



57th World Congress of Chess Composition August 23-30, 2014 in Berne

What to do in Berne

Today is a hot summer day. What do locals do on a day like this?

They spend the better part of the day in the [“Marzili” pool](#), the legendary river pool with the best view over the Bundeshaus (parliament building) and guess what: It’s free. The best part about the Marzili is the possibility to [swim in the “Aare” river](#) and many people do. It’s so popular that there is even a free [App](#) to find out the temperature of the river. Usually the water is really cold, below 20 °C most of the time. As soon as the temperature rises over 20 °C the Aare is really crowded. If you want to try it, beware: The river has strong currents and is only for experienced swimmers. Accidents happen mainly to tourists, because they misjudge the force of the river. But it’s still a lot of fun.

Another favorite pastime in summer is floating down the river in a [rubber boat](#) e.g. from Thun to Berne. It takes about 3 hours on the water and you can stop for a picnic on the way.

If you are not totally exhausted and burnt after these activities, a Bernese would hang out at the “Front” in the middle of town, have a beer, meet some friends and watch the street performers. The “Front” is a series of restaurants at the Bärenplatz between the Käfigturm (prison tower) and the Bundesplatz (federal square).

This is what locals would do. Here are some tips for tourists:

I. Inner City

One thing you can’t miss is the **inner city**. We distinguish between the lower and upper part of the old town. The upper part (from Zytglogge (clock tower) to Bahnhof (main station)) is the commercial center with lots of stores, mainly from international chains. The real old town, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site, goes from the Zytglogge to the Bear Park. This is where the really charming cobblestone lanes are, most of them with covered walkways. There are shops, too, but smaller ones, Antiques, second hand shops, specialties like “Vom Fass” (where you can buy everything liquid, from Olive Oil to Whisky out of barrels) and some souvenir shops as well. It’s fun to stroll through the streets and crossover to parallel streets through small and dark alleyways (don’t worry, it’s safe).

What you shouldn’t miss in the inner city:

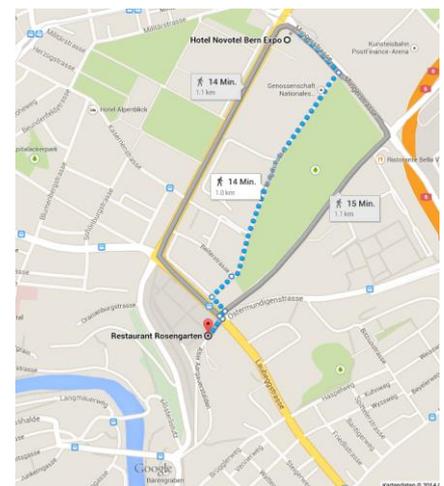
1. The **Zytglogge** is the city’s landmark; the first tower at this site dates back to 1220. The tower has a wild history and was town gate, women’s prison and many other things. The real sight is the clockwork from the 15th and 16th centuries. Its accuracy doesn’t exceed 15 minutes, but in times when this clock was the only one in town and times weren’t as hectic as these days, this was not only sufficient but a masterpiece of engineering. From the outside, it’s not very spectacular; to fully appreciate the clockwork, there are [guided tours](#) to the inside of the tower.

- When you stroll through the lower and upper old town, don't forget to look out for the different **fountains**. Most of them are from the 16th century. Very famous is the "[Chindlifrässer Brunnen](#)" on the Kornhausplatz (that's right at the tram station "Zytglogge" where you will often exit the tram to go to the old town. The [link](#) will give you some theories where the idea for the fountain came from.

Most fountains have a sign nearby with some descriptions.



