Why Go?

To the Swiss, Central Switzerland – green, mountainous and soothingly beautiful – 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. Geographically, politically, spiritually, this is the heartland. Nowhere does the flag fly higher.

You can see why locals swell with pride at Lake Lucerne: enigmatic in the cold mist of morning, molten gold in the dusky half-light.

The dreamy city of Lucerne is small enough for old-world charm yet big enough to harbour designer hotels and a world-class gallery full of Picassos. From here, cruise to resorts like Weggis and Brunnen, or hike Mt Pilatus and Mt Rigi. Northeast of Lucerne, Zug has Kirschtorfe (cherry cake) as rich as its residents and medieval heritage. Come snow-time, head to the Alps for Andermatt’s austere mountain-scapes or Engelberg for powdery off-piste perfection.

When to Go

Any time is a good time to visit Lucerne, although it does get packed in the summer months and during the Lucerne Festival. For places such as Andermatt and Engelberg, winter is the obvious time for taking advantage of skiing and snowboarding opportunities, although late spring, summer and early autumn are wonderful for walking and hiking. Zug and Lake Uri are at their best in summer, when swimming in the lakes is heavenly.
Getting There & Around

The nearest major airport is Zürich, and road and rail connections are excellent in all directions. An interesting way to leave the region is aboard the Wilhelm Tell Express (p363).

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 Sfr180/246), which is valid from 1 April until 31 October. Sold at Lucerne tourist office and all boat stations, the Tell-Pass provides free travel for two or five days, 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.

Central Switzerland Highlights

1. Revel in the melodious atmosphere of Lucerne (p212), Switzerland’s prettiest city

2. Witness the awe-inspiring sunrise from the top of Mt Rigi (p223) – a time-honoured tradition that never disappoints

3. Be dazzled by the blues of Lake Lucerne on the vertiginous Bürgenstock Felsenweg (p216) cliff top walk

4. Cruise Lake Lucerne (p220) and witness the play of light and shadow, mist and magic

5. Twirl above the crevassed glacier of Mt Titlis (p230) via cable car

6. Feel the spirit of William Tell by walking the Swiss Path (p225) around fjord-like Lake Uri

7. Hike to the source of the Rhine in summer or cruise snowy backcountry in winter in Andermatt (p234)