



MAKE TIME TO EXPLORE THE 'HEART' OF SWITZERLAND

The FIDI Conference will be in French-speaking Geneva next April, but German is the mother tongue for around two-thirds of Swiss people – so take time to visit some highlights of the German-speaking parts of **Switzerland**, urges **Angie Mirams**, of Welte-Furrer AG

Zurich is my home city and I'm proud of it. Although I was born in England, I moved to Zurich when I was five and have spent most of my life there. It's great to have the FIDI Conference in Geneva next year, but to get a true feel for the diversity of Switzerland, factor in time to enjoy some of the highlights of the other towns and cities, plus the spectacular Swiss Alps.

Here are my suggestions for cities you must not miss out on within the German-speaking part of the country – and one of the jewels of the Swiss Alps. Switzerland isn't a huge place and it is fairly easy to get around...

LUCERNE – A 'CLASSIC' VIEW OF SWITZERLAND

In many people's minds, Switzerland consists of lakes and mountains – and they are not far wrong. Our country is a beautiful place.

There are few better cities to start your sightseeing in than Lucerne (*Luzern*), right in the heart of Switzerland. It is an ideal place for visitors who want to see not only lakes and mountain peaks, but traditional chalet-style houses and the wooden bridges across Lake Lucerne (*Vierwaldstättersee*). A famous landmark is the

Chapel Bridge (*Kapellbrücke*), which spans the lake and was erected in the 14th century.

The old town is very pretty and an ideal place to spend a couple of days in what I regard as the 'real' Switzerland. There are lots of dining options and bars along the lake, where you can take in the views and soak up the atmosphere.

Other attractions include the city's casino, restaurants and roof-top bars. If you are looking for a traditional feast, try Restaurant *Burgerstube* in the heart of the old city, followed by a nightcap in the Louis Bar in Hotel Montana.

For 'party animals', I would recommend the Penthouse club with its fantastic roof-top bar overlooking the city.

Lucerne is within a couple of hours' drive of just about anywhere in Switzerland – just don't confuse it with Lausanne, another city, but in the French-speaking part of the country.

■ For more information on Lucerne, go to: www.luzern.com/en/index.cfm



Angie Mirams is keen for visitors to enjoy Switzerland

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Historic Lucerne provides classic images of Switzerland



BORIS STROJIKO / SHUTTERSTOCK



FEATURE

DIVERSITY RULES IN COSMOPOLITAN ZURICH

Welcome to my home town. When it comes to embracing different lifestyles and cultures, Zurich probably offers the liveliest scene in all of Switzerland.

Punks with outrageous hairstyles sitting on the same park bench as girls wearing Louis Vuitton designer clothes – that is what Zurich is all about.

The nightlife is hard to beat – many nightclubs are open until 5am and there are some where you can party right through the weekend until Monday morning.

The city also hosts live bands, discos and great bars, and there is always a fantastic atmosphere around Lake Zurich (*Zürichsee*), where swimming pools are built into the lake.

The one downside to Switzerland is the changeable weather – it is so difficult to plan anything. In summer, the climate can range from 15° C one day to 35°C the next; things are unpredictable, including the amount of sunshine. Be sure to bring some warm clothes for April; it could easily be around 10-15°C.

Back to Zurich: make sure you visit the lakeside promenade and indulge in a spot of ‘people watching’, the local hobby; there are so many personalities and cultures. Alternatively, go to the Restaurant Lake Side, or any cafe along the Limmat – the river that springs from our lake and flows right through our city.

Switzerland has a great public transport system. In Zurich, you can reach any spot by tram, so grab one of our tram plans, a day travel-pass and explore!

To enjoy the nightlife, make a weekend of it – bar-hopping is mandatory before you settle for one of the many nightclubs.

Visit *Bahnhofstrasse*, the city’s main shopping street, where the designer brand shops are located. For pretty much anything in Switzerland, you will need money – our country is not cheap, unfortunately. But don’t worry, *Bahnhofstrasse* is also our main banking district. Lots of ATMs can get you into trouble!



Zurich offers great nightlife and plenty of opportunity for ‘people watching’

ANDREAS ZERNOLD / SHUTTERSTOCK

If you prefer to shop for souvenirs and funky clothes and items, try the old part of Zurich, *Niederdorf*. Here, you will also find a huge number of bars and restaurants with traditional Swiss food.

■ For more information: www.zuerich.com/en#section-01

A HISTORIC CITY YOU SHOULD NOT MISS

Bern is Switzerland’s capital. As well as being a historic city, its old town – with its cobbled streets – is a Unesco World Heritage Site.

It is known as a ‘politicians’ town’ (don’t let that put you off!) because it is the home of our parliament and the seat of our democracy.

We like democracy in Switzerland – our country is famous worldwide for being neutral and we have not one, but seven presidents!

As we put it sometimes, we don’t like to make decisions; we like options. Did you know, for example, we speak four official languages – German, French, Italian and Romansh – and have a different tax system for each canton/county?

Although we are not part of the European Union, we have bi-lateral trading agreements with other countries and our own currency, the Swiss Franc.

