

Berne
capital Switzerland

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Chapter 1

Bern

For other uses of Bern or Berne, see [Bern \(disambiguation\)](#).

The city of **Bern** or **Berne** (German: *Bern*, pronounced [bɛrn]; French: *Berne* [bɛʁn]; Italian: *Berna* [ˈbɛrna]; Romansh: *Berna* [ˈbɛrnə]; *Berndeutsch/Bärndütsch* (Bernese German): *Bärn* [b̥æːrn]) is the de facto capital of Switzerland, referred to by the Swiss as their (e.g. in German) *Bundesstadt*, or "federal city".^[3]^[note 1] With a population of 139,321 (February 2015), Bern is the fourth most populous city in Switzerland.^[4] The Bern agglomeration, which includes 36 municipalities, has a population of 328,616 in 2000.^[5] The metropolitan area had a population of 660,000 in 2000.^[6] Bern is also the capital of the Canton of Bern, the second most populous of Switzerland's cantons.

The official language of Bern is (the Swiss variety of Standard) German, but the main spoken language is the Alemannic Swiss German dialect called Bernese German.

In 1983 the historic old town in the centre of Bern became a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Bern is ranked among the world's top ten cities for the best quality of life (2010).^[7]

1.1 Name

The etymology of the name *Bern* is uncertain. According to the local legend, based on folk etymology, Berchtold V, Duke of Zähringen, the founder of the city of Bern, vowed to name the city after the first animal he met on the hunt, and this turned out to be a bear. It has long been considered likely that the city was named after the Italian city of Verona, which at the time was known as *Bern* in Middle High German. As a result of the find of the Bern zinc tablet in the 1980s, it is now more common to assume that the city was named after a pre-existing toponym of Celtic origin, possibly **berna* "cleft".^[8] The bear was the heraldic animal of the seal and coat of arms of Bern from at least the 1220s. The earliest reference to the keeping of live bears in the *Bärengaben* dates to the 1440s.

1.2 History

Main article: [History of Bern](#)

1.2.1 Early history



The construction of the Untertor-bridge in Bern, Tschachtlanchronik, late 15th century

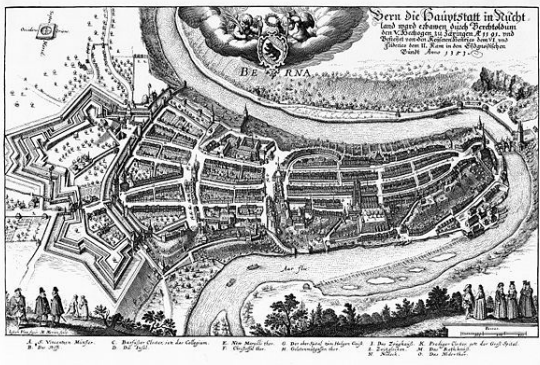
No archaeological evidence that indicates a settlement on the site of today's city centre prior to the 12th century has been found so far. In antiquity, a Celtic *oppidum* stood on the "Engehalsinsel" north of Bern, fortified since the 2nd century BC (late La Tène period), thought to be one of the twelve oppida of the Helvetii mentioned by Caesar. During the Roman era, there was a Gallo-Roman *vicus* on the same site. The Bern zinc tablet has the name *Brenodor* "dwelling of Breno". In the Early Middle Ages, there was a settlement in Bümpliz, now a city district of Bern, some 4 km (2 mi) from the medieval city.

The medieval city is a foundation of the Zähringer ruling family, which rose to power in Upper Burgundy in the 12th century. According to 14th century historiography (*Cronica de Berno*, 1309), Bern was founded in 1191 by Berthold V, Duke of Zähringen.

In 1218, after Berthold died without an heir, Bern was

made a free imperial city by the *Goldene Handfeste* of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II.

1.2.2 Old Swiss Confederacy



Bern in 1638

In 1353 Bern joined the *Swiss Confederacy*, becoming one of the “eight cantons” of the formative period of 1353 to 1481. Bern invaded and conquered *Aargau* in 1415 and *Vaud* in 1536, as well as other smaller territories, there by becoming the largest city-state north of the Alps, by the 18th century comprising most of what is today the canton of Bern and the canton of Vaud.

