

Switzerland

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Jungfrau Region** Gargantuan mountain vistas and white-knuckle adrenalin adventures abound in this gorgeous area (p1139)
- **Zermatt** Moody alpine scenery and ski slopes at the base of the Matterhorn (p1131)
- **Zürich** This city is elegant and sedate during the day and a positive party at night (p1133)
- **Best journey** Riding the cable car to the top of the Schilthorn, checking out the million-dollar views over a quick lunch at its revolving restaurant then skiing the mountain's gnarly front down to breathtaking Mürren (p1139)
- **Off-the-beaten track** Soaking up seriously sexy ambience sipping wine at a lakeside café in Switzerland's sultry Italian canton, Ticino (p1131)

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 41,285 sq km (similar to the Netherlands)
- **ATMs** Available everywhere
- **Budget** Sfr40 to Sfr60 per day, excluding transport
- **Capital** Bern
- **Famous for** cheese, the Matterhorn, clocks, banking
- **Money** Swiss franc (Sfr); A\$1 = Sfr0.93; CA\$1 = Sfr1.10; €1 = Sfr1.57; ¥100 = Sfr1.04; NZ\$1 = Sfr0.80; UK£1 = Sfr2.34; US\$1 = Sfr1.22
- **Languages** French, German, Italian, Romansch
- **Population** 7.4 million
- **Phrases** *gruezi* (hello, good day), *merci vielmal* (thank you very much), *adieu* (goodbye), *sprechen sie Englisch?* (do you speak English?)



- **Telephone Codes** country code ☎ 41; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 1
- **Visas** No visa required for citizens of the EU, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa

TRAVEL HINT

Drinking before a toast is unforgivable and will lead to seven years of bad sex... or so the superstition goes.

ROAMING SWITZERLAND

Start in Bern, then hit Zermatt, Interlaken and the Jungfrau region, Lucerne and Zürich. Extra time? Explore Ticino.

If they decide to shoot *Switzerland: The Movie*, count on Heidi playing the innocent heroine, but we'll bet it's James Bond, and not Peter, cast in the sexy hero role. Just because it's easy to envision rosy-faced goat herders yodelling to a melody of clinking cowbells, don't assume the Swiss are as straight-laced as they seem. After all, *this* is the country that brought you absinthe

and LSD, and is known as much for secret bank accounts as for fondue and droopy-roofed chalets.

Melting in your mouth as smoothly as its rich chocolates, Switzerland is an easy country to get addicted to. Not only does it offer the kind of natural beauty Hollywood filmmakers salivate over, it also dishes up enough adrenalin-pumping fuel to keep your inner junkie satisfied for weeks (think out-of-this-world hiking to flying through the sky on a pair of manmade wings). Winter or summer, there's always something to do, be it splashing out at an ultraglam celebrity-heavy ski resort like St Moritz or partying in the more down-to-earth mountain hamlet of Zermatt.

HISTORY

In 1291 the forest communities of Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden formed an alliance that is seen as the origin of the Swiss Confederation. The Swiss began seizing more land, but finally over-reached themselves. Defeated by a superior force of French and Venetians, they declared neutrality. Swiss mercenaries continued to serve in other armies for centuries, earning an unrivalled reputation for skill and courage.

The French invaded in 1798, but following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, Switzerland gained full independence. In 1848 the Swiss agreed upon a new federal constitution. Having achieved political stability, Switzerland could concentrate on economic and social matters.

The Swiss carefully guarded their neutrality during the world wars, and emerged with an expanded (and rising) commercial, financial and industrial base. Zürich developed as an international banking centre, and many international bodies based their headquarters in Geneva. An independent commission of historians has confirmed that tens of thousands of Jewish refugees were rejected from Switzerland's border during WWII and left to face their fate in Nazi Germany. Swiss banks were accused of banking Nazi plunder and Holocaust victims' accounts during WWII. After years of recriminations and a threatened lawsuit, two Swiss banks made a settlement of US\$1.25 billion to Holocaust victims' families in 1998.

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 Gotthard Tunnel within 12 months all prompted intense soul-searching. The year 2005 was also devastating. Floods washed through the country causing several deaths and an estimated Sfr2 billion damage.

Switzerland became the 190th member of the UN in 2002. In 2005 (effective 2007) it joined Europe's 'Schengen' passport-free travel zone 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 doesn't look like it will become one anytime soon.

THE CULTURE

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.

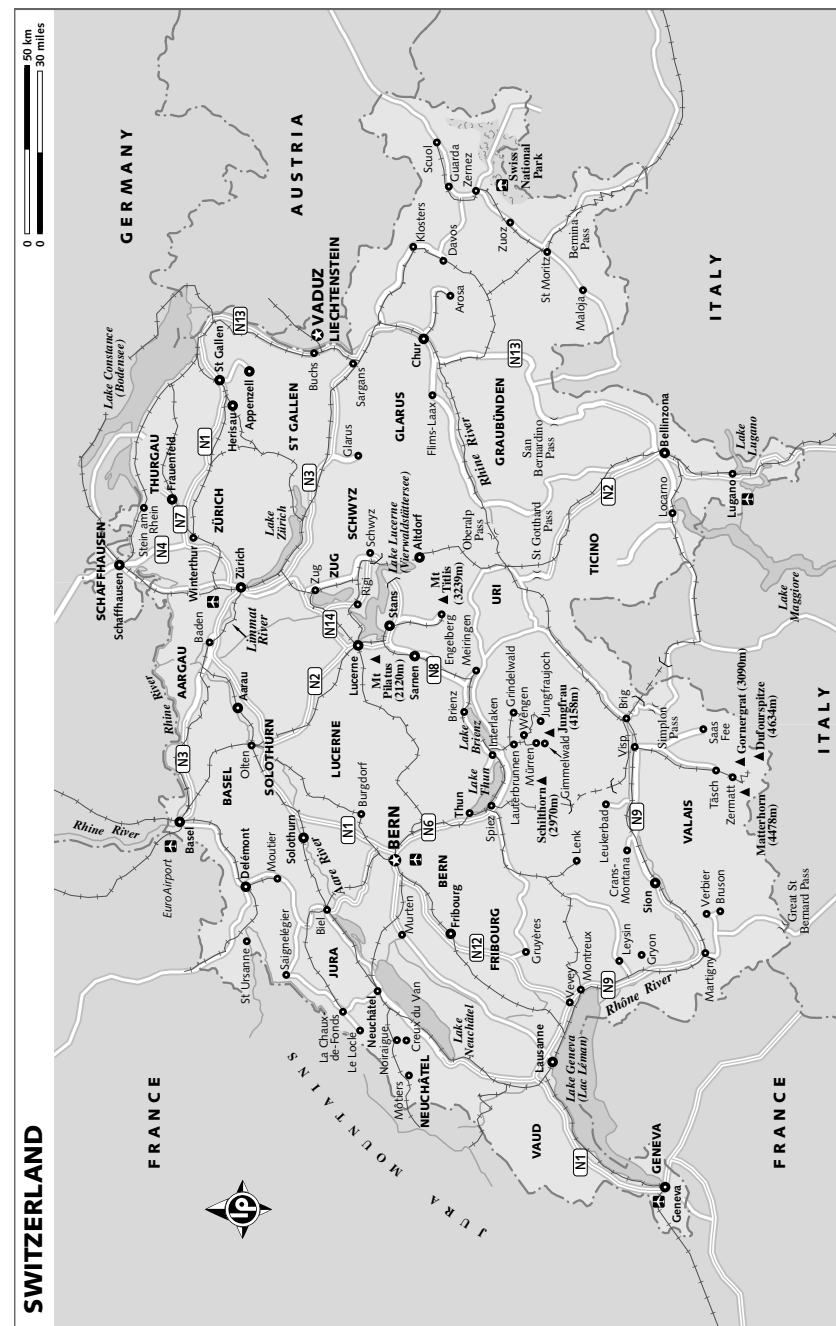
Living quietly with your neighbours is a national obsession and there are strict rules about noise levels. Good manners infuse the national psyche and politeness is the cornerstone of all social intercourse. Always shake hands when being introduced to a Swiss, and kiss on both cheeks to greet and say goodbye to friends. Don't forget to greet shopkeepers when entering shops.

Most locals are of Germanic origin, and this is shown in the breakdown of the four national languages. German speakers account for around 64% of the population, French 19%, Italian 8% and Romansh under 1%. Around 20% of the country's residents are non-Swiss citizens.

ENVIRONMENT

Mountains make up 70% of Switzerland's 41,285 sq km. The Alps occupy the central and the southern regions of the country. The Dufourspitze (4634m), a peak on the Monte Rosa Massif, is the highest point, although the Matterhorn (4478m) is more famous.