- You might know that [Albert Einstein lived in Berne](#) while he wrote most of his important work. The [apartment](#) he lived in is now open to the public in the old town.
- You will not miss the **Münster** (cathedral), which is located prominently in the middle of the old town. Since it's a protestant church, the inside is rather modest. If you are in good shape, you can [climb the 312 steps to the tower](#) and enjoy a beautiful view over the roofs of the old town. Don't forget to visit the platform with a view over the river, the old Matte quarter below and (on the left looking away from the Münster), the beautiful gardens of the Junkerngasse, where rich people used to live and still do.
- At the bottom of the old town, there is the old Nydegg Bridge to cross the river. From it you can see "[Untertorbrücke](#)", the oldest existing bridge in town.
- You need to cross one of these bridges to get to the [Bear Park](#). The legend says that Duke Berchtold V of Zähringen, founder of Berne back in 1191, wanted to name the new city after the first animal he saw on a hunting trip, and this turned out to be a bear. The city was named Berne, and our heraldic animal has been a bear since. Until 5 years ago, the bears lived in the bear pit, but this did not meet our new animal protection laws, why we had to build a park for them. You should watch the bears for a little while and then have that beer at the Tramdepot restaurant nearby that I talked about in an earlier post. In the same building as the Restaurant Tramdepot, there is a Tourist Information, and they offer a [Multimedia Show about the history of Bern](#). It's quite good.
- From the Bear Park, a short but steep detour brings you to the **rose garden**. Some might know that I am not a gardener or flower lover, but for those who are, there are more than 200 types of roses and other flowers as well. I recommend the rose garden because of the iconic view over the old town. You'll know what I mean when you'll stand there.... There is another way to get to the rose garden: The walk from our hotel is about 1 km, you can take the main road, but nicer is the path along the National Horse Center (see map on the right).



In the rose garden they seem to have a nice play ground for toddlers.

- In the upper old town, you shouldn't miss the Bundeshaus¹ (parliament building) with the **Bundesplatz** (Platz = square). Different banks and the Bundeshaus surround the Bundesplatz. On a normal day, there are 26 fountains (for the 26 cantons) blowing water into the air, and on hot days, kids love to play in the fountains.

There is one specialty about the Bundesplatz: Every Tuesday and Saturday, they turn down the fountains because there is a traditional farmers market on this square, right in

1 For a free tour, you'll have to deposit a picture ID: <http://www.parlament.ch/e/service-presse/fuehrungen/besuch-ausserhalb-session/Pages/default.aspx>

front of the Bundeshaus. As far as I know, the market on Saturdays is bigger and extends to the Münstergasse with the meat market.

Sheridan Handloser has offered to lead some walks during the week and the walk around the inner city is planned for Monday. To participate, check the schedule.

II. More City

1. The **Dählhölzli** is not only a wood in the city, but also a Zoo (actually all locals call it **Tierpark** (animal park)). It is beautifully situated in the woods and along the Aare river. There are two parts: The “inside” where you have to pay a fee and the “outside” where you can stroll around and watch the wildlife for free. You can get there with bus #19 and get off at the stop “Tierpark” from there it is very close to the woods and there are [maps](#) to get around. You will get down to the river and you can even walk along the river further than the park. It’s really beautiful.

Down by the river, there is a family restaurant and a big playground for kids (worth checking out, Masha) and a children’s zoo. Apparently there is Pony riding for kids every Wednesday and Sunday, 2.30 – 4 pm, at the picnic area.

For families with children 4 years and up (minimum of 40kg) and active adults, there is an attraction at the other end of the Dählhölzli: [Ropetech](#), an adventure park in the middle of the city. On a secure rope, you can climb through the woods up to 20 meters high. Thomas has done it twice with his then 12-year-old nephew Dominik and they had a lot of fun. Unfortunately he broke his little finger once there, so it is an adventure after all.

2. The first walk with Sheridan is planned to lead you to the [Gurten](#), the “mountain” of Berne (its actually not in Berne, but in a suburb called Köniz). There is a steep railroad going up (and this is included in your tram ticket for the week). Besides the view and hiking possibilities, there are playgrounds for kids that are legendary. I remember what fun it was to visit the Gurten and ride the kid’s train when I was little.

