventure sports destination, just behind New Zealand, and everything you can think of in this regard is offered from here (although the activities take place in the greater Jungfrau region). Options include skydiving (Sfr380); paragliding (Sfr150); night sledding past frozen waterfalls followed by a fondue dinner (Sfr95); skiing or snowboarding including transport, lift ticket and appropriate clothing and gear rental (Sfr165); and fly-in, drink a glass of champagne then hit the virgin powder glacier skiing (Sfr250). In summer there's canyoning, where you jump, slide and rappel down rocks and waterfalls (from Sfr125) and rafting on the class III-IV Lüttschine River (Sfr95).

The vast majority of excursions occur without incident, but there's always a small risk of injury. Two tragically fatal accidents (canyoning in the Saxet Gorge and bungee jumping off the Stechelberg-Mürren cable car) about five years ago fortunately have not been repeated, but it is always a

good idea to ask about safety records and procedures.

Those without lots of cash should check out the hiking trails, all with signposts giving average walking times, that dot the area.

The major operators, each able to arrange most sports, include the following:

Alpin Center (☎ 033 823 55 23; www.alpincenter.ch; Hauptstrasse 16)

Alpin Raft (☎ 033 823 41 00; www.alpinraft.ch; Hauptstrasse 7)

Outdoor Interlaken (☎ 033 826 77 19; www.outdoor-interlaken.ch; Hauptstrasse 15)

Swissraft (☎ 033 823 02 10; www.swissraft.ch; Obere Jungfraustrasse 72)

MYSTERY PARK

For something a little less extreme (especially if you have the kids along) head to **Mystery Park** (☎ 033 827 57 57; Hauptstrasse 43; adult/child Sfr48/28; ☒ 10am-6pm). The latest brainchild of Erich von Däniken, the out-there author of the 1970s best-seller *Chariots of the Gods*, this theme park features replicas of Aztec pyramids and more space-aged buildings, where virtual reality/computer technology will invite you to consider Mr Däniken's theory that human beings descended from aliens.

Sleeping

Balmer's Herberge (☎ 033 822 19 61; www.balmers.ch; Hauptstrasse 23; dm Sfr27, s/d/q with shared bathroom Sfr33/76/132; ☒) Young Americans have flocked to this cosy Swiss chalet with a raucous summer-camp feel for more than 50 years – it's a great place to meet people and party. On the negative side you're locked out of your room (even the doubles) during the day, you'll be constantly harassed to partake in the adventure sports and the staff even charges you to use the kitchen. If you can resist the temptation to buy, however, it's a good deal.

River Lodge (☎ 033 822 44 34; www.riverlodge.ch; Brienzstrasse 24; dm from Sfr28, s/d Sfr62/84; ☒) Originally a camping area, this place was destroyed in the 2005 floods and rebuilt as a more upmarket joint, although a few dorms bed are available. River views are featured from each of the bungalows lining the waterfront, which house between one and four people in bunks. In summer the hosts encourage you to bring the feather

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Lötschberg/Susi's B&B (☎ 033 822 25 45; www.lotschberg.ch; General Guisan Strasse 31; B&B s/d Sfr105/135, hotel s/d from Sfr120/165; 📍 📞) This place has received consistently positive reviews over its 100 years of continuous operation, for its personal service and friendly hosts. Rooms here are spotless, and each is individually and thoughtfully decorated with homemade art on the walls. The attached B&B offers the cheapest digs, although these are still quite comfortable. In the main house, rooms come in a variety of sizes. A few are quite small, so ask when booking if you're claustrophobic. If you can nab it, grab the attic 'honeymoon' room. It has a huge slanted window that boasts in-you-face mountain views. In summer the place gets really full, and the outdoor patio with sturdy wooden benches and tables is a great place to chill out and meet other travellers.

The hotel arranges quite a few activities for guests. 'Cooking with Fritz' (Sfr 30) is its latest endeavour. Well worth the price, the host teaches you how to make traditional Swiss fondue and *rösti* from scratch. Fritz also takes guests paragliding (Sfr130) and for night sledding and fondue (Sfr75). Both cost less than going through the in-town companies, but are only open to guests.

duvet outside and sleep under the stars by the water. A communal kitchen and bikes and kayaks for guests are extra perks.

Backpackers Villa Sonnenhof (☎ 033 826 71 71; www.villa.ch; Alpenstrasse 16; dm/d from Sfr33/98; 📍 reception 7.30-11am & 4-9pm, to 10pm Jun-Aug; 📞) Widely regarded as the cleanest and most genteel of Interlaken's hostels, this place still has plenty going on – in the corner somewhere you're likely to find at least a few folks reliving their last skydive over pints of beer. Spacious, renovated rooms have nice touches such as steamer trunks and balconies, some with Jungfrau views. There's a small kitchen, a lounge and table tennis in the garden.

Funny Farm (☎ 079 652 61 27; www.funny-farm.ch; Hauptstrasse; dm Sfr35; 📍) Another budget powerhouse, Funny Farm has a raucous feel and draws in hordes of Australians. It revels in its anarchic, ramshackle premises – somewhere halfway between a squat and an island shipwreck. There's a ramshackle house surrounded by makeshift bars and a swimming pool, but guests don't care; they're here for the party.

Hotel-Gasthof Hirschen (☎ 033 822 15 45; www.hirschen-interlaken.ch; Hauptstrasse 11; s/d from Sfr90/180) Following a Sfr400,000 renovation in 2004, this 16th-century heritage-listed Swiss chalet is enjoying a new lease of life. Rooms are now 'rustic modern', with parquet floors, bathroom pods and wireless LAN (local area network).

Victoria-Jungfrau Grand Hotel & Spa (☎ 033 828 28 28; www.victoria-jungfrau.ch; Höheweg 41; s/d

Sfr510/620) The granddaddy of Interlaken hotels, the Victoria easily outclasses everything else in town. From its swanky lobby and pampering spa to its old-world rooms, this 1865 landmark is the last word in Swiss style.

Eating & Drinking

Balmer's has the town's hottest after-dark scene (especially when its club is open), with Funny Farm a close second, and guests rarely leave at night. Self-caterers can stock up on beer (and food) at the **Coop Pronto** (Höheweg 11).

Balmer's Café & Grill (☎ 033 822 1961; www.balmers.ch; Hauptstrasse 23; mains Sfr10-12) The American-style food (think big juicy burgers and greasy fries) served here is quite good and fairly priced, making it an option even if you're not staying at the hostel. The lounge-like atmosphere with wooden tables and a roaring fire is appealing. There's local beer on tap and fondue for Sfr16 per person. The downstairs club, Metro Bar, rocks the house Sunday through Wednesday nights. It gets going after 11pm.

Per Bacco (☎ 033 822 97 92; Rugenparkstrasse 2; mains Sfr12-15; 📍 9am-1am Mon-Sat) With a quaint wine-cellar feel, this sophisticated place has a sophisticated wine list to match. It tends to attract a well-dressed older crowd, but anyone looking for cosy atmosphere, good wine and hearty bowls of yummy pasta won't be disappointed.

Des Alpes (☎ 033 822 2323; Höheweg 115; mains Sfr12-25) With priceless Jungfrau sunset views,

this restaurant is deservedly popular. If the weather is clear at least pop in for a coffee or cocktail. The food is good too, with a variety of Swiss dishes and meat fondue.

