



Mittelland

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

Includes ➔

Bern	96
Biel-Bienne	104
Around Biel-Bienne ..	106
Emmental Region.	106
Solothurn.	107

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Terrasse & Casa (p101)
- ➔ L'Écluse (p106)
- ➔ Gasthaus Bäregghöhe (p107)
- ➔ Cantinetta Bindella (p108)
- ➔ Pittaria (p108)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Hotel Schweizerhof (p101)
- ➔ Hotel Kreuz (p105)
- ➔ Villa Lindenegg (p105)
- ➔ Möschberg (p107)
- ➔ SYHA Hostel Solothurn (p108)

Why Go?

At first glance it may seem 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 and laid back.

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 and 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.
- ➔ 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.
- ➔ In the middle of winter, try to feast on *Treberwurst*, a local sausage with a definite alcoholic kick.

Bern

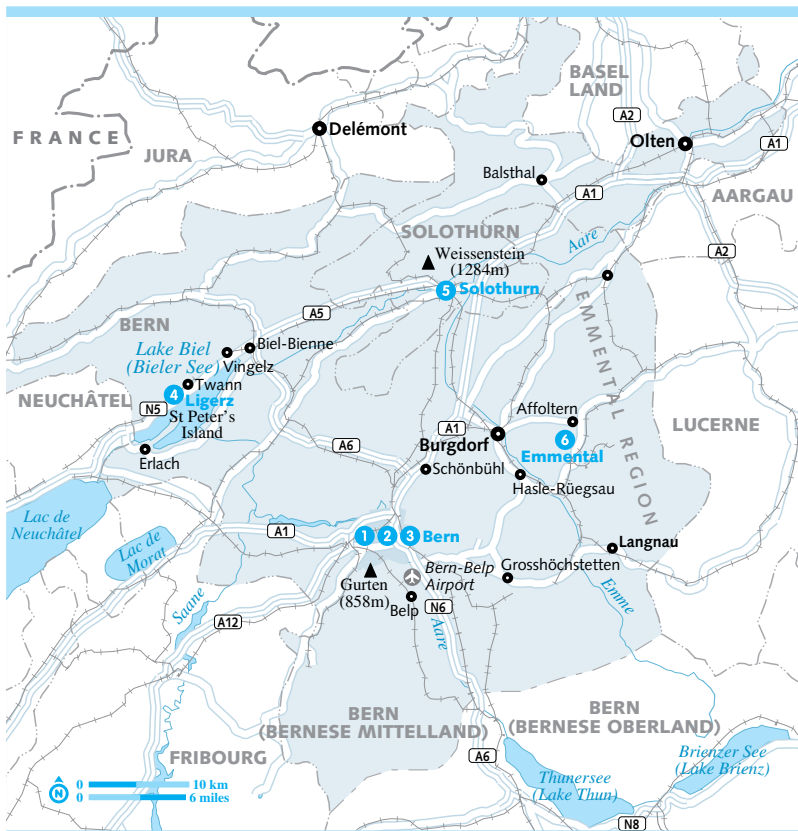
POP 127,520 / ELEV 540M

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

Bern's flag-festooned, cobbled centre, rebuilt in distinctive grey-green sandstone

after a devastating 1405 fire, is an aesthetic delight, with 6km of covered arcades, cellar shops and bars, and fantastical folk figures frolicking on 16th-century fountains. From the surrounding hills, you're presented with an equally captivating picture of red roofs arrayed on a spit of land within a bend of the Aare River.

In a nutshell, Bern seduces and surprises at every turn. Its museums are excellent, its



Mittelland Highlights

- 1 Fountain- and bar-hop through the fairy-tale, heritage-listed **Old Town** (p97) of Bern.
- 2 Grin and 'bear' it at the much-improved **Bärenpark** in Bern (p97).
- 3 Immerse yourself in Einstein's world at the

Historisches Museum Bern (p97).

- 4 Drink in the views to St Peter's Island and Lake Biel from lovely **Ligerz** (p105), with a local wine in hand.
- 5 Meander lazily around Old Town **Solothurn** (p107), allowing time for

its baroque cathedral and creative dining and drinking spaces by the water.

- 6 Be cheesy in **Emmental** (p106): eat it, watch it being made at the show dairy, then take your pick of local farms and inns for fondue-themed dreams.