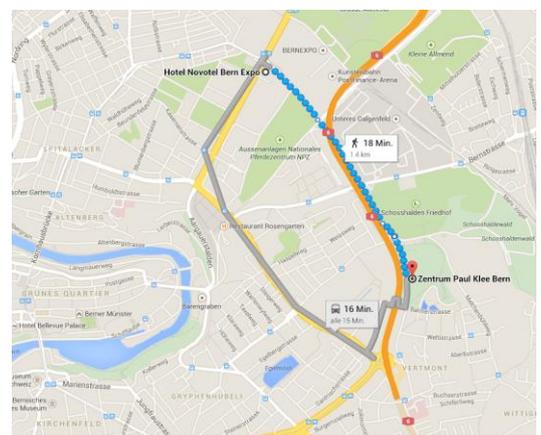
Definitely a place you want to visit with your little ones.

3. Duke Berchtold V of Zähringen founded Bern in 1191, but everybody knows that there were even earlier settlements in this area. There are Roman and Celtic ruins to be visited on the Enge peninsula. There is an [archeological path](#) to these sites. Unfortunately, it’s only in German as far as I know. You can visit Celtic and Roman graves, a small Roman theater and more. Nothing very fancy, but quite interesting. If you are really interested in Roman ruins, there is the arena of Avenches about half an hour to the west or Augusta Raurica (Augst) about one hour away to the north, near Basel.

III. What to do on a rainy day

There are a number of museums to visit, when the weather should be bad (and unfortunately this can happen):

1. Very close to our hotel is the [Center Paul Klee](#), you can even walk (not a very nice walk, though) or take the bus #40 to Ostring and take a short walk from there. The heirs of Paul Klee have left his work to the Canton of Berne under the condition that they build a museum for it. The museum was built by Renzo Piano, an



internationally well known Italian architect, and you will appreciate the very special architecture that gives Klee's work an appropriate home.

2. The [Kunstmuseum Bern](#) has recently become famous because the (in)famous Cornelius Gurlitt has left his estate to this museum. Nothing is decided about this inheritance yet, but if you like art, you shouldn't miss this museum.
3. If you are interested in Einstein's life, a section of the permanent exhibition at the [Bernese Historic Museum](#) is dedicated to him. The special exhibition this summer is about the "Pile Dwellers".
4. Not far from the Historic Museum is the [Natural History Museum of Berne](#). My father used to take us to this museum very often when my sisters and I were kids, but it has changed a lot and is much more fun for kids these days. One of the recent highlights they added to the museum is the "Planggenstock Crystal", one of the biggest crystals ever found in the Alps: Worth having a look.
5. A little outside of Berne you'll find "[Illusoria-Land](#)", a museum and gallery for optical illusions and holographs, run by my good friend and artist [Sandro Del Prete](#). It's much more than admiring Sandro's fascinating art, but experience the darkness of Castel Nero or feel what illusions do to your senses.
6. A few years ago, a new Shopping Mall opened in the Western part of Berne, called "[Westside](#)". Built by the famous architect Daniel Libeskind, it is worth a trip for all architect lovers. It's easily reachable by tram #8.

For families with children, [Bernaqua](#) adventure swimming pool in this mall is more important than architecture. Thomas and Dominik tested it and they would go back anytime.

IV. Shopping

One more thing you can do on a rainy day is shopping. Berne is known for the covered walkways along the main streets through the inner city. You only need an umbrella to cross the streets.

1. Many tourists from Far East come to Switzerland to buy really expensive watches like Rolex or Rado for thousands and thousands of francs. I guess that's not the average chess tourist's objective. If I am mistaken, let me know in private ;-). Unfortunately, I don't think they make chess clocks ...
2. As I mentioned before, the commercial part of the inner city, the upper inner city, has lots of chain stores like C&A, H&M and lots of shoe stores and fashion boutiques... To my mother's displeasure, I am not a big shopper for fashion and shoes, and I could not really help you in that department. There are a few department stores with Globus and Loeb as the more upscale ones and Migros and Coop for the price conscious shoppers. You will not find discount stores like Aldi and Lidl in the inner city; they are in suburbs where the rent is not as expensive. Quite inexpensive are "Landi" stores as well, which are run by the cooperative of the farmers in Switzerland. You'll find those everywhere but in the inner cities of Switzerland.
3. In the lower old town, there are few chains but mostly specialty boutiques, antiques and souvenir shops. The one with a wide choice of good quality souvenirs is [Heimatwerk](#) on Kramgasse 61, one of the main lanes down the old town, very close to the Zytglogge.