The city grew out towards the west of the boundaries of the peninsula formed by the River Aare. Initially, the *Zytglogge* tower marked the western boundary of the city from 1191 until 1256, when the *Käfigturm* took over this role until 1345, which, in turn, was then succeeded by the *Christoffelturm* (located close to today’s railway station) until 1622. During the time of the *Thirty Years’ War* two new fortifications, the so-called big and small *Schanze* (entrenchment), were built to protect the whole area of the peninsula.

After a major blaze in 1405, the original wooden buildings were gradually replaced by half-timbered houses and later the sandstone buildings that came to be characteristic for the Old Town. Despite the waves of pestilence that hit Europe in the 14th century, the city continued to grow mainly due to immigration from the surrounding countryside.^[9]

1.2.3 Modern history

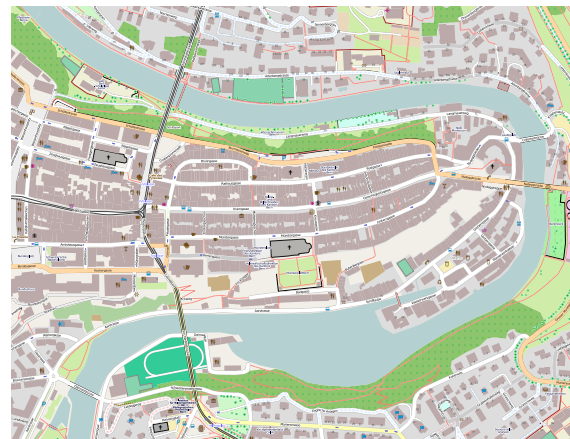
Bern was occupied by French troops in 1798 during the *French Revolutionary Wars*, when it was stripped of parts of its territories. It regained the *Bernese Oberland* in 1802, and following the *Congress of Vienna* of 1814 newly acquired the *Bernese Jura*, once again becoming the largest canton of the confederacy as it stood during the *Restoration*, and further until the secession of the canton of Jura in 1979. In 1848 Bern was made the *Federal City*

(seat of the *Federal Assembly*) of the new Swiss federal state.

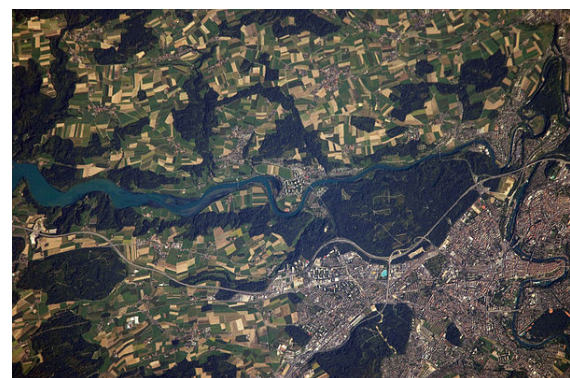
A number of congresses of the socialist *First and Second Internationals* were held in Bern, particularly during *World War I* when Switzerland was neutral; see *Bern International*.

The city’s population rose from about 5,000 in the 15th century to about 12,000 by 1800 and to above 60,000 by 1900, passing the 100,000 mark during the 1920s. Population peaked during the 1960s at 165,000, and has since decreased slightly, to below 130,000 by 2000. As of February 2015, the resident population was at 139,321 of which 100,627 were Swiss citizens and 29,662 (22%) resident foreigners. Another estimated 350,000 people live in the immediate urban agglomeration.^[10]

1.3 Geography



The Aare flows in a wide loop around the Old City of Bern



View of Bern from the ISS. The Old City is in the lower, right hand side.

Bern lies on the *Swiss plateau* in the *Canton of Bern*, slightly west of the centre of Switzerland and 20 km (12 mi) north of the *Bernese Alps*. The countryside around Bern was formed by glaciers during the most recent *Ice Age*. The two mountains closest to Bern are *Gurten* with

a height of 864 m (2,835 ft) and Bantiger with a height of 947 m (3,107 ft). The site of the old observatory in Bern is the point of origin of the CH1903 coordinate system at $46^{\circ}57'08.66''\text{N } 7^{\circ}26'22.50''\text{E} / 46.9524056^{\circ}\text{N } 7.4395833^{\circ}\text{E}$.

The city was originally built on a hilly peninsula surrounded by the River Aare, but outgrew the natural boundaries by the 19th century. A number of bridges have been built to allow the city to expand beyond the Aare.