Glaciers account for an area of 2000 sq km, most notably the Aletsch Glacier, which at 23km long is the largest in Europe. The St Gotthard Massif, in the centre of Switzerland, is the source of many lakes and rivers, such as the Rhine and the Rhône. The Jura Mountains straddle the border with France, and peak at



READING UP

Johanna Spyri's *Heidi* is probably the story most readily associated with Switzerland, but novelists of all sorts have used the country as a backdrop. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* had its genesis in Switzerland, with much of the action set around Lake Geneva. Shelley wrote the story when she was a neighbour of Lord Byron, who in turn penned the poem *The Prisoner of Chillon*.

around 1700m. Between the two mountain systems is the Mittelland, 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.

Despite this, scientists at the University of Zürich said in 2004 that Switzerland's glaciers had shrunk by a fifth in the last 15 years and they predict 70% will disappear in the next 30 years, as a result of global warming. In 2005 the Aletsch Glacier shrank by 66m, while the Trift Glacier retreated a massive 216m.

TRAVEL PASSES & DISCOUNTS

Swiss public transport is highly efficient and incorporates trains, buses, boats and funiculars. If you're planning on travelling extensively in the country, especially if you don't have a European rail pass, it's best to invest in a local discount pass. In any case, while Eurail passes allow you to travel on Swiss national railways at no extra cost, they are not valid on the postbuses, city transport, some private rail lines or the cable cars. This is unfortunately the case in the super-popular Jungfrau region.

The Swiss Pass offers 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 (Sfr260), eight days (Sfr360), 15 days (Sfr440), 22 days (Sfr495) and one month (Sfr545). The Swiss Flexi Pass allows free, unlimited trips for three (Sfr230) and eight days (Sfr440) within a month. With either pass, two people travelling together get 15% off.

The Swiss Card (one month Sfr185) 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. The Half-Fare Card (one month Sfr105) is a similar deal minus the free return trip.

Book your Swiss Pass at **Switzerland Tourism** (www.myswitzerland.com) before your trip and score a discount.

TRANSPORT

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Most international airlines fly into Switzerland. Zürich and Geneva are the two busiest international airports. The budget market changes frequently, so keep an eye out for new entrants and beware that current players might abandon certain routes.

Air Berlin (code BB; ☎ 0848 737 800; www.airberlin.com)

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

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

German Wings (code 4U; www.germanwings.com)

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

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

Bus

Bus services are available with **Eurolines** (☎ 0900 573 747; www.eurolines.com) to Eastern Europe, Austria, Spain, Germany and Portugal, but distances are long. The UK-based **Busabout** (☎ 020-7950 1661; www.busabout.com) operates summer services from Bern to Paris, and from Lauterbrunnen (for Interlaken) to Paris and Venice.

Car & Motorcycle

Roads into Switzerland are good, but special care is needed to negotiate mountain passes.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

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

To use the Swiss motorways you will need to purchase a *vignette* for Sfr40. This sticker is valid for one year and must be displayed on the windscreen.

Train

Switzerland is a hub for train travel to the rest of the continent. Zürich is the busiest international terminus with trains to Austria, Germany and Italy, among other destinations. There are several trains daily to Geneva and Lausanne from Paris.

GETTING AROUND

Bicycle

Bikes can be hired from most train stations (adult/child Sfr30/25 per day) and returned to any station with a rental office for an extra Sfr6. Bikes can be transported on most trains; SBB (the Swiss rail company) rentals travel free. If you have your own wheels, you'll need a bike pass (one day Sfr15, with Swiss travel pass Sfr10).

Bus

Yellow postbuses are a supplement to the rail network and link the more inaccessible regions. Services are regular, and departures tie in with train arrivals. Postbus stations are next to train stations.

Car

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 often free, but collision-damage waiver costs extra.

Train

Trains are clean, reliable, frequent and as fast as the terrain allows. They're costly: if you plan on taking more than one or two trips and don't have a European rail pass, it's best to purchase a travel pass (see opposite). All major

stations are linked by hourly departures, but services stop from around midnight to 6am. For train information, consult **Schweizerische Bundesbahnen** (SBB; www.rail.ch) or call ☎ 0900 300 300 (Sfr1.19 per minute).

BERN

pop 122,900

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 day.

INFORMATION

Contact ☎ 0900 576 747 for help locating a doctor or dentist.

Bern Tourismus (☎ 031 328 12 28; www.berninfo.com; ☎ 9am-8.30pm Jun-Sep, 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat & 10am-5pm Sun Oct-May) Inside the train station. There's another tourist office by the bear pits.

Internet Pub (☎ 031 313 81 91; Aarberggasse 46; per hr Sfr7.50; ☎ 9am-11pm) Internet access, with a fully stocked bar and a groovy atmosphere.

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

Police (☎ 031 321 21 21)

Stauffacher (☎ 031 311 24 11; Neuengasse 25; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat) English-language titles available at this bookshop.

University Hospital (☎ 031 632 21 11; Freiburgstrasse)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Bern is a great city to explore on a budget – a lot of impressive stuff is free.

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

SWITZERLAND

SWITZERLAND

BERN

A	INFORMATION	1 F4 Austrian Embassy	2 C2 Bern Tourism	3 F4 British Embassy	4 F4 Canadian Embassy	5 F3 Dutch Embassy	6 D2 Internet Pub	7 F4 Irish Embassy	8 F4 Italian Embassy	9 C2 Main Post Office	10 C2 Staufacher	11 F2 Tourist Office			
1	SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	12 F2 Bärengraben (Bear Pits)	13 E2 Einstein Haus	14 D4 Marzli Swimming Pools	15 E3 Münster (Cathedral)	16 D2 Ogge fountain	17 D2 Zeitglockenturm (Clock Tower)	18 D2 Hotel Glocke Backpackers	19 F2 Hotel Landhaus	20 F2 Altes Tramdepot	21 F2 Cesary	22 D2 Il Grissino	23 C2 Markt-halle	24 D2 Migros	25 D4 Dampfzentrale
2	SLEEPING	26 C1 Gaskessel (see 14)	27 C2 Quasimodo (see 18)	28 C1 Reitschule	29 C2 Reitschule	30 C1 Reitschule	31 C1 Reitschule	32 C1 Reitschule	33 C1 Reitschule	34 C1 Reitschule	35 C1 Reitschule	36 C1 Reitschule	37 C1 Reitschule	38 C1 Reitschule	39 C1 Reitschule
3	EATING	40 C1 Reitschule	41 C1 Reitschule	42 C1 Reitschule	43 C1 Reitschule	44 C1 Reitschule	45 C1 Reitschule	46 C1 Reitschule	47 C1 Reitschule	48 C1 Reitschule	49 C1 Reitschule	50 C1 Reitschule	51 C1 Reitschule	52 C1 Reitschule	53 C1 Reitschule
4	DRINKING	54 C1 Reitschule	55 C1 Reitschule	56 C1 Reitschule	57 C1 Reitschule	58 C1 Reitschule	59 C1 Reitschule	60 C1 Reitschule	61 C1 Reitschule	62 C1 Reitschule	63 C1 Reitschule	64 C1 Reitschule	65 C1 Reitschule	66 C1 Reitschule	67 C1 Reitschule
	ENTERTAINMENT	68 C1 Reitschule	69 C1 Reitschule	70 C1 Reitschule	71 C1 Reitschule	72 C1 Reitschule	73 C1 Reitschule	74 C1 Reitschule	75 C1 Reitschule	76 C1 Reitschule	77 C1 Reitschule	78 C1 Reitschule	79 C1 Reitschule	80 C1 Reitschule	81 C1 Reitschule
	TRANSPORT	82 C1 Reitschule	83 C1 Reitschule	84 C1 Reitschule	85 C1 Reitschule	86 C1 Reitschule	87 C1 Reitschule	88 C1 Reitschule	89 C1 Reitschule	90 C1 Reitschule	91 C1 Reitschule	92 C1 Reitschule	93 C1 Reitschule	94 C1 Reitschule	95 C1 Reitschule

bright beaded necklaces, or a hide-away bar of the trendiest proportions.

Classic, but not to be missed, stops on your conventional map include the **ogge fountain**, in Kornhausplatz, depicting a giant enjoying a meal of wriggling children. The **Zeitglockenturm** 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) features an imposing, 12m-high, stained-glass window.

Just across the Aare River are the **Bärengraben** (Bear Pits). Although bears have been the entertainment at this site since 1857, it's really depressing to see such majestic beasts in such a cramped, concrete environment – this author had to turn away pretty quick.

Paul Klee Centre

Forming a wave on the outskirts of town, 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-Sun, 10am-9pm Thu), is Bern's Guggenheim. The main exhibition space showcases 4000 rotating works from Paul Klee's prodigious and often playful career. Interactive computer displays built into the seating mean you get the low-down on all the artist's major pieces.

Einstein Museum

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) was given a facelift to celebrate the centenary of the physicist's theory of relativity, developed here. Numerous multimedia displays flesh out the story of the subsequent general equation – $E=mc^2$.