Topo'Met (☎ 033 828 66 66; 18th fl, Metropole Hotel, Höheweg 37; buffet from Sfr10.50, mains from Sfr18) Sip on a cocktail and enjoy the sweeping mountain views. Or stop by for an ice-cream sundae, meal or coffee during the day.

Bären (☎ 033 822 7676; Marktgasse 19; mains from Sfr20) *Rösti* and Bratwurst are the house specialties at this locally recommended restaurant. It also does very good fondue, salads with homemade dressing and other delicious Swiss dishes. Sit outside when it's warm.

Golder Anker (☎ 033 822 16; Marktgasse 57; mains Sfr20-40) The junkie, the banker, the tourist and the hotel proprietor – meet them all at the Golder Anker. Rebuilt after the 2005 floods, this well-respected establishment serves interesting dishes, ranging from chicken fajitas and red snapper to ostrich steaks. It also has a roster of live bands and international artists.

Getting There & Away

Main roads go east to Lucerne and west to Bern, but the only way south for vehicles, without a detour around the mountains, is the car-carrying train from Kandersteg, south of Spiez. Trains to Grindelwald (Sfr9.80, 40 minutes, hourly), Lauterbrunnen (Sfr8, 20 minutes, hourly) and Lucerne (Sfr30, two hours, hourly) depart from Interlaken Ost. Trains to Brig (Sfr40, 1½ hours, hourly) and Montreux via Bern (Sfr92, two hours, hourly) leave from either Interlaken West or Ost.

JUNGFRAU REGION

Dominated by the famous Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau (Ogre, Monk and Virgin) mountains, the Jungfrau Region boasts the country's highest density of dramatic scenery. In winter, the Jungfrau is a magnet for skiers and snowboarders, with 200km of pistes. A one-day ski pass for Kleine Scheidegg-Männlichen, Grindelwald-First, or Mürren-Schilthorn costs Sfr56.

From the Lauterbrunnen Valley branches out from Interlaken with sheer rock faces and towering mountains on either side, attracting an army of hikers and mountain bikers. Cowbells echo in the valley and every house

and hostel has a postcard-worthy view. Many visitors choose to visit this valley on a day trip from Interlaken.

Grindelwald

Picturesque Grindelwald was once a simple farming village. Today it's the largest ski resort in the Jungfrau, nestled in a valley under the north face of the Eiger.

Grindelwald tourist office (☎ 033 854 12 12; www.grindelwald.ch in German; 📍 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat, 9am-noon & 2-5pm Sun Jul-Sep, shorter hr & closed Sun btwn seasons) is located in the centre at the Sportzentrum, 200m from the train station.

The First is the main **skiing** area in winter, with runs stretching from **Oberjoch** at 2486m to the village at 1050m. In the summer it caters to **hikers** with 90km of trails about 1200m, 48km of which are open year-round. You can catch the longest **cablcar** in Europe from Grindelwald-Grund to Männlichen, where there are more extraordinary views and hikes (one way/return Sfr29/46).

The cosy wooden chalet housing the excellent **SYHA hostel** (☎ 033 853 10 09; www.youthhostel.ch/grindelwald; Terrassenweg; dm from Sfr31, d from Sfr76; 📍 reception from 3.30pm Mon-Sat, from 5pm Sun) is perched high on a ridge with magnificent views. Avoid the 20-minute slog from the train station by taking the Terrassenweg-bound bus to the Gaggi Säge stop. The hostel closes between seasons.

Near the Männlichen cable-car station, the modern **Mountain Hostel** (☎ 033 854 3838; www.mountainhostel.ch; dm/d with shared bathroom from Sfr35/88; 📍) is a good base for sports junkies. Cyclists are especially welcomed. Rates include free ice-skating and swimming at a nearby facility.

The **Residence** (☎ 033 854 55 55; www.residence-grindelwald.ch; s/d from Sfr90/150; 📍 📞) is in quiet location on the eastern side of the village. Family-run, cosy and modern it has a terrace restaurant and allows you free access to a nearby hotel's swimming pool. There's a terrace restaurant overlooking the Wetterhorn.

On the way out of town, **Onkel Tom's Hütte** (☎ 033 853 52 39; Im Graben 4; pizzas Sfr13-30; 📍 4-10.30pm Tue, noon-2pm & 4pm-midnight Wed-Sun) is an atmospheric place serving good pizzas in three sizes (to suit any appetite). It's very popular and usually requires a wait.

For steaks, sandwiches and burgers along with good views, try **Memory** (☎ 033 854 31 31; mains Sfr15-25) inside the Eiger Hotel. It also does tasty *rösti* and fondue.

Self-caterers can stock up at Coop supermarket opposite the tourist office.

The village is easily reached by road. There is a train to Interlaken Ost (Sfr9.40, 40 minutes, hourly).

Lauterbrunnen

Tiny Lauterbrunnen, with its attractive main street cluttered with Swiss chalet architecture, is friendly and down-to-earth. It's known largely for the impressive **Trümelbach Falls** (admission Sfr10; ☒ 9am-5pm Apr-Nov), 4km out of town, where, inside the mountain, up to 20,000L of water per second corkscrews through a series of ravines and potholes shaped by the swirling waters. A bus from the train station (Sfr3) takes you to the falls.

Camping Jungfrau (☎ 033 856 20 10; adult/tent Sfr9/6, cabins per person Sfr25), at the end of Main St, has excellent facilities and awesome views of towering peaks and sheer cliffs.

Just a two-minute walk from the train station, the **Valley Hostel** (☎ 033 855 20 08; www.valleyhostel.ch; dm/d from Sfr18/44; ☐ ☒ ☒) offers up comfy rooms (many of them have balconies), a communal kitchen and a mellow environment.

When it comes to culinary matters, Lauterbrunnen has few options. Stock up at the Coop near the tourist office, or try the restaurant at the **Hotel Oberland** (☎ 033 855 12 41; Main St; mains from Sfr17). It has a big menu of *rösti*, pasta and salads.

Gimmelwald

Decades ago an anonymous backpacker scribbled these words in the Mountain Hostel's guest book: 'If heaven isn't what it's cracked up to be, send me back to Gimmelwald.' Enough said. When the sun is out in Gimmelwald, the place will take your breath away. Once a secret bolthole for hikers and adventurers looking to escape the region's worst tourist excesses, tiny Gimmelwald is seeing a lot more foot traffic these days. But even increasing crowds can't diminish its scintillating, textbook Swiss scenery and charm.

The hamlet is particularly enchanting in winter, when weathered wooden cha-

lets peep out from a thick blanket of snow and the mountains feel close enough to touch.

After a long summer hike, bed down in the barn at **Esther's Guesthouse** (☎ 033 855 54 88; www.estersguesthouse.ch; barn accommodation Sfr22, s/d with shared bathroom Sfr40/80). Offered June to October, sleeping in the straw is surprisingly comfortable. A generous breakfast of organic food and a shower are included. If you'd rather not roll in the hay, there are lovely rooms in the main house (the place was expanding when we stopped by). If you can't stay, stop in to pick up homemade beef jerky (some of the best we've ever tasted), cheeses and other organic products.

The **Mountain Hostel** (☎ 033 855 17 04; www.mountainhostel.com; dm Sfr23; ☐) recently added an outdoor hot tub, so now you can *literally* soak up their jaw-dropping mountain views. The simple, rustic place does snacks and sells beer, and the super-friendly owners have loads of area tips.

