

Zürich



Zürich is an enigma. It is the epitome of Swiss efficiency: a savvy financial centre with possibly the densest public transport system in the world, but it also has a gritty, post-industrial edge that would seem more at home in a German Ruhr Valley town.

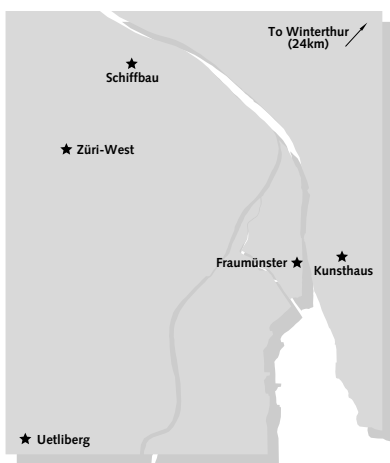
Once famed for its hard-drug problem, Switzerland's biggest city is undeniably hip – and efficient – why else would Google (whose local employees are called Zooglers) have located its European engineering centre here? With a grungy, wacky, art-world freedom one associates with Berlin, it has grubby(ish) districts alongside posh quarters. The locals may be earnest, hard-working early risers but, come clock-off time, they throw themselves wholeheartedly into a festive vortex – its summer Street Parade is one of Europe's largest street parties.

Much of the ancient centre, with its winding lanes and tall church steeples, has been kept lovingly intact. The city, however, is no stick-in-the-mud stranger to contemporary design trends. Nowhere is that clearer than in abandoned industrial Kreis (district) 5 and adjacent Kreis 4, long the near-exclusive domain of drug dealers, street mafiosi and prostitutes, which have been caught up in an urban renovation revolution since the mid-1990s. Züri-West, as the whole area is dubbed, is the epicentre of the city's nightlife.

Beyond the city, in the rest of the canton of the same name, the heights of Uetliberg are inviting to walkers and there are countless pretty spots, such as Rapperswil, along the lake. Winterthur, to the northeast, is a cultural powerhouse, with major art and science museums.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Genuflecting before Marc Chagall's stained-glass windows in the **Fraumünster** (p217).
- Admiring the Alberto Giacometti stick figures, Dadaist works and other modern art in Zürich's **Kunsthau** (p217).
- Taking in some theatre in the **Schiffbau** (p227) and doing a round of the bars afterwards in **Züri-West** (p225).
- Taking a train up to **Uetliberg** (p237) for excellent hiking and panoramic views.
- Visiting the art galleries, Technorama science museum and nearby Schloss Kyburg in **Winterthur** (p238).



■ POPULATION: 350,125

■ AREA: 1729 SQ KM

■ LANGUAGE: GERMAN

HISTORY

Today frequently voted Europe's most liveable city, Zürich started life as a Roman encampment called Turicum. Germanic tribes moved in by AD 400 and, in 1336, the already prosperous town underwent a minor revolution as craftsmen and traders took power, expelling the nobles and creating the 13 *Zünfte* (guilds), which for long after directed the city's fortunes. Many still exist today and come out to play for the Sechseläuten festival (p221). Only locals can join and many a city bigwig is a *Zunft* member.

In 1351, Zürich joined the Swiss Confederation and, in the early 16th century, became a key player in the Reformation under Zwingli (opposite). In the following centuries, it grew rich on textiles and banking.

Due to Switzerland's neutrality during both world wars, Zürich attracted all sorts of personalities both in wartime and peace. James Joyce and Vladimir Lenin hung out here. And in the wake of the horrors of WWI, the counter-cultural Dada art movement was born in Zürich. By 1923 the movement was dead, but its spirit lived on in the works of Georg Grosz, Hans Arp and Max Ernst. Dadaist works are on display in Zürich's Kunsthau (opposite) and the Plaktraum (Poster Collection) of the Museum für Gestaltung (opposite).

Politicians *can* make all the difference: the switch from conservative rule to a Social Democrat regime in the Rathaus (Town Hall) in the early 1990s changed the face of the city. The Zürich of before was known for its dour Protestant work ethic and wealth and startlingly overt heavy drug problem. In 1995 the drug supermarket at Letten was dismantled. The heroin addicts haven't gone away, but the city is keeping a lid on the problem with supervised public injection centres. Of course, the city's wealth remains intact.

More visible has been the Town Hall's backing for the city's awakening as a cool town. Relaxed laws governing bars and clubs and active support for a plethora of cultural activities have transformed the grey lakeside city of the 'gnomes' (Brit parlance for Zürich's bankers) into one of central Europe's hippest hang-outs.

ORIENTATION

Zürich spreads around both banks of the northwest end of Zürichsee (Lake Zürich).

The Limmat River runs further north still, splitting the medieval city centre in two. The narrow streets of the Niederdorf quarter on the river's east bank are crammed with restaurants, bars and shops; down the west bank runs the hoity-toity shopping avenue of Bahnhofstrasse, capped at the north by the Hauptbahnhof (main train station).

The reborn hip part of the city, known as Züri-West and stretching west of the Hauptbahnhof, is primarily made up of two former working-class districts: Kreis 4 and Kreis 5.

Kreis 4, still a red-light district and centred on Langstrasse, is lined with opportunity shops, eateries, bars and peep shows.

Langstrasse continues north over the railway lines into Kreis 5, where it quiets down a little but still offers plenty of options. The main focus of Kreis 5 action is, however, along what the city fathers have dubbed the Kulturmeile (culture mile; www.kulturmeile.ch), Hardstrasse.

The bulk of the canton of Zürich spreads east and north of the city. Winterthur, to the northeast, has some remarkable museums. Zürichsee drops away to the southeast like a juicy fat *Kalbswurst* (veal sausage), where it runs into the eastern cantons of St Gallen and Schwyz.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Orell Füssli (Map p220; ☎ 044 211 04 44; www.books.ch; Bahnhofstrasse 70; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat) English-language bookstore.

Discount Card

ZürichCard (per 24hr adult/child Sfr17/12, per 72hr Sfr34/24) Available from the tourist office and the airport train station, this provides free public transport, free museum admission and more.

Emergency

Police station (Map p220; ☎ 044 216 71 11; Bahnhofquai 3)

Internet Access

Internetcafe (Map p220; ☎ 044 210 33 11; www.e-cafe.ch; Uraniastrasse 3; per min Sfr0.30; ☎ 7am-11pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11pm Sat, 10am-10pm Sun) You can connect your laptop (Swiss power points, p349).

Quanta (Map p220; ☎ 044 260 72 66; Limmatquai 94, Niederdorf; per hr Sfr10; ☎ 9am-midnight) Noisy but central. Enter via Mühlegasse.