Swimming

In summer the open-air **Marzli pools** (www.aaremarzli.ch; admission free; ☞ May-Sep), beside the **Aare River**, are the perfect place to get a tan. 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.

SLEEPING

Bern has budget options in stumbling distance of its eateries and bars.

Camping Eichholz (☎ 031 961 26 02; www.campingeichholz.ch; Strandweg 49; camp site/person/car

GETTING INTO TOWN

A bus links Belp airport to the train station (Sfr14, 20 minutes), and is coordinated with flight arrivals and departures. The train station is on the western edge of the Old Town and just a few minutes' walk from all the main sights.

Sfr9/7.50/3.50, per person bungalow from Sfr18; ☞ May-Sep; ☞ Camp sites are comfortable (not too rocky) and nestled by the river. The bungalows are basic but cosy. Take tram 9 to Wabern.

EATING

Wall-to-wall cafés and restaurants line popular Bärenplatz and Theaterplatz.

Migros (Markt-gasse 46; mains Sfr3-7) A supermarket that also has a cheap self-service restaurant with an international menu.

Markthalle (Bubenbr-platz 9; mains 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; mains Sfr5-15; ☞ 11.30am-2pm & 6pm-midnight Tue-Fri, 6pm-2am Sat) Organic meat and lots of vegetarian options are offered at this spot in the semichaotic surrounds of Reitschule (see p1126).

Cesary (☎ 031 318 93 83; Kornhausplatz 11; mains Sfr15-30) After work it's all about the suits and ties at this trendy new Italian restaurant, 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.

Altes Tramdepot (☎ 031 368 14 15; Am Bärengraben; mains Sfr15-25) This cavernous brewery is a Bern favourite, serving Swiss specialities along with a variety of international dishes. The atmosphere is as inviting as the cuisine.

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).

DRINKING & CLUBBING

Bern has a hip nightlife, with lots of bars and clubs to choose from. Clubs get going after 10pm.

SPLURGE!

Hotel Landhaus (☎ 031 331 41 66; www.landhausbern.ch; Altenbergstrasse 4; dm Sfr30, d/f from Sfr140/180, with shared bathroom from Sfr110; ☒ ☒) The stall-like dorms are 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.

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

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

Dampfzentrale (☎ 031 311 63 37; Marzilistrasse 47) This refined performing arts centre combines jazz, funk and soul music gigs with avant-garde art exhibitions and dance.

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.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Postbuses depart from the western side of the train station. There are train connections to most Swiss cities and major towns, including Geneva (Sfr47, 1¼ hours, hourly), Basel (Sfr34, 70 minutes, hourly), Interlaken (Sfr23, 50 minutes, hourly) and Zürich (Sfr45, 70 minutes, hourly).

Bus and tram tickets cost Sfr1.90 (maximum six stops) or Sfr2.80.

From May to October there is free daily city-bike hire from outside the train station. Bring ID and 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 Canton**, the country's northwest corner proffers a wealth of sights and escapes well off the beaten track, yet still an easy day trip from Bern.

It was in the deepest darkest depths of Couvet in the **Val de Travers** – otherwise dubbed the Pays des Fées (Fairyländ) – that absinthe was first distilled in 1740 and produced commercially in 1797. 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 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 *fée verte* (green fairy) from valley-grown wormwood. Mix one part crystal-clear liqueur with five parts water to make it green.

Val de Travers also attracts hikers, who come 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 round-trip hike can take up to five hours depending on the route.

IT ALL HAPPENED IN SWITZERLAND

- Albert Einstein came up with his theories of relativity, including the $E=mc^2$ formula, while working in Bern.
- Switzerland gave birth to the World-wide Web at the acclaimed CERN research institute outside Geneva.
- Val de Travers, near Neuchâtel, claims to be the birthplace of the mythical green alcohol, absinthe.
- Chemist Albert Hofmann was using LSD to conduct migraine cure tests in Basel in 1943 when he accidentally absorbed the compound through his fingertips and became the first man to trip on acid.

LAKE GENEVA REGION

Stretching like a liquid mirror east from Geneva and south to France is Europe's largest lake, known to most as Lake Geneva, and to Francophones as Lac Léman.

GENEVA (GENÈVE, GENF, GINEVRA)
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 the cosmopolitan city of bankers, diplomats and transients likes to boast that 'it belongs not so much to Switzerland as to the world'. Which rings pretty true – it's home to the UN, WHO, International Red Cross, International Labour Organisation and so on.

Information

Cantonal Hospital (☎ 022 372 33 11; Rue Micheli-du-Crest 24; ☒ 24hr)

Currency-exchange office (Gare de Cornavin;

☒ 6.50am–7.40pm Mon–Sat, 6.50am–6.40pm Sun)

Genève Tourism (☎ 022 909 70 00; www.geneve-tourisme.ch; Rue du Mont-Blanc 18; ☒ 10am–6pm Mon, 9am–6pm Tue–Sat) For tourist information.

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

Medical information (☎ 111)

Police station (☎ 117; Rue de Berne 6)

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

Video club (☎ 022 731 47 48; Rue des Alpes 19; per hr Sfr5; ☒ 11am–midnight Mon–Thu, 11–2am Fri & Sat, noon–midnight Sun) Internet access.

Sights & Activities

Old Town sights to check out include **Île Rousseau**, home to a statue honouring the celebrated free thinker. The part-Romanesque,

part-Gothic **Cathédrale St Pierre**, where John Calvin preached from 1536 to 1564, is just off Grand-Rue. Geneva's most visible landmark is the **Jet d'Eau**, in the lake. Calling this a fountain is an understatement. The water shoots up with incredible force to create a 140m-high plume.

At the Art Deco **Palais des Nations** (☎ 022 907 48 96; Ave de la Paix 9–14; adult/student Sfr8.50/6.50; ☒ 9am–6pm Jul–Aug, 10am–noon & 2–4pm Apr–Jun & Sep–Oct, 10am–noon & 2–4pm Mon–Fri Nov–Mar; ☒ 5 or 8), the European arm of the UN, you can see where decisions about world affairs are made on the hour-long tour (bring your passport). Afterwards don't miss the extensive gardens and the towering grey titanium monument donated by the USSR to commemorate the conquest of space.

The **International Red Cross & Red Crescent Museum** (☎ 022 748 95 25; Ave de la Paix 17; admission free; ☒ 10am–5pm Wed–Mon; ☒ 5 or 8) 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, the noble aims of the organisation are set. Plus it's free.

Sleeping

Camping Pointe à la Bise (☎ 022 752 12 96; Chemin de la Bise 19; camp sites per adult/tent/car Sfr7.50/7/6.50; ☒ Apr–Oct; ☒ E) Camping spots in an appealing lakeshore location.

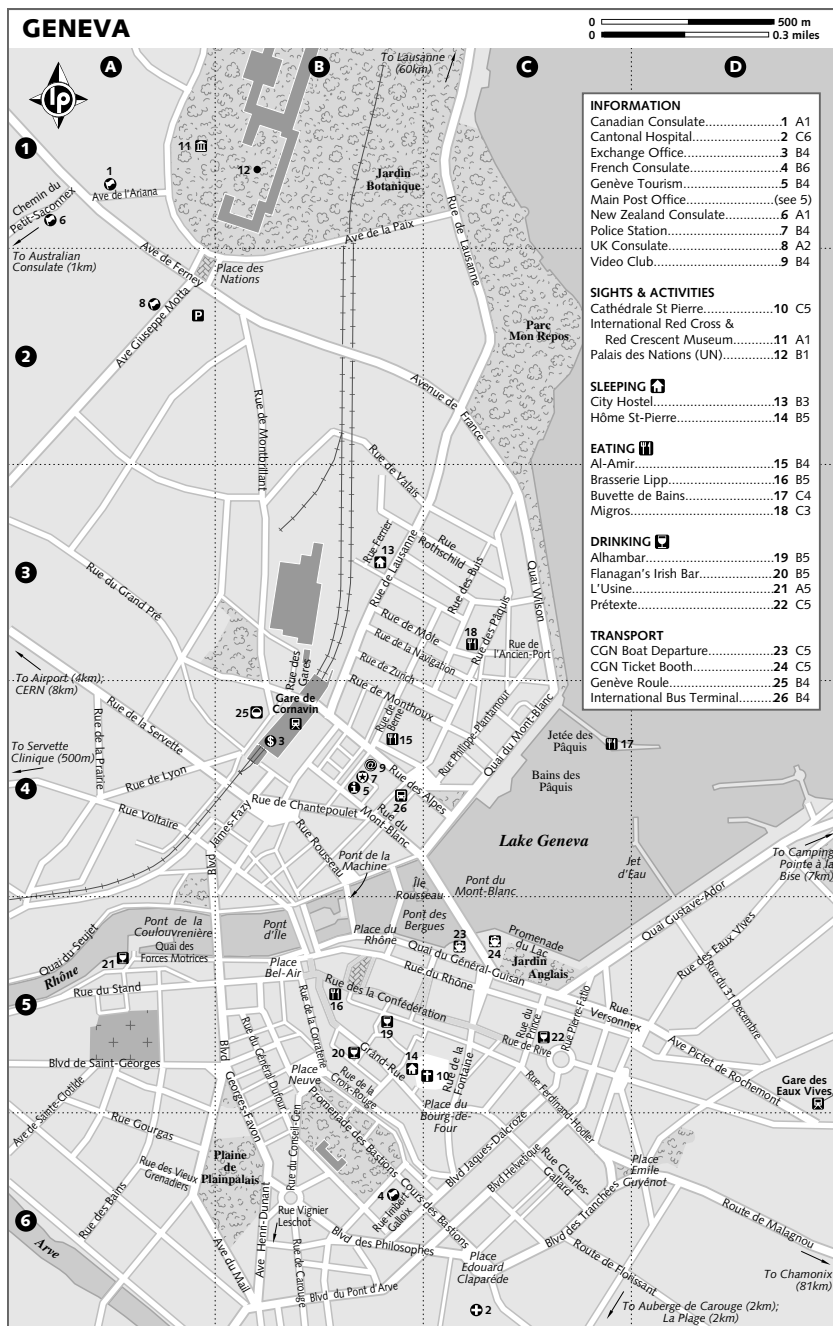
Hôte St-Pierre (☎ 022 310 37 07; www.homestpierre.ch; Cour St-Pierre 4; dm Sfr27, s/d with shared bathroom Sfr40/60; ☒) This women-only hostel sees a lot of returning guests, little wonder considering its amazing views from the rooftop terrace and cosy home-away-from-home persona.