Restaurant-Pension Gimmelwald (☎ 033 855 17 30; mains Sfr18) has hearty cooking, including fondue and farmers' barley soup. Don't miss the 'Gimmelwälder Horse-Shit Balls' for Sfr4. You'll have to visit to find out what they're made from.

To reach Gimmelwald hike up a steep trail (it's sometimes closed in winter due to avalanche danger) for about an hour and a half from Stechelberg or get a lift on the cable car (one way Sfr8). A great way to get to Stechelberg from Lauterbrunnen is to hike along a flat path for about 1½ hours. The trail passes through dramatic scenery. From Mürren, Gimmelwald is a pleasant 40-minute walk downhill, or catch the cable car (one way Sfr8).

Mürren

Arrive in Mürren on a clear evening, when the sun hangs low on the horizon, and you'll think you've died and gone to heaven. The peaks feel so close you're sure you can touch them, and staring slack-jawed at the towering masses of rock (some of the best views in the region) could be considered an activity in itself.

In summer, the **Allmendhubel funicular** (one way/return Sfr12/7.40) takes you above Mürren to a panoramic restaurant. From here, you can set out on many hikes, including

the famous **Northface Trail** (2½ hours), via Schiltalp to the west, which offers outstanding views across the Lauterbrunnen valley. There's also an easier **Children's Adventure Trail** (one hour).

Sleeping options within Mürren include **Eiger Guesthouse** (☎ 033 856 54 60; eigerguesthouse@muerren.ch; dm from Sfr50, d with shared bathroom Sfr120), by the train station, which has a bar, restaurant and games room. There's also **Hotel Edelweiss** (☎ 033 855 13 12; edelweiss@muerren.ch; s/d Sfr95/190), which is perched right on the edge of a cliff and has vertiginous views, particularly through the large windows of its lounge and indoor restaurant. Try for a room with a balcony.

Tham's Snacks & Drinks (☎ 033 856 01 10; mains Sfr15-28; ☒ noon-9pm Jul & Aug) serves Thai, Singaporean, Malaysian and other Asian dishes cooked by a former five-star chef who's literally taken to the hills to escape the rat race. Tham's keeps irregular hours during the low season, so call ahead. Try the Hotel Blumental's rustic **Restaurant La Grotte** (☎ 033 855 18 26; mains Sfr16.50-35) for highly regarded fondues and flambés, although it's becoming slightly touristy in summer. Both it and Tham's are along the lower main thoroughfare.

One of the best parts about Mürren is getting there. From Lauterbrunnen take a cable car to Grütschalp, then switch to the train (Sfr9.40 total). The ride yields tremendous unfolding views across the valley to the Jungfrau, Mönch and Eiger peaks.

Schilthorn

There's a fantastic 360-degree panorama from the 2970m **Schilthorn** (www.schilthorn.ch) one that's possibly even better than from Jungfraujoch. On a good day, you can see from Titlis around to Mont Blanc, and across to the German Black Forest. Yet, some visitors seem more preoccupied with practising their delivery of the line, 'The name's Bond, James Bond', than taking in the 200 or so mountains. That's because a few scenes from *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* were shot here in late 1968/early 1969. You can watch them on a 180-degree panoramic screen at the free **Touristorama** in the cable car building.

The revolving **Piz Gloria Restaurant** (mains Sfr15-35) is really quite amazing. The food

(pasta, burgers, etc) is reasonably priced; and the views come with million-dollar smiles.

In winter there is a gnarly but heavenly **ski run** down to Mürren. You will need to be a pretty advanced rider to try it – it's long and steep and the moguls can be massive. If you know what you are doing, however, you will have a blast – think deep powder and places to catch lots of air. A day pass to Schilthorn-Mürren costs Sfr65 (you won't have to pay again for the cable cars).

If you are not skiing, you will need a Sfr115 excursion trip (Half-Fare Card and Swiss Pass, 50% off, Eurail Pass 25%) going to Lauterbrunnen, Grütschalp, Mürren, Schilthorn and returning through Stechelberg to Interlaken. A return from Lauterbrunnen (via Grütschalp), and Mürren costs about Sfr100, as does the journey up and back via the Stechelberg cable car.

Jungfraujoch

The train trip to Jungfraujoch (3454m) is touristy and expensive, but you do it anyway because (a) it's generally an once-in-a-lifetime experience and (b) you have to see it for yourself. Plus, there is a reason why about two million people a year visit this, the highest train station in Europe. On a clear day the outlook is indisputably spectacular. Good weather is essential so call ☎ 033 855 10 22 for taped forecasts in multiple languages before leaving.

From Interlaken Ost the journey is 2½ hours each way (Sfr169 return). Trains go via Grindelwald or Lauterbrunnen to Kleine Scheidegg. From here the line is less than 10km long but took 16 years to build. Opened in 1912, the track powers through both the Eiger and the Mönch, pausing briefly for travellers to take happy snaps of views from two windows blasted in the mountainside, before terminating at Jungfraujoch.

There's a cheaper 'good morning ticket' of Sfr145 if you can drag yourself out of bed for the early train (6.35am from Interlaken) and leave the summit by noon. From 1 November to 30 April the discount applies to the 6.35am and 7.35am trains, and there's no noon restriction. Eurail pass-holders get 25% off, Swiss Pass holders slightly more.

NORTHERN SWITZERLAND

This region is left off most people's Switzerland itineraries, which is why you should visit. Sure, it is known for industry and commerce, but it also has some great attractions. Breathe in the sweet (okay slightly stinky) odours of black-and-white cows as you roll through the bucolic countryside. Take time to explore the tiny rural towns set among green rolling hills and on Lake Constance (Bodensee) and the Rhine River on the German border.

BASEL

pop 161,800

Visit Basel in the summer. Strangely, given its northerly location, the city has some of the hottest weather in the country. When the mercury starts rising the city sheds its notorious reserve and just cuts loose. As locals bob along in the fast-moving Rhine (Rhein) River, cool off in the city's numerous fountains, whiz by on motor scooters and dine and drink on overcrowded pavements, you could almost be in Italy, rather than on the dual border with France and Germany.

Basel's (Bâle in French) idyllic old town and many enticing galleries and museums are top draws at any time of year. The famous Renaissance humanist, Erasmus of Rotterdam, was associated with the city and his tomb rests in the cathedral.

Orientation & Information

The pedestrian-only old town and most popular sights are all on the south bank in Grossbasel (Greater Basel). **Internet Pub** (☎ 084 489 19 91; Steintorstrasse 11; per hr Sfr8; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Thu, to 8pm Fri, to 5pm Sat) is a smoky joint where you can down a beer and surf the Web. The **main post office** (Rudengasse 1; ☎ 7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) is in the city centre. The **main tourist office** (☎ 061 268 68 68; www.baseltourismus.ch; Stadtcasino, Barfüsserplatz; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) is at this address until 2007; afterwards check the website for new office location. There is another branch of the **tourist office** (☎ 061 268 68 68; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun) at the train station.

Sights & Activities

With its cobbled streets, colourful fountains, medieval churches and stately buildings, the old town is a wonderful place to wander. In Marktplatz check out the impressive rust-coloured **Rathaus** (town hall), with frescoed courtyard. The 12th-century **Münster** (cathedral), southeast from Marktplatz, is another highlight, with Gothic spires and Romanesque St Gallus doorway.