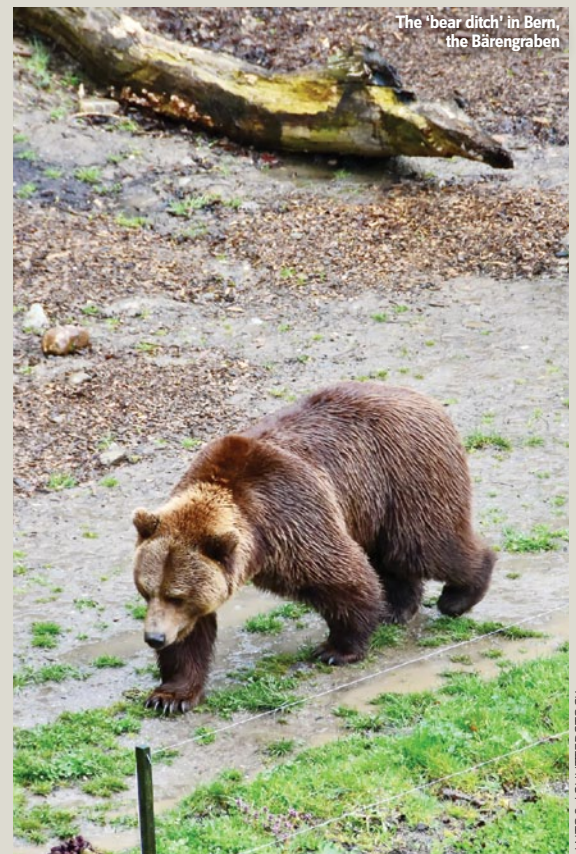
The parliament building in Bern is a pretty tourist attraction, but more famous is the *Bärengraben*, a sunken den in the city centre that is home to a small number of bears, which are fed and looked after here.

In recent years, these bears and their welfare have been the subject of public discussion, but there is no doubt the *Bärengraben* is an unusual tourist attraction and one of the things that makes Bern a worthwhile day trip.

The nightlife is relaxed rather than frantic; and you can dine well in the city’s restaurants.

■ Like to know more? Go to: www.bern.com/en/index.cfm

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The ‘bear ditch’ in Bern, the *Bärengraben*

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Basel has helped put Switzerland on the world footballing map



A view of snow-covered Davos

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BASEL – PUTTING SWITZERLAND ON THE INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL STAGE

The city of Basel is perhaps best known for its industry, providing a home to big pharmaceutical companies such as Roche and Novartis.

I would suggest a day trip that takes in the city's big open square, *Barfüsserplatz*.

Football (soccer) is pretty big here and FC Basel have put Switzerland on the sport's international map by playing in the European Champions League. As a fan of rival FC Zurich, I am reluctant to say this – but Basel is a big footballing town, and the bars around the stadium get very packed before and after matches. Fans also meet in the *Barfüsserplatz* before a big game.

Basel hosted the international between England and Switzerland last year. I was there supporting England, while my husband backed the Swiss. It was great fun singing along with the crowd; the England fans were nuts (I mean that in a good way!)

■ See www.myswitzerland.com/en-gb/suggestions/citytrips/cities/basel.html

What's on the menu?

Don't miss out on two traditional Swiss dining highlights – both of which are designed for hearty alpine appetites:

■ **Fondue:** This is a mouthwatering melted cheese dish that is usually made with Gruyère, lots of garlic and white wine. Traditionally, you stick a chunk of bread on a long fork and turn it in the melted cheese, which is contained in a candle-lit fondue pot on your dinner table. You can also use vegetables, such as potatoes and cherry tomatoes, to dip in the cheese. It's sociable food, which is great for a party.



■ **Raclette:** Another melted-cheese dish! Diners make their own dinner by melting the raclette cheese on little 'shovels' in the raclette oven, which is placed on the table. You can use tomatoes, mushrooms, and so on, as toppings. It's another winter warmer for outdoor types – or just cheese lovers!

■ **To drink:** Tradition calls for you to wash down fondue with a glass of kirsch (cherry-based brandy) sometimes even dipping the bread in the kirsch before dipping it in the cheese mixture. Kirsch is transparent; Swiss people have a saying that drinks that you can see through – such as schnapps – won't give you a headache the next morning! Be warned, however, it is strong alcoholic stuff – only for the brave!

A BREATHTAKING TASTE OF THE SWISS ALPS

There isn't space for a definitive guide, for the true Swiss experience, you really need to connect with the mountains during your visit.

A place my Weltri-Furrer colleagues are fond of – we go here on our annual skiing weekend – is Davos, which is high in the Swiss Alps and best known for hosting the annual World Economic Forum meetings.

A ski lift can take you up to the village and while April will be too late in the year for Davos's prime attractions of skiing and snowboarding, you can still unwind from the business of the FIDI Conference by going hiking and taking in the mountain air.

There are great restaurants and unmatched scenery. If you come to Switzerland in the winter, don't miss out on the après ski – the party can go on all night as you work your way down the mountain.

April should offer a more laid-back atmosphere than in the peak season, with families enjoying the mountains and looking to escape the last of our winter days.

■ For more information, see www.myswitzerland.com/en-gb/davos.html

■ Mark the date: Sunday 10–Wednesday 13 April 2016. FIDI looks forward to welcoming you all in Geneva. The conference registration website will be launched in November. If you are interested in being a 2016 Conference Sponsor, email Laura Rossignoli (FIDI events officer) at Laura.rossignoli@fidi.org

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