

Central Switzerland



If the Swiss were to nominate one canton as home, there would be no place like Central Switzerland. Green, hilly and soothingly beautiful, it is the very essence of 'Swissness'. It was here that the pact that kick-started a nation was signed in 1291; here that hero William Tell gave a rebel yell against Habsburg rule; here that in a moment of sharp brilliance Karl Elsener invented the boy scout's best friend, the Victorinox army knife. Geographically, politically, spiritually, this is Switzerland's heartland. Nowhere does the flag fly higher.

And you can see why locals swell with pride at Lake Lucerne. Still in the cold mist of morning, enigmatic in the swirling fog, molten gold in the dusky half-light – it's no wonder these waters were a source of endless fascination for the brush of Turner. Indeed the views amused Queen Victoria as she trotted up Rigi on horseback, Wagner, who knew of 'no more beautiful place on earth' and Mark Twain, who called it 'the charmingest place' he had ever lived.

Lucerne is a heart-stealer with its sparkly lake vistas, rickety bridges and Victorian curiosities. This dreamy little city is small enough to walk yet big enough to harbour red-hot designer hotels and a world-class gallery full of Picassos. From here, cruise over to resorts like Weggis and Brunnen, or hike nearby Mt Pilatus and Rigi. Northeast of Lucerne, megalomaniacal Zug has *Kirschtorte* (cherry cake) just as rich as its residents and medieval heritage.

Even on the shores of Lucerne, the Alps squeeze into the picture to demand exploration. Outdoorsy types go south to Andermatt for austere mountain-scapes close to the source of the Rhine, or angelic Engelberg for heavenly off-piste encounters in the virgin powder.

HIGHLIGHTS

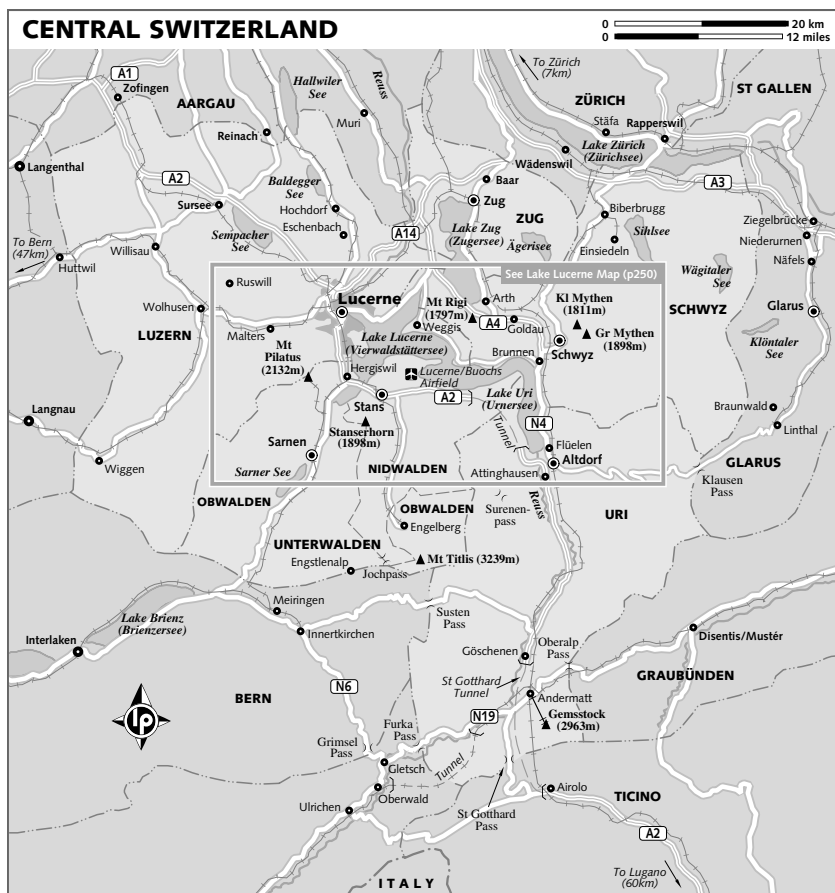
- Touching Lucerne's medieval past crossing the **Kapellbrücke** (p243) and clambering up the **city wall** (p243)
- Being dazzled by the blues of Lake Lucerne on the vertiginous **Bürgenstock Felsenweg** (p70) clifftop walk
- Twirling above the crevassed glacier of **Mt Titlis** (p257) on the world's first revolving cable car
- Cruising fjord-like **Lake Uri** (p253) to feel the spirit of William Tell
- Hiking to the source of the Rhine in summer, or cruising snowy backcountry in winter in **Andermatt** (p262)



■ POPULATION: 613,800

■ AREA: 4484 SQ KM

■ LANGUAGE: GERMAN



Orientation & Information

At the heart of Central Switzerland (Zentral-schweiz) is Lake Lucerne (Vierwaldstättersee in German, meaning 'Lake of the Four Forest Cantons'), surrounded by the cantons of Lucerne, Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden (subdivided into Nidwalden and Obwalden). Also in this region is Switzerland's smallest rural canton, Zug. Central Switzerland is fairly flat in the north and west, but a southern tip reaches into the Alps as far as the St Gotthard Pass.

For information on the entire region, contact the tourist office in Lucerne (opposite).

Getting There & Around

The nearest airport is Zürich, while road and rail connections are excellent in all direc-

tions. An interesting way to leave the region is aboard the Wilhelm Tell Express (p369).

If you don't have a Swiss or Eurail Pass (both of which are valid on lake journeys), consider purchasing the regional **Tell-Pass** (www.tell-pass.ch; per 7/15 days Sfr158/210; 🗓️ late Mar-Oct). Sold at Lucerne tourist office and all boat stations, the Tell-Pass provides travel for two/five days respectively, and half-price fares for the remainder.

The handy Vierwaldstättersee Guest Card, available when you stay overnight anywhere in the region, offers benefits including discounts on sporting facilities and 10% to 50% off certain cable cars, as well as reductions on museum admission in Lucerne and elsewhere.