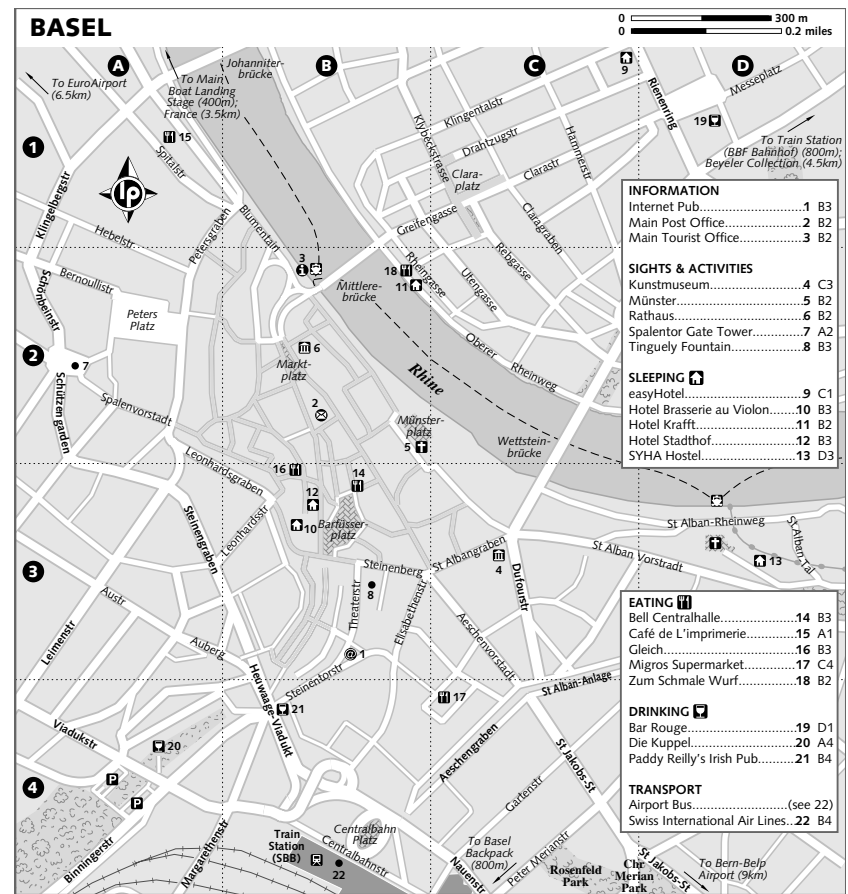
Theaterplatz is a crowd-pleaser, with a curious **fountain**, designed by Swiss sculptor Jean Tinguely. His madcap scrap-metal machines perform a peculiar water dance, delighting children and weary travellers alike. Also check out the 700-year-old **Spalentor** gate tower, a remnant of the town's old city walls, with a massive portal and grotesque gargoyles.

Art lovers should head to the **Kunstmuseum** (☎ 061 206 62 62; www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch; St Albangraben 16; adult/student Sfr10/5, free 1st Sun of month; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). It holds the largest art collection in Switzerland, including works by Klee and Picasso.

Of the private Swiss art collections made public, Hildy and Ernst Beyeler's is probably the most astounding. In the **Beyeler Collection** (☎ 061 645 97 00; www.beyeler.com; Baselstrasse 101; adult/student/child under 10 Sfr21/12/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Thu-Tue, to 8pm Wed) the quality of the 19th- and 20th-century paintings is matched only by the way Miró and Max Ernst sculptures are juxtaposed with similar tribal figures. All are fabulously displayed in Italian architect Renzo Piano's open-plan building. Take tram 6 to Riehen.

Festivals & Events

Basel makes much of its huge **Fasnacht** spring carnival, even though many people prefer Lucerne's exuberant celebrations. The festival kicks off at 4am exactly on the Monday after Ash Wednesday with the **Morgestraich**. The streetlights are suddenly extinguished and the large procession starts to wend its way through the central district. Participants wear elaborate costumes and masks, restaurants and bars stay open all night and the streets are packed with revellers. The main parades are on the Monday and Wednesday afternoons, with Tuesday afternoon reserved for the children's parade.



Sleeping

Hotels are often full during Basel's numerous trade fairs and conventions, so book ahead.

easyHotel (www.easyhotel.com; Riehenring 109; r from Sfr30; ☎) What's plastic and orange and cheap all over? Yep, after the no-frills airline easyJet, here's the second instalment in Stelios Haji-Ioannou's hotel empire. Rooms are functional, clean, modern and, if not especially aesthetically appealing, slightly better than in the London outlet. Variable pricing sees costs rise at busy times (up to Sfr140 when we looked, but could go above that). Book well ahead, and if possible get a room with air-conditioning so you won't have to open a window on to the noisy street.

Basel Backpack (☎ 061 333 00 37; www.baselbackpack.ch; Dornacherstrasse 192; dm Sfr31, s/d/f Sfr80/96/144; ☎) This friendly independent hostel in a converted factory building has cheerful, colour-coded eight-bed dorms and more sedate doubles and family rooms. Breakfast is extra.

SYHA hostel (☎ 061 278 97 39; www.youthhostel.ch/basel; St Alban Kirchrain 10; dm Sfr35, s/d from Sfr80/82; ☎) This is the older of the two official hostels in town, less conveniently but more attractively located in a quiet, leafy spot.

Hotel Stadthof (☎ 061 261 87 11; www.stadthof.ch; Gerbergasse 84; s/d with shared bathroom Sfr80/120; ☎) Tucked into a corner of buzzing Barfüsserplatz, this hotel has rudimentary but

very clean rooms. Its bar and restaurant do a roaring trade. Book ahead.

Hotel Brasserie au Violon (☎ 061 269 87 11; www.au-violon.com; Im Lohnhof 4; s/d from Sfr100/150) The doors are one of the few remaining hints that quaint, atmospheric Au Violon was once a prison. Its understated rooms are decently sized (most comprise two former cells) and decorated in relaxing neutral tones. The hotel overlooks the city from its quiet, leafy hilltop location and has a well-respected restaurant.

Hotel Krafft (☎ 061 690 91 30; www.hotelkrafft.ch; Rheingasse 12; s/d from Sfr145/230) The renovated Krafft will appeal to design-savvy urbanites. Sculptural modern chandeliers have been added to its creaky-floored dining room overlooking the Rhine, and minimal tea bars (all stainless steel, grey and Japanese teapots) now adorn each landing of the spiral stairs. Rooms have a tasteful 1950s retro feel and classic furniture from the likes of Charles and Ray Eames. The river bank is popular at night, however, so in summer this won't suit light sleepers.

Eating

For a quick, cheap bite on the run, the daily market on Marktplatz has tasty Bratwurst (Sfr5) and delicious breads (Sfr3 to Sfr7). Alternatively, there's pedestrian-only Steinenvorstadt, with its countless fast-food outlets, cafés and restaurants.

Zum Schmale Wurf (☎ 061 683 33 25; Rheingasse 10; mains Sfr10-30) Delicious smells and an air of intergenerational bonhomie waft over this Italian antipasto, pasta and meat heaven on the river. Lunch menus (Sfr18.50) occasionally branch out into global cuisine, with *merguez* (French spicy beef) sausages or jambalaya.