Bern is built on very uneven ground. There is an elevation difference of several metres between the inner city districts on the Aare (Matte, Marzili) and the higher ones (Kirchenfeld, Länggasse).

Bern has an area, as of 2009, of 51.62 square kilometers (19.93 sq mi). Of this area, 9.79 square kilometers (3.78 sq mi) or 19.0% is used for agricultural purposes, while 17.33 square kilometers (6.69 sq mi) or 33.6% is forested. Of the rest of the land, 23.25 square kilometers (8.98 sq mi) or 45.0% is settled (buildings or roads), 1.06 square kilometers (0.41 sq mi) or 2.1% is either rivers or lakes and 0.16 square kilometers (0.062 sq mi) or 0.3% is unproductive land.^[11]

Of the developed, 3.6% consists of industrial buildings, 21.7% housing and other buildings, and 12.6% is devoted to transport infrastructure. Power and water infrastructure as well as other special developed areas made up 1.1% of the city, while another 6.0% consists of parks, green belts and sports fields. 32.8% of the total land area is heavily forested. Of the agricultural land, 14.3% is used for growing crops and 4.0% is designated to be used as pastures. The rivers and streams provide all the water in the municipality.^[11]

1.3.1 Climate

1.3.2 Subdivisions

The municipality is administratively subdivided into six districts (*Stadtteile*), each of which consists of several quarters (*Quartiere*).

1.4 Demographics

Bern has a population of 138,809 people, 34% of the population are resident foreign nationals. Over the last 10 years (2000–2010) the population has changed at a rate of 0.6%. Migration accounted for 1.3%, while births and deaths accounted for -2.1% .^[13]

Most of the population (as of 2000) speaks German (104,465 or 81.2%) as their first language, Italian is the second most common (5,062 or 3.9%) and French is the third (4,671 or 3.6%). There are 171 people who speak Romansh.^[14]

As of 2008, the population was 47.5% male and 52.5% female. The population was made up of 44,032 Swiss men (35.4% of the population) and 15,092 (12.1%) non-Swiss men. There were 51,531 Swiss women (41.4%) and 13,726 (11.0%) non-Swiss women.^[15] Of the population in the municipality, 39,008 or about 30.3% were born in Bern and lived there in 2000. There were 27,573 or 21.4% who were born in the same canton, while 25,818 or 20.1% were born somewhere else in Switzerland, and 27,812 or 21.6% were born outside of Switzerland.^[14]



Apartment blocks at Bern-Bethlehem

As of 2000, children and teenagers (0–19 years old) make up 15.1% of the population, while adults (20–64 years old) make up 65% and seniors (over 64 years old) make up 19.9%.^[13]

As of 2000, there were 59,948 people who were single and never married in the municipality. There were 49,873 married individuals, 9,345 widows or widowers and 9,468 individuals who are divorced.^[14]



Houses in the Old City of Bern

As of 2000, there were 67,115 private households in the municipality, and an average of 1.8 persons per household.^[13] There were 34,981 households that consist of only one person and 1,592 households with five or more people. In 2000, a total of 65,538 apartments (90.6% of the total) were permanently occupied, while 5,352 apartments (7.4%) were seasonally occupied and 1,444 apartments (2.0%) were empty.^[16] As of 2009, the construction rate of new housing units was 1.2 new units per 1000 residents.^[13]

As of 2003 the average price to rent an average apartment in Bern was 1108.92 Swiss francs (CHF) per month (US\$890, £500, €710 approx. exchange rate from 2003). The average rate for a one room apartment was 619.82 CHF (US\$500, £280, €400), a two-room apartment was about 879.36 CHF (US\$700, £400, €560), a three-room apartment was about 1040.54 CHF (US\$830, £470, €670) and a six or more room apartment cost an average of 2094.80 CHF (US\$1680, £940, €1340). The average apartment price in Bern was 99.4% of the national average of 1116 CHF.^[17] The vacancy rate for the municipality, in 2010, was 0.45%.^[13]

1.5 Historic population

The historical population is given in the following chart:^[18]

1.6 Politics



Erlacherhof



Rathaus

See also: List of mayors of Bern

Bern is governed by the *Gemeinderat*, an executive council with five members, one of them the elected mayor (*Stadtpräsident*). The parliament has 80 members and is

called *Stadtrat*. Both the legislative and the executive are elected in general elections for a term of four years. The last elections were held in November 2008 with a 43.48% participation.