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.

Eating

Migros (Rue des Pâquis; ☒ 8am–7pm Mon–Fri, 8am–6pm Sat) Self-caterers can stock up at the Migros, where you'll also find baguettes (Sfr2) and sandwiches (Sfr3.60) in its self-service restaurant.

Buvette des Bains (☎ 022 738 16 16; Quai du Mont-Blanc 30; admission to jetty adult Sfr2, 6–15yr Sfr1; dishes Sfr6–14; ☒ 8am–11pm, sometimes reduced in winter) The rather scruffy snack bar at the legendary



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Pâquis baths attracts some bankers with its *champagne fondue au crémant* (Sfr20, from 6pm), but the rest of the fare is very reasonable. In summer nothing beats sipping wine from a plastic glass on this jetty in Lake Geneva, while others swim nearby. In winter there's a *hammam*, too.

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

Drinking & Clubbing

The latest events and live gigs are covered in the *Genève Agenda*, which you can pick up for free from the tourist office.

Alternatively, you can just take an evening stroll around the Quartier des Pâquis (wedged between the train station and the lake), which is packed full with pubs and bars.

Alhambra (☎ 022 314 13 13; 1st fl, Rue de la Rôtisserie 10) With a hubbub feel, an eclectic music programme and the best Sunday brunch there is in town, Alhambra offers 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, this pub keeps the Guinness flowing well into the wee hours.

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

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 in town.

Getting There & Around

Geneva airport has frequent connections to each major European city.

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 of the steamer include Lausanne (Sfr30, 3½ hours, hourly) and Montreux (Sfr42, 4½ hours, hourly).

Both Eurail and Swiss passes are valid on CGN boats or you can purchase CGN boat day passes for Sfr55.

International buses depart from Place Doreière. Destinations include London (Sfr145, 17 hours, twice weekly) and Barcelona (Sfr100, 10 hours, twice weekly).

Train connections include Zürich (Sfr76, three hours, hourly), Interlaken (Sfr63, three hours, hourly), Paris (Sfr103 by TGV, 3½ hours, eight times daily), Hamburg (Sfr280, 10 hours, at least daily), Milan (Sfr81, four hours, at least daily) and Barcelona (Sfr100, nine hours, at least daily).

Genève Roule (☎ 022 740 13 43; www.geneveroule.ch; Place de Montbrillant 17; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun), next to the train station, has free daily bike use from May to October. Bring ID and a Sfr50 deposit.

Public transport is excellent. A day pass costs Sfr6.

LAUSANNE

pop 118,200

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.

The **tourist office** (☎ 021 613 73 21; www.lausanne-tourisme.ch; Place de la Navigation 4; ☎ 9am-6pm) is located next door to the Ouchy metro station.

Sights & Activities

The **Musée de L'Art Brut** (☎ 021 647 54 35; www.artbrut.ch, in German; Ave de Bergières 11; adult/student Sfr6/4; ☎ 11am-1pm & 2-6pm Tue-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat & Sun) is perhaps the most alluring museum in Switzerland. It has a fascinating amalgam of 15,000 works of art created by psychiatric patients, eccentrics and incarcerated criminals.

Another must-see is the Gothic **Cathédrale de Notre Dame** (☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-7pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, closes 5.30pm Oct-Mar), arguably the finest in Switzerland.

If you're in the mood to shred, make sure you check out Lausanne's acclaimed indoor **skatepark** (☎ 021 626 37 93; Ave de Sévelin 36; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun), with 1700 sq metres of mini ramps, bowls, street courses and half-pipes. Call ahead if you need gear. Take the metro to Flon and get off at the first stop (Vigie).

Sleeping

You will need to catch a bus from Place St François to reach most of the budget digs in Lausanne.

Camping de Vidy (☎ 021 622 50 00; www.campinglausannevidy.ch; Chemin du Camping 3; camp site/tent/car Sfr7.80/12/3.50; 🚻 2 from Place St François) This camping ground is located on the lake just to the west of the Vidy sports complex. Sites are well maintained and it's popular with families.

Lausanne Guesthouse & Backpacker (☎ 021 601 80 00; www.lausanne-guesthouse.ch; Chemin des Epinettes 4; dm Sfr35, s/d with shared bathroom Sfr81/88; 🚻 📺) A tastefully renovated 1894 townhouse perched high on a hill with stunning views. The garden terrace is great for chilling and meeting other backpackers.

Jeunotel SA (☎ 021 626 02 22; www.jeunotel.ch; Chemin du Bois-de-Vaux 36; dm Sfr30, s/d with shared bathroom Sfr60/80; 🚻 📺) The cheaper rooms feel dismal with exposed cinderblock walls, but the place caters to young Swiss and the bar can become lively at night.

Eating & Drinking

Café de Grancy (☎ 021 616 86 66; Ave du Rond Point 1; mains Sfr20; 🍷 Wed-Mon) A hip hang-out with floppy lounges in the front, wi-fi and a tempting restaurant out the back. Wednesday is fondue night.

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. Students and travellers dig its organic dishes and animated vibe. At night come to this café for drinks.

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.

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.

Mad – Moulin a Danse (☎ 021 312 11 22; www.mad.ch, in French; Rue de Genève 23; admission Thu-Sun Sfr20; 🍷 Wed-Sun) A popular club that is generally packed out on the weekends. The downstairs cellar bar has free admission every Wednesday. On Sunday the club hosts Trixx Club for gays and lesbians.

Getting There & Around

There are trains to Geneva (Sfr18.80, 50 minutes, three hourly), Bern (Sfr30, 70 minutes, one or two hourly) and Interlaken Ost (Sfr52, two hours, two hourly). For boat services, see p1129 in the Geneva section.

MONTREUX

pop 22,800

The showpiece of the Swiss Riviera has been an inspiration to writers, artists and musicians for centuries, and past 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** (☎ 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* in the 19th century.

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.

On the waterfront, **Auberge de Jeunesse** (☎ 021 963 49 34; Passage de l'Auberge 8, Territet; dm from Sfr32; 🍷 mid-Feb–mid-Nov) has a cheery atmosphere. Dorms come with as few as two beds. Catch bus 1 from the train station.

La Rose des Sables (☎ 021 961 15 46; Ave des Alps; mains from Sfr3; 🍷 lunch) serves inexpensive sandwiches, croissants and quiches, and has a mouthwatering chocolate selection.

There are trains to Geneva (Sfr26, 70 minutes, hourly) and Lausanne (Sfr9.80, 25 minutes, three hourly).

GRYON & LEYSIN

Leave the beaten track and soak up the Swiss Alpine experience in untouristy **Gryon** (1130m). The fantastic **Swiss Alp Retreat** (☎ 024 498 33 21; www.gryon.com; Chalet Martin; dm/d from Sfr18/52; 📺 📺) 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 get here take a train from Lausanne to the neighbouring town of Bex (Sfr18, 40 minutes, hourly), 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.