Café de l'imprimerie (☎ 061 262 36 06; St Johans Vorstadt 19; 2-course menu Sfr14.50-16.50) An unpretentious bistro offering filling meals at affordable prices; locals like to lounge over pint at the sturdy wood tables.

Gleich (☎ 061 261 48 83; Leonhardsberg 1; mains Sfr18) Anticarnivores cherish the large vegetarian menu and minimalist décor at this longtime favourite haunt.

For self-caterers, there's the local **Migros** (Sternengasse 17). Or for a huge selection of organic local produce (including 200 different cheeses) try the **Bell Centralhalle** (cnr Streitgasse & Weisse Gasse).

Drinking & Entertainment

In Steinenvorstadt, there's a string of cinemas with latest-release movies. There's also a bar/café/restaurant to suit every taste.

Bar Rouge (☎ 061 361 30 31; Messeplatz 10) This plush red bar with panoramic views from the 31st floor of the *Messturm* (or convention tower) is the city's most memorable. Hipsters and (early on weekday evenings) a few suits come to appreciate the regular DJs and films. It closes for parts of July and August, so ring ahead then.

Paddy Reilly's Irish Pub (☎ 061 281 33 36; Steinentorstrasse 45; mains Sfr5-12.50) This pub entices expats with Brit beers and big-screen TV. It's a cosy spot to kick back with a Guinness and watch the sport.

Die Kuppel (☎ 061 270 99 39; www.kuppel.ch; Binningerstrasse 14) An atmospheric wooden dome, with a dance floor and cocktail bar, in a secluded park; salsa, soul, house and '70s/'80s are regularly on the bill.

Getting There & Away

By motorway, the E25/E60 heads from Strasbourg and passes by the EuroAirport, and the E35/A5 hugs the German side of the Rhine.

The **EuroAirport** (BSL or MLH; www.euroairport.com), 5km northwest of town, in France, is the main airport for Basel.

Basel is a major European rail hub with two main train stations, the SBB and the BBF (on the northern bank). The SBB has two sections, one servicing destinations within Switzerland, and the SNCF section, which services France. Trains to Germany leave from the BBF station.

Destinations include Paris (Sfr69, five hours, seven times daily). Local trains to the Black Forest stop only at BBF, though fast EC services stop at SBB, too. Main destinations along this route are Amsterdam (Sfr180, eight hours, daily), Frankfurt (Sfr80, three hours, daily) and Hamburg (Sfr198, 6½ hours, daily). Services within Switzerland leave from SBB. There are fast trains to Geneva (Sfr71, three hours, twice hourly) and Zürich (Sfr30, 70 minutes, twice hourly).

Getting Around

For the EuroAirport catch bus No 50 from in front of the SBB Station (Sfr6.60). City buses and trams run every six to 10 minutes

(Sfr1.80 for four or fewer stops, Sfr2.80 for central zone, or Sfr8 for a day pass). By the SBB station is a hut offering free bike loans in summer.

SCHAFFHAUSEN

pop 32,900

On the northern bank of the Rhine, Schaffhausen has a quaint medieval old town, filled with beautiful oriel windows, painted façades and ornamental fountains. It's a pleasant day trip from Zürich.

Schaffhausen tourist office (☎ 052 625 51 41; tourist@swissworld.com; Fronwagurturm; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat, to 4pm Sat & 10am-1pm Sun Jun-Aug) is in the heart of the old town.

The best views around are found at the 16th-century hilltop **Munot fortress** (admission free; ☎ 8am-10pm May-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct-Apr). The summit is a 15-minute walk from the centre of town. **Rheinfall** (Rhine Falls) is a 40-minute stroll westward along the river, or take bus 1 to Neuhausen. Though the drop is only 23m, the waterfall is considered the largest in Europe, with an extraordinary amount of water thundering over it. The 45km of the Rhine from Schaffhausen to Constance is one of the river's most stunning stretches. It passes by meadows, castles and ancient villages, including **Stein am Rhein**, 20km to the east, where you could easily wear out your camera snapping pictures of the buildings in the picture-perfect Rathausplatz.

The **SYHA hostel** (☎ 052 625 88 00; fax 052 624 59 54; Randenstrasse 65; dm Sfr24; ☎ Mar-Oct) is in an impressive 16th-century former manor house (although the place does smell a bit musty). Take bus No 3 to Breite. The **Fischerzunft** (☎ 052 632 05 05; www.fischerzunft.ch; Bahnhofstrasse 46; s/d from Sfr142/215), one of Switzerland's most opulent hotels away from the big city, has a subtle Oriental theme, with printed silks in the bedrooms and a sinfully expensive restaurant (menus up to Sfr265!).

Check out **Fass-Beiz** (☎ 052 625 46 10; Webergasse 13; dishes Sfr7.50-25) for food and drinks. An alternative bar-café, it has a laid-back atmosphere and serves tasty sit-down dishes with an excellent vegetarian selection. There are music gigs and theatre performances in the cellar below.

Schaffhausen has good roads in all directions. Trains run to Zürich (Sfr17.20, 50 minutes, hourly).

APPENZELLERLAND

Just as Tasmania is to Australians and Appalachia to Americans, Appenzellerland is the butt of many a Swiss joke – its people the country's bumpkins, reputedly slow on the uptake. The roots of this backward reputation are fairly easy to divine. To use just one example, Innerhoden, one of the two semicantons that make up Appenzellerland, unusually still holds a yearly open-air parliament and it didn't permit women to vote until 1991. Even then, the Supreme Court had to intervene.

In a general sense, however, many foreigner visitors find the Appenzellers' devotion to rural tradition immensely charming and just what they expected from Switzerland. Appenzellerland has beautiful villages, mostly untouched by modern times. Life moves along at an enviable relaxed pace – the contented locals may know more than they are credited with.

The pastel hued village of **Appenzell** is a feast both for the eyes and the stomach. Behind the highly decorative façades of its traditional Swiss buildings lie numerous cafés, confectioneries, cheese shops, delicatessens, butchers and restaurants all offering local specialities. (Inevitably, given Appenzell's popularity with guided bus tours, there are plenty of shops selling tacky trinkets, too.)

It's suitable for lunch and a wander on a Sunday afternoon, or you could come for longer and explore the surrounding hills. Whichever you choose, remember to come hungry and with enough space in your luggage for chocolate, cheese and alcoholic souvenirs.

The train station is 400m from the town centre. The **tourist office** (☎ 071 788 96 41; www.appenzellerland.ch in German; Hauptgasse; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 2-4pm Sat) is in the centre.

Gasthaus Traube (☎ 071 787 14 07; www.hotel-traube.ch; s Sfr85-110, d Sfr150-180; ☎ closed Feb) is the most charming place to sleep in town (look for it just off Landsgemeindeplatz behind Hotel Santis). The rooms are small, but feature wooden beds and new bathrooms with sliding frosted glass doors. The on-site restaurant feels like a traditional tavern and serves good fondue.

There is a train to St Gallen (Sfr12, 30 minutes, twice hourly).

SWITZERLAND DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Switzerland caters to all budgets – you can camp, sleep in a barn, stay in a hostel or live it up in a five-star hotel. However, prices may seem steep at even the most inexpensive places compared with other parts of Europe. Tourist offices always have brochures listing prices and facilities of local accommodation.