The executive council has a left-green majority with two representatives, including the mayor Alexander Tschäpät, of the *Social Democratic Party of Switzerland (SPS)* and one representative of the leftist Green party *Grünes Bündnis (GB)*. It also has a majority of three women against two men.

The seat of the *Gemeinderat* is the Erlacherhof.

The 80 members of the legislative council belong to 18 different political parties, the strongest being the *Social Democratic Party* with 20 representatives, followed by the conservative *Free Democratic Party of Switzerland (FDP)* with 10 and the moderate Green party *Grüne Freien Liste (GFL)* with 9 seats. Both the far right *Swiss People's Party (SVP)* and the leftist Green party *Grünes Bündnis* have 8 seats each.

The *Stadtrat* meets on Thursday evenings at the *Rathaus* (town hall).

The representatives of the *Social Democratic Party* and of the *Green Parties*, collectively referred to as “Red-Green-Center” (*Rot-Grüne-Mitte*), hold a majority in both councils and mostly determine city policy, although no formal coalition agreement exists and, under the system of direct democracy that prevails in Switzerland, most important issues are settled by general vote.

In the 2007 federal election the most popular party was the SPS which received 29.12% of the vote. The next three most popular parties were the Green Party (24.88%), the SVP (16.73%) and the FDP (15.7%). In the federal election, a total of 43,783 votes were cast, and the voter turnout was 51.5%.^[19]

1.7 Main sights



Federal Palace of Switzerland (Swiss Parliament Building)

The structure of Bern's city centre is largely medieval



The Ogre of the Kindlifresserbrunnen has a sack of children waiting to be devoured.

and has been recognised by UNESCO as a Cultural World Heritage Site. Perhaps its most famous sight is the *Zytglogge* (Bernese German for “Time Bell”), an elaborate medieval clock tower with moving puppets. It also has an impressive 15th century Gothic cathedral, the *Münster*, and a 15th-century town hall. Thanks to 6 kilometres (4 miles) of arcades, the old town boasts one of the longest covered shopping promenades in Europe.

Since the 16th century, the city has had a bear pit, the *Bärengraben*, at the far end of the Nydeggbücke to house its heraldic animals. The currently four bears are now kept in an open-air enclosure nearby, and two other young bears, a present by the Russian president, are kept in Dählhölzli zoo.^[20]

The Federal Palace (Bundeshaus), built from 1857 to 1902, which houses the national parliament, government and part of the federal administration, can also be visited.

Albert Einstein lived in a flat at the Kramgasse 49, the site of the Einsteinhaus, from 1903 to 1905, the year in which the *Annus Mirabilis Papers* were published.

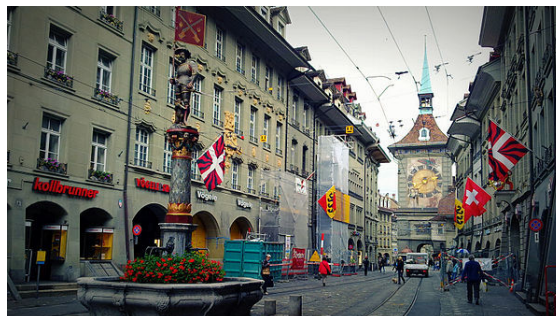
The Rose Garden (*Rosengarten*), from which a scenic panoramic view of the medieval town centre can be enjoyed, is a well-kept Rosarium on a hill, converted into a park from a former cemetery in 1913.

There are eleven Renaissance allegorical statues on public fountains in the Old Town. Nearly all the 16th century fountains, except the Zähringer fountain which was created by Hans Hiltbrand, are the work of the Fribourg mas-

ter Hans Gieng. One of the more interesting fountains is the Kindlifresserbrunnen (Bernese German: Child Eater Fountain but often translated Ogre Fountain) which is claimed to represent a Jew,^[21] the Greek god Chronos or a Fastnacht figure that scares disobedient children.^[22]

Bern’s most recent sight is the set of fountains in front of the Federal Palace. It was inaugurated on 1 August 2004.

The Universal Postal Union is situated in Bern.