Tranquil **Leysin** attracts skiers, snowboarders, hikers and meditators. In a 19th-century guesthouse the **Hikings Sheep** (☎ 024 494 35 35; www.hikingsheep.com; dm/d with shared bathroom from Sfr27/74; 🚻 📺) is another favourite with backpackers. It has breathtaking views from its balconies, a pine-forested back yard and great vibes. Don't miss the hammocks. All sorts of activities can be arranged. Reach Leysin by cogwheel train from nearby Aigle (Sfr8.40, 30 minutes, hourly); there are trains to Aigle from Lausanne (Sfr29, 30 minutes, hourly).

VALAIS (WALLIS)

It's pretty hard not to be seduced by 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.

ZERMATT

pop 5500

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

Zermatt is small and car-free, but tiny electric taxis and vans whisk guests about. Bahnhofstrasse is the main street, but street names aren't used. **Zermatt Tourismus** (☎ 027 966 81 00; www.zermatt.ch; 🍷 8.30am-noon & 1.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) is beside the train station.

Activities

Arguably the country's best ski resort, **Zermatt Bergbahnen** (☎ 027 966 01 01; http://bergbahnen.zermatt.ch/e; lift ticket winter/summer Sfr72/60, ski & boot hire Sfr45) caters mainly to intermediate and expert riders. One ski region, the Klein Matterhorn, provides access to the most extensive summer ski region in Switzerland and the highest skiing on the Continent.

In summer Zermatt is a **hiking** paradise with 400km of trails offering spectacular views. Take a cable car up and hike or bike down the slopes. A day lift pass for cyclists costs Sfr54. To climb the Matterhorn you'll need prior climbing experience, a week's preparation and a staggering Sfr1120 per person. The ascent and descent takes eight hours. For more details, visit the

Alpin Center (☎ 027 966 24 60; www.zermatt.ch/alpincenter; Bahnhofstrasse; 🍷 8.30am-noon & 4-7pm Jul-Sep, 5-7pm Jan-mid-May) near the post office. It arranges a myriad of other adventure sports.

Sleeping, Eating & Drinking

Be warned that many hotels and restaurants close between seasons.

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

Papperla 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 left over after the day on the slopes.

Restaurant Weisshorn (☎ 027 967 57 52; Am Bach 6; mains Sfr15-30; 🍷 mid-Jun–Sep & mid-Nov–Apr) The garish mural of Chichenitza, the Mexican temple, contrasts with the orange glowing Matterhorn table lamps. The food range is just as odd, from nachos and *quesadillas* to fondue.

Getting There & Around

Trains depart from Brig, stopping at Visp en route (one way/return Sfr37/65, 80 minutes, hourly). Swiss Passes are valid but there is no discount for Eurail pass holders. Zermatt is car-free. You need to park at Täsch (from Sfr5.50 per day) and take the train (Sfr8.60). Parking is free near the Visp train station if you take the Zermatt train.

TICINO (TESSIN)

The Mediterranean air is hot and spicy, the attitude laid-back, with cafés in the colourful piazzas buzzing under a brilliant blue sky. 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 that defies the stereotypes.

South of the Alps, Ticino (Tessin in German) enjoys an unmistakable Italian flavour, and Italian is the official language. Although not technically in Ticino, we've included the resort towns of St Moritz and Flims-Laax in this section because of their proximity.

LOCARNO

pop 14,400

A rambling red enclave of Mediterranean-style houses, piazzas and arcades ending at the northern end of Lake Maggiore, Locarno enjoys more hours of sunshine than anywhere else in Switzerland.

Piazza Grande is the town's centre. Gulp shots, smoke Cuban cigars and check emails at the **Pardo Bar** (☎ 091 752 21 23; Via della Motta 3; per hr Sfr20; ☎ 11am-1am). The **tourist office** (☎ 091 751 03 33; locarno@ticino.com; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is in the casino complex.

Don't miss the formidable **Madonna del Sasso**, with its panoramic views of the lake and town. It features a church with 15th-century paintings, a small museum and several distinctive statues.

Make sure to stroll around the lake to **Giardini Jean Arp**, off Lungolago Motta, where sculptures by the surrealist artist are scattered among palm trees and springtime tulips.

Pensione Città Vecchia (☎ 091 751 45 54; cittavecchia@datacomm.ch; Via Toretta 13; dm Sfr25, s/d Sfr36/72; ☎ Mar-Nov; ☒) has basic dorms, smiley staff and a nonsmoking environment. It's uphill from Piazza Grande via a lane next to the Manor department store.

Lake Maggiore has a great range of fresh and tasty fish. Check out *persico* (perch) and *corigone* (whitefish). For self-caterers there's a Coop supermarket and a Migros De Gustibus snack bar on Piazza Grande.

There are trains from Brig (Sfr50, 2½ hours, hourly).

LUGANO

pop 26,100

Switzerland's southernmost tourist town is a sophisticated slice of Italian life, with vibrant markets, fancy shops, pedestrian-only piazzas and lakeside parks. Resting on the shore of Lake Lugano with Montes 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 from the train station.

Stroll through the winding alleyways of Lugano's Old Town, go window-shopping along the stylish arcade-lined **Via Nassa** (Street of Fishing Nets), then pop into the **Santa Maria degli Angioli Church** (Piazza Luini), featuring a vivid 1529 fresco of the *Crucifixion* by Bernardino Luini.

Hotel & Hostel Montarina (☎ 091 966 72 72; www.montarina.ch; Via Montarina 1; dm Sfr25, s/d Sfr80/120; ☎ mid-Mar-Oct; ☒) has rooms with four- to 16-bunk beds in the hostel section, which shares facilities with the charming hotel next door (if you have the extra cash rooms are airy, with timber floors and antiques). It's just behind the train station.

Head to the pedestrian-only piazzas to tempt the tastebuds, with *panini* (Sfr5) and gelati (Sfr3) from street stalls. **Soho Café** (☎ 091 922 60 80; Corso Pestalozzi 3; ☎ 10am-1am Mon-Fri, 4pm-1am Sat) is buzzing with Lugano's beautiful people. DJs keep the music loud enough to groove to, but quiet enough to converse.

Postbuses run to St Moritz (Sfr74, four hours, daily in summer but only Friday, Saturday and Sunday in winter). Swiss Pass holders pay Sfr11. Everyone needs to reserve seats the day before by visiting or phoning the **bus station** (☎ 091 807 85 20; Via Serafino Balestra).

Trains run to Locarno (Sfr15, one hour) and from Locarno to Brig (Sfr50, 2½ hours).

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, its town also looks a million dollars.

The **tourist office** (☎ 081 837 33 33; www.stmoritz.ch; Via Maistra 12; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) is in St Moritz Dorf.

In winter 350km of superb slopes draw skiers and snowboarders to **Corviglia-Marguns** (☎ 081 830 00 00; www.bergbahnenengadin.ch; lift ticket Sfr63, ski & boot hire Sfr43). The choice for beginners is limited. There are also 160km of **cross-country trails** (equipment hire Sfr20). In summer check out the 120km of marked **hiking paths**.

Backing onto the forest, **Youth Hostel St Moritz Bad** (☎ 081 833 39 69; www.youthhostel.ch/st.moritz; Via Surpunt 60; dm with half-board Sfr46; ☒) has excellent facilities. There's mountain-bike hire, 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.

Bobby's Pub (☎ 081 834 42 83; Via dal Bagn; ☒) is a favourite drinking spot.

Trains link St Moritz and Tirano, Italy (Sfr52, 2½ hours, nine daily). From Tirano you can connect to Milan.

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 the local nightlife up, too. The resort is barely two hours by train and bus (less by car) from Zürich airport.

The main **tourist office** (☎ 081 920 92 00; www.alpenarena.ch; Via Nova; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat May-Oct, 8am-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 (Sfr62) includes ski buses and costs (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 **river rafting** on a turbulent 17km stretch of the Vorderrhein between Ilanz and Reichenau. It takes you through the Rheinschlucht (Rhine gorge), somewhat optimistically dubbed Switzerland's Grand Canyon, but impressive enough for all that. **Swissraft** (☎ 081 911 52 50; 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 per person up to Sfr200; ☒) 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, video recorder, DVD player and Dolby surround sound. The whole place is wi-fi wired and is located 200m from the Laax lifts. Its lobby bar picks up après-ski scene 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.

ZÜRICH

pop 351,700

If you haven't visited Switzerland's most populous city, you're more likely to associate its name with boring banking capital than up-and-coming urban hot spot. That's a shame, because contemporary Zürich has a kind of pulsating energy not easily found in Switzerland. Now that its Street Parade has overtaken London's Notting Hill Carnival, Zürich is host to Europe's largest yearly street party. Plus 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.

ORIENTATION

Compact and easy to navigate, Zürich is at the northern end of Lake Zürich. The Limmat River splits the city centre.

