



Mittelland

POP 1.2 MILLION / AREA 842 SQ KM / LANGUAGES GERMAN, FRENCH

Includes »

Bern.....	98
Biel-Bienne.....	107
Around Biel-Bienne.....	109
Emmental Region.....	110
Solothurn	110

Best Places to Eat

- » Altes Tramdepot (p104)
- » Restaurant Coopérative St Gervais (p108)
- » Gasthaus Bäregghöhe (p110)
- » Cantinetta Bindella (p112)
- » Pittaria (p112)

Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel Schweizerhof (p103)
- » Hotel Kreuz Ligerz (p109)
- » Hotel Landhaus (p103)
- » Villa Lindenegg (p107)
- » Mösberg (p110)

Why Go?

It's funny that this flat, unassuming 'middle ground', as its straight-talking name states, should have Switzerland's capital at its heart. In fact, few even realise that riverside Bern is the Swiss capital, because the city is so delightfully languid, laid-back and – dare one say – the essence of 'soft power'.

Yet Bern's middling is precisely what makes it so politically savvy. When politicians had to pick a capital for the troubled Swiss Confederation it leapt out as the unthreatening choice: Geneva was too French, Zürich too German. Bern was just right.

Easily one of the most charming capitals on the planet, its 15th-century Old Town is fairy-tale-like with its terraced stone buildings, covered arcades, clock towers and cobbled streets. The surrounding countryside is as benignly beautiful, with traditional villages and farms speckling the rolling green hills, some of which produce Emmental – the cheese that could not be more Swiss if it tried.

When to Go

Summer is the time to visit for the best chance of warm days, blue skies and miles of lush green meadows dotted with cows, but you will be accompanied by a lot of tour buses. In autumn, the changing foliage on St Peter's Island is particularly dazzling, while Bern parties hearty during the *Zibelemärit* (Onion Market), which takes place on the fourth Monday in November and sees the city celebrating with a giant market selling all things onion-related. See p104 for more details. In the middle of winter, try to feast on *Treberwurst* (p109), a local sausage with a definite alcoholic kick.

i Information

Schweizer Mittelland Tourismus (☎031 328 12 12; www.smit.ch, in German; Bahnhofplatz 10a, Bern) The regional tourist office.

Bern

POP 123,500 / ELEV 540M

Wandering its picture-postcard Old Town, with arcaded stone streets and a provincial, laid-back air, it is hard to believe that Bern (Berne in English and French) is the capital of Switzerland – but it is, plus a Unesco World Heritage Site to boot.

Indeed, on the city's long, cobbled streets, lined with 15th-century terraced buildings and fantastical folk figures frolicking on fountains since the 16th century, you feel as if you're in some kind of dizzying architectural canyon. From the surrounding hills, you're presented with an equally captivating picture of red roofs crammed on a spit of land within a bend of the Aare River.

In a nutshell, Bern captivates. Its drinking scene is dynamic, its alternative arts scene happening and its locals happy to switch

DON'T MISS

BÄREN PARK

A popular folk etymology is that Bern got its name from the bear (*Bär* in German), when the city's founder, Berthold V, duke of Zähringen, snagged one here on a hunting spree. To the dismay of some, there was still a 3.5m-deep cramped bear pit in the city until 2009, when it was (thankfully) replaced by a spacious 6000-sq-metre open-air riverside park dotted with trees and terraces, in which a number of bears roam (although they still have access to the old pit).

You'll find the bear park (www.baerenpark-bern.ch) at the eastern end of the Nydeggbücke. And with any luck, you'll catch sight of Finn, Björk, Mischa, Mascha, Ursina or Berna as they frolic, swim, eat and poop in the woods, as nature (almost) intended. Watching them play, it's hard to believe that Mischa and Mascha were 10kg orphans when they arrived in Bern from Ussuria. Obviously, there's not much to see in the winter months, when hibernation is the name of the game.

from their famously lilted and slow local dialect to English – which all goes to show that there's more to Bern than bureaucracy.

👁 Sights



Zentrum Paul Klee

ART MUSEUM

(www.zpk.org; Monument in Fruchtländ 3; adult/child Sfr22/10, audioguides Sfr5; ☺10am-5pm Tue-Sun) Bern's answer to the Guggenheim, the architecturally bold Paul Klee Centre is an eye-catching 150m-long building filled with popular modern art. Renzo Piano's curvaceous building swoops up and down like waves to create a trio of 'hills' in the agricultural landscape east of town.

The middle hill houses the main exhibition space, showcasing 4000 rotating works from Paul Klee's prodigious and often-playful career. Interactive computer displays built into the seating mean you can get the low-down on all the Swiss-born artist's major pieces, while music-driven audioguides take you on a one-hour DIY musical tour of his work. In the basement of another 'hill' is the fun-packed **Kindermuseum Creaviva** (☺10am-5pm Tue-Sun), an inspired children's museum, where kids can experiment with hands-on art exhibits (included in admission price) or participate in the weekend **Five Franc Studio** (www.creaviva-zpk.org; ☺10am-4.30pm Sat & Sun), where young artists (and older ones too!) pay Sfr5 to work with the atelier's materials and space and get to take their creations home with them.

In the museum grounds, a walk through fields takes visitors past a stream of modern and contemporary sculptures, including works by Yoko Ono and Sol Lewitt.

Take bus 12 from Bubenberplatz to Zentrum Paul Klee (Sfr4). By car the museum is right next to the Bern-Osting exit of the A6.



Berner Münster

CHURCH

(www.bernermuenster.ch; audioguide Sfr5, tower admission adult/child Sfr5/2; ☺10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 11.30am-5pm Sun Easter-Nov, noon-4pm Tue-Fri, to 5pm Sat, 11.30am-4pm Sun rest of year, tower closes 30 min earlier) The high point of the 15th-century Gothic cathedral is its lofty spire. At 100m, it's Switzerland's tallest, and those with enough energy to climb the dizzying 344-step spiral staircase are rewarded with vertiginous views of the Bernese Alps on a clear day. Coming down, take a breather by the **Upper Bells** (1356), rung at 11am, noon and 3pm daily, and the three **Lower Bells**,