The Zytglogge clock tower and the city’s medieval covered shopping promenades (Lauben)

1.7.1 Heritage sites of national significance

Bern is home to 114 Swiss heritage sites of national significance.^[23]

It includes the entire Old Town, which is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and many sites within and around it. Some of the most notable in the Old Town include the Cathedral which was started in 1421 and is the tallest cathedral in Switzerland, the Zytglogge and Käfigturm towers, which mark two successive expansions of the Old Town, and the Holy Ghost Church, which is one of the largest Swiss Reformed churches in Switzerland. Within the Old Town, there are eleven 16th century fountains, most attributed to Hans Gieng, that are on the list.

Outside the Old Town the heritage sites include the Bärengraben, the Gewerbeschule Bern (1937), the Eidgenössisches Archiv für Denkmalpflege, the Kirchenfeld mansion district (after 1881), the Thunplatzbrunnen, the Federal Mint building, the Federal Archives, the Swiss National Library, the Historical Museum (1894), Alpine Museum, Museum of Communication and Natural History Museum.

1.8 Culture

See also: List of museums in Bern

1.8.1 Theatres

- Bern Theatre^[24]



Zentrum Paul Klee



Stadttheater



Gurtenfestival, 2003

- Narrenpack Theatre Bern^[25]
- Schlachthaus Theatre^[26]
- Tojo Theater
- The Theatre on the Effinger-Street^[27]
- Theatre am Käfigturm^[28]

1.8.2 Cinemas

Bern has several dozen cinemas. As is customary in Switzerland, films are generally shown in their original language (e.g., English) with German and French subtitles. Only a small number of screenings are dubbed in German.

1.8.3 Film festivals

- **Shnit international shortfilmfestival** shnit International Shortfilmfestival, held annually in early October.
- **Queersicht** – gay and lesbian film festival, held annually in the second week of November.

1.8.4 Festivals

- **BeJazz** Summer and Winter Festival
- **Buskers'** festival
- **Gurtenfestival**
- **Internationales Jazzfestival** Bern
- **SHNIT International Short Film Festival**
- **Taktlos-Festival**

1.8.5 Fairs

- **Zibelemärit** – The Zibelemärit (onion market) is an annual fair held on the fourth Monday in November.
- **Bernese Fasnacht** (Carnival)

1.9 Sport



Stade de Suisse Wankdorf

Bern was the site of the 1954 Football (Soccer) World Cup Final, a huge upset for the Hungarian Golden Team, who were beaten 3–2 by West Germany.

The football team BSC Young Boys is based in Bern at the Stade de Suisse Wankdorf, which also was one of the venues for the European football championship 2008.

The *Stade de Suisse* hosted three matches during the 2008 UEFA Euro Cup tournament.

SC Bern is the major ice hockey team of Bern who plays at the PostFinance Arena.

The *PostFinance Arena* was the main host of the 2009 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship, including the opening game and the final of the tournament.

The PostFinance Arena was also the host of the 2011 European Figure Skate Championships.

Bern Cardinals is the baseball and softball team of Bern, which plays at the Allmend

Bern Grizzlies is the American football club in Bern and plays at Athletics Arena Wankdorf.

Bern was a candidate to host the 2010 Winter Olympics, but withdrew its bid in September 2002 after a referendum was passed that showed that the bid was not supported by locals. Those games were eventually awarded to Vancouver, Canada.

RC Bern is the local rugby club (since 1972) and plays at the Allmend. The ladies team was founded in 1995.

1.10 Economy

As of 2010, Bern had an unemployment rate of 3.3%. As of 2008, there were 259 people employed in the primary economic sector and about 59 businesses involved in this sector. 16,413 people were employed in the secondary sector and there were 950 businesses in this sector. 135,973 people were employed in the tertiary sector, with 7,654 businesses in this sector.^[13]

In 2008 the total number of full-time equivalent jobs was 125,037. The number of jobs in the primary sector was 203, of which 184 were in agriculture and 19 were in forestry or lumber production. The number of jobs in the secondary sector was 15,476 of which 7,650 or (49.4%) were in manufacturing, 51 or (0.3%) were in mining and 6,389 (41.3%) were in construction. The number of jobs in the tertiary sector was 109,358. In the tertiary sector; 11,396 or 10.4% were in wholesale or retail sales or the repair of motor vehicles, 10,293 or 9.4% were in the movement and storage of goods, 5,090 or 4.7% were in a hotel or restaurant, 7,302 or 6.7% were in the information industry, 8,437 or 7.7% were the insurance or financial industry, 10,660 or 9.7% were technical professionals or scientists, 5,338 or 4.9% were in education and 17,903 or 16.4% were in health care.^[29]