Hostels, hotels and pensions most often include breakfast in their price, and while many rooms are tiny, most are of quite high standard and almost all include wonderful feather duvets. In budget places breakfast is basic: generally just a beverage with bread rolls, cheese spread, butter and jam.

Most hostels and budget hotels have two classes of rooms – cheaper rooms with shared bathroom and shower facilities and more expensive rooms with private bathroom. For budget rooms expect to pay under Sfr100, while midrange places will set you back anywhere from Sfr100 to Sfr200. Top-end places will cost anything from Sfr200.

Barns

When their cows are out to pasture in the summer, Swiss farmers have habitually put their empty barns to good use, allowing travellers to sleep in them for a very small fee of about Sfr20. It's a unique experience that disappoints few. **Aventure sur la paille** (☎ 041 678 1286; www.aventure-sur-la-paille.ch) produces a booklet listing participating farmers.

Hostels

Switzerland has two types of hostels: official Swiss Youth Hostels (SYHA), affiliated with Hostelling International (HI), where nonmembers pay an additional 'guest fee' of Sfr6, and the independent hostels. Independent hostels tend to be more charismatic and better bets for solo travellers or anyone looking to meet other backpackers. Prices listed in this book for SYHA hostels do not include the guest fee. On average a dorm bed in either type of hostel costs between Sfr20 and Sfr30.

ACTIVITIES

There are dozens of ski resorts throughout the Alps, the pre-Alps and the Jura, and some 200 different ski schools. Equipment hire is available at resorts and ski passes allow unlimited use of mountain transport.

There is simply no better way to enjoy Switzerland's spectacular scenery than to walk through it. There are 50,000km of designated paths, often with a convenient inn or café located en route. Yellow signs marking the trail make it difficult to get lost, and each provides an average walking time to the next destination. Slightly more strenuous mountain paths have white-red-white markers. The **Schweizer Alpen-Club** (SAC; ☎ 031 370 1818; www.sac-cas.ch in German; Monbijousstrasse 61, Bern) maintains huts for overnight stays at altitude and can also help with extra information.

Lonely Planet's *Walking in Switzerland* contains track notes for walking in the Swiss countryside.

You can water-ski, sail and windsurf on most lakes. And there are more than 350 lake beaches. Rafting is possible on many Alpine rivers, including the Rhine and the Rhône.

Bungee jumping, paragliding, canyoning and other high-adrenaline sports are widely available throughout Switzerland, especially in the Interlaken area.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most shops are open from 8am to 6.30pm Monday to Friday, with a 90-minute or two-hour break for lunch at noon. In towns there's often a late shopping day till 9pm, typically on Thursday or Friday. Closing times on Saturday are usually 4pm or 5pm. At some places, such as large train stations, you may find shops are open daily. Banks are open 8.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday, with some local variations. Eating and drinking establishments are open for lunch and dinner unless otherwise noted in our reviews.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Swiss Embassies & Consulates

For a comprehensive list of Swiss embassies overseas, visit www.eda.admin.ch.

Australia (☎ 02-6162 8400; www.eda.admin.ch/australia/; 7 Melbourne Ave, Forrest, Canberra, ACT 2603)

Canada (☎ 613-235 1837; www.eda.admin.ch/canada/; 5 Marlborough Ave, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 8E6)

Ireland (☎ 01-218 6382; www.eda.admin.ch/dublin/; 6 Ailesbury Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

New Zealand (☎ 04-472 1593; vertretung@wel.rep.admin.ch; 22 Panama St, Wellington)

South Africa (☎ 012-452 06 60; www.eda.admin.ch/pretoria/; 225 Veale St, Parc Nouveau, New Muckleneuk 0181, Pretoria)

UK (☎ 020-7616 6000; www.eda.admin.ch/london/; 16-18 Montague Pl, London W1H 2BQ)

USA (☎ 202-745 7900; www.eda.admin.ch/washington/; 2900 Cathedral Ave NW, Washington DC 20008-3499)

Embassies & Consulates in Switzerland

All embassies are found in Bern. Consulates can be found in several other cities, particularly in Zürich and Geneva. Australia and New Zealand have no embassy in Switzerland, but each has a consulate in Geneva. Most of Bern's embassies are located southeast of the Kirchenfeldbrücke. For a comprehensive list, go to www.eda.admin.ch.

Australia (☎ 022 799 91 00; www.australia.ch; Chemin des Fins 2, Grand-Saconnex, Geneva)

Austria (☎ 031 356 52 52; bern-ob@bmaa.gv.at; Kirchenfeldstrasse 77-79, Bern)

Canada (Bern ☎ 031 357 32 00; www.canada-ambassade.ch; Kirchenfeldstrasse 88; Geneva ☎ 022 919 92 00; 5 Ave de l'Ariana)

France (Bern ☎ 031 359 21 11; www.ambafranch-ch.org; Schosshaldenstrasse 46; Geneva ☎ 022 319 00 00; www.consulfrance-geneve.org; 11 Rue J Imbert Galloix)

Germany (Bern ☎ 031 359 41 11; www.deutsche-botschaft.ch; Willadingweg 83; Basel ☎ 061 693 33 03; Schwarzwaldallee 200)

Ireland (☎ 031 352 14 42; Kirchenfeldstrasse 68, Bern)

Italy (☎ 031 350 07 77; Elfenstrasse 14, Bern)

Netherlands (☎ 031 350 87 00; www.nlembassy.ch; Kollerweg 11, Bern)

New Zealand (☎ 022 929 03 50; Chemin des Fins 2, Grand-Saconnex, Geneva)

UK (Bern ☎ 031 359 77 00; www.britain-in-switzerland.ch; Thunstrasse 50; Geneva ☎ 022 918 24 00; Rue de Vermont 37-39; Zürich ☎ 01 383 65 60; Hegibachstrasse 47)

USA (Bern ☎ 031 357 70 11; <http://bern.usembassy.gov>; Jubiläumsstrasse 93; Geneva ☎ 022 840 51 60; Rue Versonnex 7; Zürich ☎ 043 499 29 60; Dufourstrasse 101)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Many events take place at a local level throughout the year (check with the local tourist offices as dates often vary from year to year). Following is just a brief selection.

February

Fasnacht A lively spring carnival of wild parties and parades is celebrated countrywide, but with particular enthusiasm in Basel and Lucerne.

March

Combats de Reines From March to October, the lower Valais stages traditional cow fights known as the Combats de Reines.

April

Landsgemeinde On the last Sunday in April, the people of Appenzel gather in the main square to take part in a unique open-air parliament.

July

Montreux Jazz Festival Big-name rock/jazz acts hit town for this famous festival (www.montreuxjazz.com) held during the first two weeks of July.

August

National Day On 1 August, celebrations and fireworks mark the country's National Day.

Street Parade Zürich lets its hair down in the second week of August with an enormous techno parade with 30 lovemobiles and more than half a million excited ravers.

October

Vintage Festivals Down a couple in wine-growing regions such as Neuchâtel and Lugano in early October.

November

Onion Market Bern takes on a carnival atmosphere for a unique market day held on the fourth Monday of November.