INFORMATION

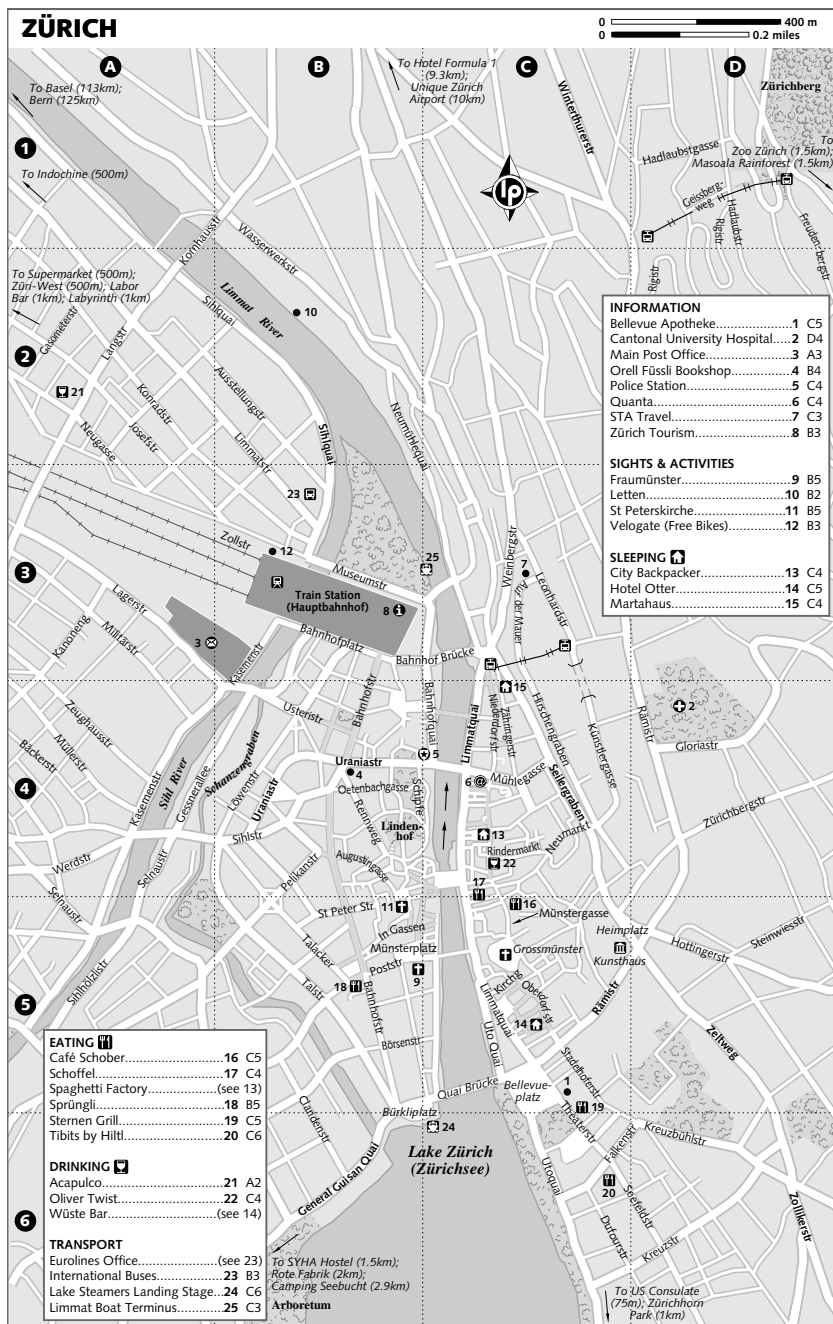
Bellevue Apotheke (☎ 01 252 56 00; Theaterstrasse 14) A 24-hour chemist.

Cantonal University Hospital (☎ 01 255 11 11; Rämistrasse 100; ☎ 24hr)

Main post office (☎ 01 296 21 11; Kasernenstrasse 95-97; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat)

Medical and dental help (☎ 01 269 69 69) For emergency treatment.

Orell Füssli Bookshop (☎ 01 211 04 44; Bahnhofstrasse 70; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) Fiction and travel books in English.



Police station (☎ 01 216 71 11; Bahnhofquai 3)

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

STA Travel (☎ 01 261 97 57; Leonhardstrasse 10; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 10am-8pm Thu, 10am-1pm Sat)

Zürich Tourism (☎ 01 215 30 00; www.zurichtourism.ch; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-6.30pm Sat & Sun) Inside the train station; arranges hotels, car hire and tours.

SIGHTS

Elegant **Bahnhofstrasse** is simply perfect for window-shopping and affluent Züricher-watching. On Sunday 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.

The 13th-century **Fraumünster** (Cathedral; Münsterplatz; ☎ 9am-6pm May-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Apr) has some of the world's most distinctive stained-glass windows (designed by 20th-century surrealist Marc Chagall), while the 13th-century tower of **St Peterskirche** (St Peter's Church; St-Peterhofstatt; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat) has Europe's largest clock face (8.7m in diameter).

ACTIVITIES

Between May and the middle of September, **outdoor swimming areas** (admission Sfr6; ☎ 9am-7pm May & Sep, 9am-8pm Jun-Aug) open around the lake and up the Limmat River. These are usually rectangular wooden piers with a pavilion covering part of them, and most offer massages, yoga and saunas. One favourite spot is **Letten** (Lettensteg), where Züri-West trendsetters swim, barbecue, skateboard, or just drink and chat on the grass. 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.

Use of city bikes is free of charge from **Velo-gate** (Platform 18, Main Train Station; ☎ 7.30am-9.30pm). Bring photo ID and Sfr20 deposit.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

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

SLEEPING

Camping Seebucht (☎ 01 482 16 12; Seestrasse 559; camp sites per adult/tent/car Sfr9.50/12/5; ☎ May-Sep; ☎ 161 or 165 from Bürkliplatz) On the west shore of the lake,

4km from the city centre (signposted), this camping ground has a shop and café.

our pick City Backpacker (☎ 044 251 90 15; www.city-backpacker.ch; Niederdorfstrasse 5; dm Sfr31, s/d Sfr66/92) Smack in the middle of the Old Town, this bustling favourite features sparkling dorms and doubles, a 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 beers.

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

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. Street noise and tiny, shared bathrooms are negatives.

EATING

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

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 yoghurt and fruit are on the menu.

our pick Café Schober (Napfgrasse 4) A kitsch, fairy-tale grotto of a café, with huge bouquets of flowers tied with ribbons to ceiling arches, Schober serves a serious hot chocolate (made from real *schoggi* - chocolate - instead of cocoa powder) and shouldn't be missed.

Tibits by Hiltl (☎ 044 260 32 22; Seefeldstrasse 2; dishes Sfr3.70/100g) Tibits is where with-it,

GETTING INTO TOWN

Regular trains make the 10-minute trip from the airport to the main train station (Sfr5.40) on the western bank of the river and the edge of the Old Town.

health-conscious Zürchers head for a light bite when meeting friends. There's a tasty vegetarian buffet, fresh fruit juices, coffees and cake.

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

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). Portions are just right.

Sprüngli (☎ 044 244 47 11; Bahnhofstrasse 21; chocolates from Sfr2, mains Sfr19-28) The mother of all chocolate shops, this is 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.

DRINKING & CLUBBING

Late-night pubs, clubs and discos clutter Niederdorfstrasse and adjoining streets. Zürich's former industrial quarter has become one of its hippest neighbourhoods: the much-vaunted 'Züri-West' district 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. Dress well and expect to pay Sfr15 to Sfr30 admission to enter Zürich's clubs.

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

Acapulco (☎ 044 272 66 88; Neugasse 56) For something a little more local, plant yourself on one of the scuffed red leather sofas in this understated, retro 1970s lynchpin of the Züri-West scene. Bloody Marys are excellent here, as they come with a tray of the condiments necessary to spice them to your own taste.

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 Chinawhite or Paris' Buddha Bar.

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

Rote Fabrik (☎ 044 481 91 43; www.rotfabrik.ch, in German; Seestrasse 395; ☎ 161 or 165 from Bürkliplatz) 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.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Unique Zürich airport (☎ 043 816 22 11; www.zurich-airport.com) is 10km north of the city centre.

Trains go to Stuttgart (Sfr61, three hours, daily), Munich (Sfr86, 4½ hours, daily), Innsbruck (Sfr66, four hours, daily), Milan (Sfr72, four hours, daily), Lucerne (Sfr22, 50 minutes, hourly), Bern (Sfr48, 70 minutes, hourly) and Basel (Sfr32, 65 minutes, hourly).

There's a comprehensive bus, tram, boat and S-Bahn service. Short trips under five stops cost Sfr2.30. A 24-hour pass, including travel to/from the airport, is Sfr10.80.

Various buses head east to Budapest, Belgrade, Dubrovnik and other destinations. The bus station is behind the train station. **Eurolines** (☎ 01 272 40 42) has an office here.

Lake steamers depart the Limmat Boat Terminus from early April to late October (Swiss Pass and Eurail valid, Inter-Rail 50% discount).

SPLURGE!