In 2000, there were 94,367 workers who commuted into the municipality and 16,424 workers who commuted away. The municipality is a net importer of workers, with about 5.7 workers entering the municipality for every one leaving.^[30] Of the working population, 50.6% used public transport to get to work, and 20.6% used a private car.^[13]

1.11 Religion

From the 2000 census, 60,455 or 47.0% belonged to the Swiss Reformed Church, while 31,510 or 24.5% were Roman Catholic. Of the rest of the population, there were 1,874 members of an Orthodox church (or about 1.46% of the population), there were 229 persons (or about 0.18% of the population) who belonged to the Christian Catholic Church, and there were 5,531 persons (or about 4.30% of the population) who belonged to another Christian church. There were 324 persons (or about 0.25% of the population) who were Jewish, and 4,907 (or about 3.81% of the population) who were Muslim. There were 629 persons who were Buddhist, 1,430 persons who were Hindu and 177 persons who belonged to another church. 16,363 (or about 12.72% of the population) belonged to no church, are agnostic or atheist, and 7,855 persons (or about 6.11% of the population) did not answer the question.^[14] On 14 December 2014 the *Haus der Religionen* was inaugurated.

1.12 Education



Main building of the University of Bern

The University of Bern, whose buildings are mainly located in the *Länggasse* quarter, is located in Bern, as well as the University of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschule*) and several vocations schools.

In Bern, about 50,418 or (39.2%) of the population have completed non-mandatory upper secondary education, and 24,311 or (18.9%) have completed additional higher education (either university or a *Fachhochschule*). Of the 24,311 who completed tertiary schooling, 51.6% were Swiss men, 33.0% were Swiss women, 8.9% were non-Swiss men and 6.5% were non-Swiss women.^[14]

The Canton of Bern school system provides one year of non-obligatory *kindergarten*, followed by six years of primary school. This is followed by three years of obligatory lower secondary school where the pupils are separated according to ability and aptitude. Following the lower secondary pupils may attend additional schooling or they may enter an apprenticeship.^[31]

During the 2009–10 school year, there were a total of 10,979 pupils attending classes in Bern. There were 89 kindergarten classes with a total of 1,641 pupils in the municipality. Of the kindergarten pupils, 32.4% were permanent or temporary residents of Switzerland (not citizens) and 40.2% have a different mother language than the classroom language. The municipality had 266 primary classes and 5,040 pupils. Of the primary pupils, 30.1% were permanent or temporary residents of Switzerland (not citizens) and 35.7% have a different mother language than the classroom language. During the same year, there were 151 lower secondary classes with a total of 2,581 pupils. There were 28.7% who were permanent or temporary residents of Switzerland (not citizens) and 32.7% have a different mother language than the classroom language.^[32]

Bern is home to 8 libraries. These libraries include; the Schweiz. Nationalbibliothek/ Bibliothèque nationale suisse, the *Universitätsbibliothek Bern*, the *Kornhausbibliotheken Bern*, the *BFH Wirtschaft und Verwaltung Bern*, the *BFH Gesundheit*, the *BFH Soziale Arbeit*, the *Hochschule der Künste Bern, Gestaltung und Kunst* and the *Hochschule der Künste Bern, Musikbibliothek*. There was a combined total (as of 2008) of 10,308,336 books or other media in the libraries, and in the same year a total of 2,627,973 items were loaned out.^[33]

As of 2000, there were 9,045 pupils in Bern who came from another municipality, while 1,185 residents attended schools outside the municipality.^[30]

1.13 Transport



Tram station on the Bahnhofplatz, with the Heiliggeistkirche in the background

Public transport works well in Bern, with the Bern S-

Bahn, Bern tramway network, Bern trolleybus system and a bus network forming an integrated all-four style scheme connecting the different parts of the city.

A funicular railway leads from the *Marzili* district to the *Bundeshaus*. The *Marzilibahn* funicular is, with a length of 106 m (348 ft), the second shortest public railway in Europe after the *Zagreb* funicular.