4. If you want (and are allowed according your customs regulations) to bring cheese back home, there is a wide choice. There are only a few specialty cheese stores like “[Chäsueb](#)” (cheese boy) on Kramgasse 81 (even closer to the Zytglogge than Heimatwerk). There is a very good cheese guy at the market on the Bundesplatz (remember: every Tuesday and Saturday). All department stores in the upper inner city (Globus, Loeb, Coop and Migros) have a very nice cheese section as well. Don’t stick only to the well-known brands like Emmental or Greyerzer, but try other stuff like different alp cheeses or round “Mutschlis” (semi hard cheese). Better cheese stores let you try before buying.



By the way: Our excursion will take us to a cheese factory in Greyerz. They have a gift shop, too.

5. Chocolate is always a good thing to bring home, just pay attention to the heat.... I have already mentioned the best chocolate and pastry shops [Eichenberger](#), [Tschirren](#) or [Beeler](#) in my food and beverage piece. All department stores have a good choice of Swiss chocolate as well.

By the way: Our excursion will take us to the chocolate factory “Maison Cailler”. They have a gift shop, too.

6. Thanks to our sponsor Glatz, you will be introduced to “[Mandelbärli](#)”, a wonderful pastry in the shape of a bear that comes in different flavors. The original is with almonds (=Mandel), but there are many more flavors these days, like chocolate, lemon and so on. Mandelbärli were invented right around the corner where we live.



7. “Läckerli Huus”: Läckerli are cookies originally from Basel. Their Bernese branch sells cookies in tin boxes in the shape of the Zytglogge. A great souvenir gift IMHO. There are two shops in Berne: One in the Westside Mall and one at Bahnhofplatz 3, right opposite of the Church of the Holy Ghost. If you check the signs at Bahnhofplatz 3, you might find out why I know about the tin boxes ☺ (OK, I tell you: Läckerli Huus is in the same building as my office).
8. Money: Switzerland still has it’s own currency the Swiss franc (short: CHF), 1 € is about 1.2 Swiss francs. Credit cards (MasterCard, Visa and sometimes American Express) are widely accepted. I am not sure about foreign debit cards, though. Most of the time you can withdraw money from ATMs with your debit cards though. The hotel will change money for you, but I guess the rates at the banks are much better. You can spend € in many shops and restaurants, but you will usually get your change in Swiss francs, and the exchange rate will not be so great.

Coins go from 5 cents (Rappen) to 5 francs, and bills come in 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 to 1000 CHF. You will have no problem to break 100 CHF bills, 200 CHF bills are not seen

very often, but getting change for those isn't usually a problem either. 1000 CHF bills are not very common and not recommended.

V. Circus

I have just found out that from August 14 to 27, the "Swiss National Circus" [KNIE](#) will be in town, in walking distance from the hotel. This circus is known for their excellent horse and elephant acts, but they usually have very good international acrobatic acts as well. In lack of royals in Switzerland, our yellow press follows the Knie family very closely.

The program sounds promising.

Schedule for the shows:

Saturday: 3 pm, 8 pm

Sunday: 2.30 pm, 6 pm

Monday 8 pm

Wednesday 3 pm, 8 pm

The circus travels with a small zoo (very different from the Tierpark Dählhölzli I talked about earlier), where they offer pony or elephant riding. You can even watch public trainings with horses and elephants. I guess kids could like this a lot.

That's all for today. More to come.