December

L'Escalade This historical festival held in Geneva on 11 December celebrates deliverance from would-be conquerors.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Attitudes toward homosexuality are reasonably tolerant in Switzerland and the age of consent is 16. Zürich has a lively gay scene and hosts the Christopher Street Day march in late June. It is also home to **Cruiser magazine** (www.cruiser.ch in German), which lists significant gay and lesbian organisations, and has extensive listings of bars and events in Switzerland (Sfr4.50).

Take a look at **Pink Cross** (www.pinkcross.ch in German) for more insights into gay life in Switzerland.

HOLIDAYS

New Year's Day 1 January

Easter March/April – Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Monday

Ascension Day 40th day after Easter

Whit Sunday & Pentecost 7th week after Easter

National Day 1 August

Christmas Day 25 December

St Stephen's Day 26 December

INTERNET RESOURCES

Switzerland has a strong presence on the Internet, with most tourist-related businesses having their own website; a good place to start is **Switzerland Tourism** (www.switzerland.com), with many useful links.

LANGUAGE

Located in the corner of Europe where Germany, France and Italy meet, Switzerland is a linguistic melting pot with three official federal languages: German (spoken by 64% of the population), French (19%) and Italian (8%). A fourth language, Rhaeto-Romanic, or Romansch, is spoken by less than 1% of the population, mainly in the canton of Graubünden. Derived from Latin, it's a linguistic relic that has survived in the isolation of mountain valleys. Romansch was recognised as a national language by referendum in 1938 and given federal protection in 1996.

English-speakers will have few problems being understood in the German-speaking parts. However, it is simple courtesy to greet people with the Swiss-German *grüezi* and to inquire *Sprechen Sie Englisch?* (Do you speak English?) before launching into English.

In French Switzerland you shouldn't have too many problems either, though the locals' grasp of English probably will not be as good as the German-speakers'. Italian Switzerland is where you will have

the greatest difficulty. Most locals speak some French and/or German in addition to Italian. English has a lower priority, but you'll still find that the majority of hotels and restaurants have at least one English-speaking staff member.

MONEY

Swiss francs (Sfr, written CHF locally) are divided into 100 centimes (called *rappen* in German-speaking Switzerland). There are notes for 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500 and 1000 francs, and coins for five, 10, 20 and 50 centimes, and one, two and five francs.

All major travellers cheques and credit cards are accepted. Nearly all train stations have currency-exchange facilities open daily. Commission is not usually charged for changing cash or cheques but it's gradually creeping in. Shop around for the best exchange rates. Hotels usually have the worst rates.

There are no restrictions on the amount of currency that can be brought in or taken out of Switzerland.

There's no need to tip in Switzerland, unless you feel the service was really superlative. Tips are included in meal prices.

ATMs are widespread throughout the country.

POST

Postcards and letters to Europe cost Sfr1.30/1.20 priority/economy; to elsewhere they cost Sfr1.80/1.40. The term *poste restante* is used nationwide or you could use the German term, *Postlagernde Briefe*. Mail can be sent to any town with a post office and is held for 30 days; show your passport to collect mail. Amex also holds mail for one month for people who use its cheques or cards.

Post office opening times vary but typically they are open from 7.30am to noon and from 2pm to 6.30pm Monday to Friday and until 11am Saturday.

TELEPHONE

The privatised Swisscom is the main telecommunications provider. The minimum charge in Swisscom payphones is Sfr0.60, though per-minute rates are low. Swisscom charges the same rate for national or local calls. During the day it's Sfr0.08 per minute, and during evenings and weekends it drops

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- **Ambulance** ☎ 144
- **Fire** ☎ 118
- **Motoring breakdown assistance** ☎ 140
- **Police** ☎ 117
- **REGA air rescue** ☎ 1414

to Sfr0.04. Regional codes no longer exist in Switzerland. Although the numbers for a particular city or town all start with the same two or three digits (for example Zürich ☎ 01, Geneva ☎ 022), numbers must always be dialled in full (ie always include telephone codes), even when you're calling from within the same town.

International call prices have dropped substantially in recent years. A standard-rate call to the USA/Australia/UK costs Sfr0.12/0.25/0.12 per minute. Standard rates apply on weekdays (day or night), and there are reduced rates on weekends and public holidays. Many telephone boxes no longer take coins; the prepaid *taxcard* comes in values of Sfr5, Sfr10 and Sfr20, and is sold in post offices, kiosks and train stations.

You can purchase a SIM card from Swisscom for your mobile phone as well as prepaid cards. Calls are not cheap, however. The SIM card costs about Sfr40 and then calls are almost Sfr1 per minute, although they're cheaper at nights and weekends. Mobile service in Switzerland is generally excellent – even in the mountains.

Hotels can charge as much as they like for telephone calls, and they usually charge a lot, even for direct-dial calls.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Local tourist offices are extremely helpful. They have reams of literature to give out, including maps (nearly always free). Offices can be found everywhere tourists are likely to go and will often book hotel rooms and organise excursions. If you are staying in resorts, ask the local tourist office whether there's a Visitor's Card, which is excellent for discounts.

Switzerland Tourism also sells the **Swiss Museum Passport** (www.museumspass.ch; adult/stu-

dent Sfr30/25), which will save you big bucks if you plan to visit more than a handful of museums. Note that if you've purchased a Swiss Pass, entrance to all Swiss museums is free.

VISAS

Visas are not required for passport holders from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, the UK or the USA. A maximum three-month stay applies, although passports are rarely stamped.

TRANSPORT IN SWITZERLAND

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

The busiest international airports are **Unique Zürich** (ZUR; ☎ 043 816 22 11; www.uniqueairport.com) and **Geneva International Airport** (GEN; ☎ 022 717 71 11; www.gva.ch/en), each with several nonstop flights a day to major transport hubs such as London, Paris and Frankfurt. Most international airlines fly into Switzerland, as do a few budget operators. EasyJet offers regular services from London to/from Basel and Geneva, while bmibaby flies from East Midlands, in the UK, to Geneva. Switzerland's international carrier is Swiss International Airlines (known as Swiss).

Airport departure taxes are always included in the ticket price.

Air Berlin (code AB; ☎ 084 873 78 00; www.airberlin.com)

Air France (code AF; ☎ 01 439 18 18; www.airfrance.com)

American Airlines (code AA; ☎ 01 654 52 57; www.americanairlines.com)

bmibaby (code BD; ☎ 041 900 00 13 00; www.bmibaby.com)

British Airways (code BA; ☎ 0848 845 845; www.britishairways.com)

Delta Airlines (code DL; ☎ 0800 55 20 36; www.delta.com)

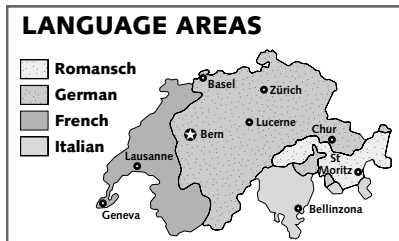
easyJet (code EZ; ☎ 0848 888 222; www.easyjet.com)

flybe (code BEE; ☎ 1392 268 500; www.flybe.com)

Helvetic (code OAW; ☎ 043 557 90 99; www.helvetic.com)

Lufthansa (code LH; ☎ 01 447 99 66; www.lufthansa.com)

SkyEurope (code NE; ☎ 043 557 90 99; www.skyeurope.com)



Swiss International Airlines (code LX; ☎ 0848 853 00 00; www.swiss.com)

United Airlines (code UA; ☎ 01 212 47 17; www.united.com)

Lake

Lake steamers from Germany and Austria traverse Lake Constance (Bodensee) to Switzerland. For boat information contact the operators based in Switzerland (☎ 071 463 34 35), Austria (☎ 055 744 28 68) or Germany (☎ 075-3128 1398).