Hotel Otter (☎ 01 251 22 07; www.wueste.ch; Oberdorfstrasse 7; s/d Sfr100/130) This flamboyantly quirky hotel is by far our favourite place to stay in Zürich. The 17 rooms are each unique – one's a safari lodge, another a religious grotto and then there's the *1001 Arabian Nights* room, which imports you straight to Arabia. Not to be missed.

CENTRAL SWITZERLAND & BERNER OBERLAND

Welcome to the fairy-tale alpine creation they call the Berner Oberland, a place so silver-screen perfect you'll think you're conjuring it up. This place is like having your cake and eating it too. Not only can you spend mesmerising hours staring at the sheer, outrageous beauty of those snow-white, jagged, craggy, so-big-they're-going-to-swallow-you mountains found everywhere, you can also play in them.

LUCERNE

pop 58,600

Lapped by a scenic lake and surrounded by mountains of myth, Lucerne is one of the most beautiful cities in Switzerland.

Don't miss the medieval Old Town with ancient rampart walls and towers, and 15th-century buildings with painted façades. **Kapellbrücke** (Chapel Bridge), dating from 1333, is Lucerne's best-known landmark. Also check out the rather dark and dour *Dance of Death* panels under the roofline of **Spreuerbrücke** (Spreuer Bridge).

At the **Picasso Museum** (☎ 041 410 35 33; Furengasse 21; adult/student Sfr6/3; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 11am-1pm & 2-4pm Nov-Mar) nearly 200 photographs show an impish Picasso at work and play in his Cannes home during the last 17 years of his life.

Lucerne's six-day **Fasnacht** celebrations are more boisterous and fun than Basel's famous 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.

Travellers have loved the lively vibe at **Backpackers Lucerne** (☎ 041 360 04 20; www.backpackers-lucerne.ch; Alpenquai 42; dm/d Sfr28/66; ☎ reception 7-10am & 4-11pm) for years. Besides fabulous balconies boasting lake views, facilities include a kitchen and laundry. It's a 15-minute walk southeast of the train station.

The **Tourist Hotel** (☎ 041 410 24 74; www.tourist-hotel.ch; St Karliquai 12; dm Sfr35, s/d from Sfr90/120, with shared bathroom from Sfr70/100; ☎ ☎) has an up-market hostel vibe and 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.

Self-caterers should head to Hertensteinstrasse, where cheap eats are plentiful and there's a Coop supermarket.

Rathaus Bräuererei (☎ 041 410 52 57; Unter der Egg 2; mains Sfr8-30) is an atmospheric restaurant serving big glasses of home brews and some of the most delicious food in town. Cuisine ranges from local to Mexican to Vietnamese.

Brit beer, food and footy are on the menu at the lively **Mr Pickwick Pub** (☎ 041 410 59 27; Rathausquai 6; sandwiches Sfr6.50, mains Sfr10-23); the pub sandwiches are a real steal and there's outdoor riverfront seating.

Jazzkantine (☎ 041 410 73 73; Grabengasse 8; mains from Sfr15) is 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.

Train destinations include Zürich (Sfr19, 50 minutes, hourly), Interlaken (Sfr26, two hours, hourly) and Bern (Sfr30, 1½ hours, hourly).

INTERLAKEN

pop 15,000

Catering to backpackers like nowhere else in Switzerland, budget travellers often make Interlaken their main Switzerland destination. Interlaken is also a mecca for thrill seekers, and 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 don't have loads of money, check out the myriad hiking trails in the area – the views are amazing and free!

Orientation & Information

Most of Interlaken lies between its two train stations, Interlaken Ost and West. 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 **Interlaken Tourism** (☎ 033 826 53 00; www.interlaken-tourism.ch; Höhweg 37; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat, 10am-noon & 4-6pm Sun Jul-Aug, 8am-noon & 1.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat Sep-Jun).

Activities

Some say leaping from an aeroplane over the Swiss Alps is a life-changing experience. Others argue that canyoning is superior, while

some swear by night sledding. Whatever your tastes, most adventure sports are offered from Interlaken.

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 ski clothing and gear hire (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), as well as rafting on the class III-IV Lüttschne River (Sfr95).

The following list shows the major operators; each one is able to arrange most sports:

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)

Hostels can suggest good hikes and provide maps. You can also check with the tourist office, or just set off on foot and look for the signs.

Sleeping

The most popular budget accommodation is on Hauptstrasse, a 15-minute signposted walk from either train station.

Balmer's Herberge (☎ 033 822 19 61; www.balmers.ch; Hauptstrasse 23; dm/s/d/q with shared bathroom Sfr27/33/76/132; ☑) 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. One negative, however, is you'll be constantly harassed to partake in the pricey adventure sports. If you can resist the temptation to buy, it's a good deal.

Funny Farm (☎ 079 652 61 27; www.funny-farm.ch; Hauptstrasse; dm Sfr35; ☑) The town's other budget powerhouse has a similarly raucous feel and draws in hordes of Australians. It revels in its anarchic, ramshackle premises – somewhere halfway between a squat and an island shipwreck.

Backpackers Villa Sonnenhof (☎ 033 826 71 71; www.villa.ch; Alpenstrasse 16; dm/d from Sfr33/98; ☑)

Widely regarded as the cleanest and most genteel of Interlaken's hostels, this place still has plenty going on. Spacious, renovated rooms have nice touches, like steamer trunks and balconies, some with Jungfrau views. There's a small kitchen, a lounge and table tennis in the garden. Reception closes between 11am and 4pm.

River Lodge (☎ 033 822 44 34; www.riverlodge.ch; Brienzstrasse 24; dm from Sfr28, s/d Sfr62/84; ☑) Bungalows line the waterfront and house between one and four people in bunks. In summer the hosts encourage you to bring the feather duvets outside and sleep under the stars by the water. A communal kitchen and bikes and kayaks are extra perks.

Eating & Drinking

Balmer's has the town's hottest after-dark scene and guests rarely venture out at night – visit even if you're not staying for the social scene.

Balmer's Café & Grill (☎ 033 822 19 61; www.balmers.ch; Hauptstrasse 23; mains Sfr10-12) The American-style food (think big juicy burgers and greasy fries) served is quite good and fairly priced. 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 gets going after 11pm.

our pick Golden Anker (☎ 033 822 16 72; Markt-gasse 57; mains Sfr20-40) The junkie, the banker, the tourist and the hotel proprietor, meet them all at the Golder Anker. Rebuilt after floods in 2005, this well-respected establishment serves interesting dishes, from chicken fajitas and red snapper to ostrich steaks. It also has a roster of live bands and international artists.

Des Alpes (☎ 033 822 23 23; Höhweg 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.

Getting There & Away

Trains to Lucerne (Sfr30, two hours, hourly), Grindelwald (Sfr9.80, 40 minutes, hourly) and Lauterbrunnen (Sfr6.60, 30 minutes, hourly) depart from Interlaken Ost. Trains to Brig (Sfr38, 1½ hours, hourly) and Montreux via Bern (Sfr91, two hours, hourly) depart from Interlaken West or Ost.

JUNGFRAU REGION

The views get better the further south you go from Interlaken. In winter the Jungfrau is a magnet for skiers and snowboarders with 200km of pistes. A one-day ski pass for regional resorts costs Sfr55.

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

The First is the main **skiing area** in winter. In summer there are 90km of **hiking trails** above 1200m. You can catch the longest **cable car** 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, closing hr vary; ☑ to Gaggi-Säge) 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.

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

There is a train that connects to Interlaken Ost (Sfr9.40, 40 minutes, hourly) as well as other locations.

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 **Trümmelbach 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; Main St; camp sites per adult/tent Sfr9/6, cabins per person Sfr25) has excellent facilities, and awesome views of tow-

ering peaks and sheer cliffs. It's at the end of Main St.

Just two minutes' walk from the train station, the **Valley Hostel** (☎ 033 855 20 08; www.valleyhostel.ch; dm/d from Sfr18/44; ☎ ☑) offers comfy rooms (many with 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* (fried, buttery, shredded potatoes), 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.

After a long summer hike, bed down in the barn at **Esther's Guesthouse** (☎ 033 855 54 88; www.esthersguesthouse.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.

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 its jaw-dropping mountain views. The simple, rustic place does snacks and sells beer, and the super-friendly owners have loads of area tips.

To reach Gimmelwald hike up a steep trail (sometimes closed in winter due to avalanche danger) for about 1.5 hours from Stechelberg or take 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 the peaks feel close enough to touch, and you just might think you've died and gone to heaven. Mürren is a skiing and hiking destination, with some 50km of prepared ski runs nearby.

The **Eiger Guesthouse** (☎ 033 856 54 60; eiger.guesthouse@muerren.ch; dm from Sfr50, d with shared bathroom Sfr110), by the train station, has a bar, restaurant and games room.

Wengen

Perched on a mountain ledge, car-free Wengen has a long view down the Lauterbrunnen valley to peaks that remain snow-capped year-round. It's especially popular with British holiday-makers.

The **Old Lodge Backpackers** (☎ 078 745 58 50; www.old-lodge.ch; depending on season dm Sfr25-40, r Sfr35-60) looks pretty much as the name suggests, making it easily recognisable as you approach it down the path below Wengen's train station. In fact, it's a huge, rambling old lodge, with basic facilities, but it boasts a lively atmosphere and fantastic views.

Schilthorn

There's a fantastic 360-degree panorama from the top of the 2970m Schilthorn. On a good day you can see from Titlis around to Mont Blanc and across to the German Black Forest.

The revolving **Piz Gloria Restaurant** (mains Sfr15-35) serves reasonably priced food (pasta, burgers, brats) and views with million-dollar smiles.

In winter there is a gnarly, but heavenly, **ski run** down to Mürren. You'll need to be a pretty advanced rider to try it – it's long and steep, and the moguls can be massive. A day pass to Schilthorn–Mürren costs Sfr65 (you won't have to pay again for the cable cars).

If you're not skiing, you'll need to pay to ride the Stechelberg cable car to the top (return Sfr94, Half-Fare Card/Swiss Pass/Eurail pass Sfr47/48/81).

Jungfrauoch

The trip to Jungfrauoch (3454m) by train is something you do because a) it's generally a once-in-a-lifetime experience and b) you have to see it for yourself. If it's a clear day, the outlook at Europe's highest train station is indisputably spectacular. The track up powers through both the Eiger as well as the Mönch, and pauses briefly for travellers to take happy snaps of views from two windows blasted in the mountainside.

From Interlaken Ost the journey is 2½ hours each way (return Sfr169). There's a cheaper 'good morning ticket' for Sfr145 if

you take the early train (6.35am from Interlaken) and leave the summit by noon. From 1 November to 30 April the reduction is also valid for the 7.35am train and the noon restriction does not apply. Eurail pass holders get 25% off and Swiss Pass holders slightly more.

Good weather is essential, so call ☎ 033 855 10 22 for taped forecasts before leaving.

NORTHERN SWITZERLAND

This region is important for industry and commerce, yet by no means lacks tourist attractions. Take time to explore the tiny rural towns set among green rolling hills.

BASEL (BÂLE)

pop 161,800

Visit Basel in 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 and dine and drink on overcrowded pavements, you could almost be in Italy, rather than on the dual border with France and Germany.

The **Internet Pub** (☎ 084 489 19 91; Steinentorstrasse 11; per hr Sfr8; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Thu, 9am-8pm Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) is a smoky joint, where you can down a beer and surf the Web. The **main tourist office** (☎ 061 268 68 68; www.basel-tourismus.ch; Stadtcasino, Barfüsserplatz; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) is at this address until 2007; afterwards check its website for the new office location.

Sights & Activities

With its cobbled streets, colourful fountains, Middle Age 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) is another highlight, with Gothic spires and Romanesque St Gallus doorway.

The **Kunstmuseum** (Art Museum; ☎ 061 206 62 62; www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch; St Albangraben 16; adult/student Sfr8/5, free 1st Sun of month; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) holds the largest art collection in Switzerland,

GETTING INTO TOWN

The EuroAirport, 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. 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.

including Klées and Picassos, and the world's largest Holbein collection.

If you arrive on a hot summer day, join the locals for a swim in the Rhine. It's spectacular, popular and free. Look for clusters of bobbing bodies.

Sleeping

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.

Basel Backpack (☎ 061 333 00 37; www.baselbackpack.ch; Dornacherstrasse 192; dm Sfr31, s/d/f Sfr80/96/144; ☎) Enormous attention has gone into refitting this former factory and the results are pleasing. Dorms are cheerful and colour coded, each housing eight beds.

SYHA Hostel (☎ 061 278 97 39; www.youthhostel.ch/basel; St Alban Kirchrain 10; dm Sfr35, s/d from Sfr80/82; ☎) In a converted textiles factory in St Alban, a quiet, leafy, old money part of town, this hostel has small spick-and-span rooms.

Eating & Drinking

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 Steinenorstadt, with its countless fast-food outlets, cafés and restaurants. 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).

Café de l'imprimerie (☎ 061 262 36 06; St Johans Vorstadt 19; 2-course menus Sfr14.50-16.50) An unpre-

tentious bistro, offering filling meals at affordable prices, locals like to lounge over pints at the sturdy wood tables.

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

Getting There & Around

Located 5km north in France, **EuroAirport** (☎ 061 325 31 11; www.euroairport.com) serves Basel (as well as Mulhouse, France and Freiburg, Germany) and has several routes to London on Swiss International Air Lines and low-cost carrier easyJet, with direct flights to many Continental cities, including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Madrid, Paris and Rome.

Basel is a major rail hub. Trains to France, including Paris (Sfr69, five hours, seven times daily), leave from the SNCF section of SBB station. Germany-bound trains stop at Badischer Bahnhof (BBF) on the northern bank. Main routes are Frankfurt (Sfr80, three hours, daily) and Hamburg (Sfr198, 6½ hours, daily). There are trains to Geneva (Sfr71, three hours, twice hourly) and Zürich (Sfr30, 70 minutes, twice hourly) from the SBB.

City buses and trams cost Sfr1.80 for four or fewer stops, Sfr2.80 for the central zone or Sfr8 for a day pass.

SWITZERLAND DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Switzerland has both official Hostelling International (HI) hostels and private backpacking hostels, many of which have formed their own group. Independent hostels tend to be more charismatic and better bets for solo travellers, or anyone wanting to meet other backpackers. Dorms in some private hostels are co-ed. On average, a dorm bed in any hostel costs Sfr20 to Sfr40.

For the novel experience of sleeping in a barn, see Farm Stays (p1185).

Otherwise, check the following useful websites:

Schweizer Jugendherbergen (www.youthhostel.ch) Swiss Youth Hostel organisation.

Swiss Backpackers (www.swissbackpackers.ch) Private hostel group.

Verband Schweizer Campings (www.camping-switzerland.ch) Swiss Camping Association.

ACTIVITIES

There are dozens of ski resorts throughout Switzerland. Equipment hire is available at resorts, and ski passes allow unlimited use of mountain transport.

There's 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 en route. Yellow trail signs make it difficult to get lost, and each gives an average walking time to the next destination. Slightly more strenuous mountain paths have white-red-white markers. You can water-ski, sail and windsurf on most lakes, and there are over 350 lake beaches. Rafting is possible on many alpine rivers, including the Rhine and the Rhône.

Bungy-jumping, paragliding, canyoning and other high-adrenalin sports are available throughout Switzerland, especially in the Interlaken area.

BUSINESS HOURS

Usual business hours in Switzerland:

Banks ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, with some local variations

Post Offices ☎ 7.30am-noon & 2-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 7.30-11am Sat

Shops ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, with 90min or 2hr break at noon

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Swiss Embassies

For a comprehensive list of Swiss embassies abroad, go to **Federal Department of Foreign Affairs** (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 Place, 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 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 **Federal Department of Foreign Affairs** (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.ambafrance-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 Veronnex 7; Zürich ☎ 01 422 25 66; Dufourstrasse 101

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

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

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

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

Montreux Jazz Festival In July big-name rock/jazz acts hit town for this famous festival.

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

Street Parade In early August Zürich lets its hair down with an enormous techno parade, with 30 lovmobiles and more than half a million ravers (see p1135).

Vintage Festivals In October you can down a couple in wine-growing regions, such as Neuchâtel and Lugano.

Onion Market In late November Bern takes on a carnival atmosphere for a unique market day.

Escalade Festival On 11 December this festival held in Geneva celebrates deliverance from would-be conquerors.

HOLIDAYS

New Year's Day 1 January

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

Ascension Day 40th day after Easter

Whit Sunday & Monday 7th week after Easter

National Day 1 August

Christmas Day 25 December

St Stephen's Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Many internet cafés in Switzerland limit their system, so you can't open any email attachments. Surfing is expensive, about Sfr10 to Sfr16 per hour.

MONEY

Swiss francs (Sfr, written CHF locally) are divided into 100 centimes (called *rappen* in German-speaking Switzerland). All major travellers cheques and credit cards are accepted. Virtually all train stations have money-exchange facilities open daily.

POST

Postcards and letters to Europe cost Sfr1.30/1.20 priority/economy; to other places they cost Sfr1.80/1.40.

TELEPHONE

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 to Sfr0.04.

The country code for Switzerland is ☎ 41. Regional codes are no longer required in Switzerland. Although the numbers for a particular city or town all commence with the same two or three digits (for example Zurich ☎ 01, Geneva ☎ 022), numbers always must be dialled in full, 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.

Calls costs on prepaid local SIM cards are high, so a card is probably not worth buying for short stays. Mobile coverage in Switzerland is generally excellent – even in the mountains.

VISAS

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

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