From Italy you can catch a steamer across Lake Maggiore into Locarno. Contact **Navigazione Lago Maggiore** (NLM; ☎ 084 881 11 22, 091 751 18 65) for more information.

France can be reached from Geneva via Lake Geneva (Lac Léman); contact **Compagnie Générale de Navigation** (CGN; ☎ 022 08 48 81 18 48) for more information.

Land

BUS

With such cheap flights available, there are few people who travel to Switzerland by bus these days. **Eurolines** (☎ 090 057 37 47; www.eurolines.com) has services to Eastern Europe, Austria, Spain, Germany and Portugal, but distances are long.

If you want to visit several countries by bus, the UK-based **Busabout** (☎ in UK 020 7950 1661; www.busabout.com) operates summer services from Bern to Paris, and from Lauterbrunnen (for Interlaken) to Paris and Venice. See the Busabout website for details. Prices start at UK£219 for a two-week consecutive pass.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Roads into Switzerland are good despite the difficulty of the terrain, but special care is needed to negotiate mountain passes. Some, such as the N5 route from Morez (France) to Geneva, are not recommended if you have not had previous mountain-driving experience.

Upon entering Switzerland you will need to decide whether you wish to use the motorways (there is a one-off charge of Sfr40). Arrange to have some Swiss francs ready, as you might not always be able to change money at the border. Better still, pay for the tax in advance through Switzerland Tourism or a motoring organisation. The sticker (called a *vignette*) you receive is valid for a

year and must be displayed on the wind-screen. A separate fee must be paid for trailers and caravans (motorcyclists must pay too). Some Alpine tunnels incur additional tolls.

TRAIN

Located in the heart of Europe, Switzerland is a hub of train connections to the rest of the Continent. Zürich is the busiest international terminus. It has two direct day trains and one night train to Vienna (nine hours). There are several trains daily to both Geneva and Lausanne from Paris (three to four hours by superfast TGV). Travelling from Paris to Bern takes 4½ hours by TGV. Most connections from Germany pass through Zürich or Basel. Nearly all connections from Italy pass through Milan before branching off to Zürich, Lucerne, Bern or Lausanne. Reservations on international trains are subject to a surcharge of Sfr5 to Sfr30, which depends upon the date and the service.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Internal flights are not of great interest to most visitors, owing to the short distances and excellent ground transport. **Swiss International Air Lines** (www.swiss.com) is the local carrier, linking major towns and cities several times daily, including Zürich, Geneva, Basel, Bern and Lugano.

Bicycle

Despite the hilly countryside, many Swiss choose to get around on two wheels. You can hire bikes from most train stations (adult/child Sfr30/25 per day) and return to any station with a rental office, though this incurs a Sfr6 surcharge. Bikes can be transported on most trains; SBB (the Swiss rail company) rentals travel free (maximum five bikes per train). If you have your own wheels you'll need a bike pass (one day Sfr15, with Swiss travel pass Sfr10). Local tourist offices often have good cycling information. Bern, Basel, Geneva and Zürich offer free bike loans from their train stations.

Bus

Yellow postbuses are a supplement to the rail network, following postal routes and

PASSES & DISCOUNTS

Swiss public transport is an efficient, fully integrated and comprehensive system, which incorporates trains, buses, boats and funiculars. Convenient discount passes make the system even more appealing.

The **Swiss Pass** (www.swisstravelsystem.ch) is the best deal for people planning to travel extensively, offering unlimited travel on Swiss Federal Railways, boats, most Alpine postbuses, and trams and buses in 35 towns. Reductions of 25% apply to funiculars and mountain railways. These passes are available for four days (Sfr262), eight days (Sfr362), 15 days (Sfr430), 22 days (Sfr495) and one month (Sfr545); prices are for 2nd-class tickets. The **Swiss Flexi Pass** allows free, unlimited trips for three to eight days within a month and costs Sfr270 to Sfr460 (2nd class). With either pass, two people travelling together get 15% off. Both passes now allow you free admission to all Swiss museums, making them an even better bargain.

The **Swiss Card** allows a free return journey from your arrival point to any destination in Switzerland, 50% off rail, boat and bus excursions, and reductions on mountain railways. It costs Sfr165 (2nd class) or Sfr240 (1st class) and it is valid for a month. The **Half-Fare Card** is a similar deal minus the free return trip. It costs Sfr99 for one month.

Except for the Half-Fare Card, these passes are best purchased before arrival in Switzerland from **Switzerland Tourism** (www.myswitzerland.com) or a travel agent. The **Family Card** gives free travel for children aged under 16 if they're accompanied by a parent and is available free to pass purchasers.

There are also passes valid for any four days of unlimited travel in Switzerland and either Austria or France (Sfr391) within two months.

linking towns to the more inaccessible regions in the mountains. In all, routes cover some 8000km of terrain. Services are regular, and departures tie in with train arrivals. Postbus stations are next to train stations, and offer destination and timetable information.

Car

The **Swiss Touring Club** (Touring Club der Schweiz; ☎ 022 417 27 27; www.tcs.ch; Chemin de Blandonnet, Case postale 820, CH-1214, Venier/Geneva) is the largest motoring organisation in Switzerland. It is affiliated with the AA in Britain and has reciprocal agreements with motoring organisations worldwide.

You do not need an International Driving Licence to operate a vehicle in Switzerland. A licence from your home country is sufficient. There are numerous petrol stations and garages throughout Switzerland if you break down.

For the best deals on car hire you have to prebook. Some of the lowest rates are found through **Auto Europe** (www.autoeurope.com). One-way drop-offs are usually free of charge within Switzerland, although a collision-damage waiver costs extra.

Be prepared for winding roads, high passes and long tunnels. Normal speed

limits are 50km/h in towns, 120km/h on motorways, 100km/h on semimotorways (designated by roadside rectangular pictograms showing a white car on a green background) and 80km/h on other roads. Mountain roads are well-maintained but you should stay in low gear whenever possible and remember that ascending traffic has the right of way over descending traffic, and postbuses always have right of way. Snow chains are recommended during winter. Use dipped lights in *all* road tunnels. Some minor Alpine passes are closed from November to May – check with the local tourist offices.

Switzerland is tough on drink-driving; if your blood alcohol level is over 0.05% you face a large fine or imprisonment.

Train

The Swiss rail network covers 5000km and is a combination of state-run and private lines. Trains are clean, reliable, frequent and as fast as the terrain will allow. Prices are high, and if you plan on taking more than one or two train trips it's best to purchase a travel pass (above). All fares quoted in this chapter are for 2nd class; 1st-class fares are about 65% higher. All major stations are connected by hourly departures,

but services stop from around midnight to 6am.

Most train stations offer luggage storage, either at a counter (usually Sfr5 per piece) or in 24-hour lockers (Sfr2 to Sfr7). They also have excellent information counters that give out free timetable booklets and

advise on connections. Train schedules are revised yearly, so double-check details before travelling. For train information, consult the excellent website for the **Schweizerische Bundesbahnen** (SBB; www.sbb.ch) or call ☎ 090 030 03 00 (Sfr1.19 per minute).