Several *Aare* bridges connect the old parts of the city with the newer districts outside of the peninsula.

Bern is well connected to other cities by several motorways (A1, A12, A6).

Bern railway station connects the city to the national and international railways network.

Bern is also served by *Bern Airport*, located outside the city near the town of *Belp*. The regional airport, colloquially called *Bern-Belp* or *Belpmoos*, is connected to several European cities. Additionally *Zürich Airport*, *Geneva Airport* and *EuroAirport Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg* also serve as international gateways, all reachable within two hours by car or train from Bern.

1.14 Notable people



Albert Einstein's house

- *Mikhail Bakunin* died in Bern on 1 July 1876
- *Vladimir Lenin* resided in Bern from 1914 until 1917
- *Albert Einstein* worked out his theory of relativity while living in Bern, employed as a clerk at the patent office
- *Albrecht von Haller*
- *Louise Elisabeth de Meuron*, a famed eccentric and noble lady
- *Paul Emmert*, painter
- *Ferdinand Hodler*, painter

- Michael Kauter, fencer
- Mark Streit, ice hockey player
- Christoph von Graffenried, founder of New Bern in the US state of North Carolina
- Peter Bieri, philosophy professor and novelist
- Adolf Wölfli, visual artist
- Roman Josi, ice hockey player
- Mani Matter, songwriter
- Léon Savary, Swiss writer and journalist
- Hans Urwyler, Christian minister
- Aimé Félix Tschiffely, Famous Longrider
- Algirdas Paleckis, diplomat and politician, was born in Bern
- Emil Theodor Kocher, recipient of 1909 Nobel Prize.

1.15 Twin Cities

The city council of the city of Bern decided against having twinned cities except for a temporary (during the UEFA Euro 2008) cooperation with the Austrian city Salzburg^{[34][35]}

1.16 Notes

- [1] According to the Swiss constitution there is intentionally no *capital* ruling the Swiss Confederation, but in Bern you find governmental institutions, such as the parliament and the Federal Council. The Federal Court however is situated in Lausanne. The Federal Court of Criminality is in Bellinzona. The Federal Court of Administration and the Federal Court of Patents however are in St Gallen. Exemplifying the very federal nature of the Swiss Confederation!

1.17 Notes and references

- [1] Arealstatistik Standard - Gemeindedaten nach 4 Hauptbereichen
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 - Bern Public Transportation Website (BernMobil)
 - Bern travel guide from Wikivoyage
 - CityHunter Bern
 - Gurtenfestival

1.18 External links

- City of Bern
- *Bern (Gemeinde)* in German, French and Italian in the online *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland*.

Chapter 2

Bern railway station

For the station in the German municipality of Berne, see Berne station.

Bern railway station (German: *Bahnhof Bern*) serves the municipality of Bern, the capital city of Switzerland. Opened progressively between 1858 and 1860, and rebuilt several times since then, it forms part of the *Olten–Lausanne line* (known as the *Mittellandlinie* in German) and is near the end of the *Lötschberg line*.

The station is owned by the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB-CFF-FFS). Train services to and from the station are operated by the Swiss Federal Railways, the Bern-Lötschberg-Simplon railway (BLS) and the metre gauge Regionalverkehr Bern-Solothurn (RBS). Trains calling at the station include TGVs, ICEs, and international trains to Italy.

Bern is the nearest station to the University of Bern in the Länggasse quarter. There is a shuttle bus to Bern Airport from the station. It has an IATA Airport Code (ZDJ), as American Airlines codeshares on the Swiss Federal Railways service from Zurich International Airport in Zürich.

Between 1999 and 2003, the station was renovated and partially redesigned. It now contains Rail City, a shopping center open longer than the other shops in town, and over the weekend. This is possible as the shop opening laws of the city of Bern do not apply on Swiss Federal Railway property.

2.1 Services

2.1.1 Long-distance trains

The main long-distance routes served by trains to or from Bern railway station are as follows:

- EC Basel – Olten – **Bern** – Visp – Brig – Domodossola – Milano
- ICE Interlaken Ost – **Bern** – Olten – Basel – Frankfurt am Main – Berlin
- TGV Interlaken Ost - **Bern** – Olten - Basel - Mulhouse – Dijon – Paris

- IC Genève Aéroport – Lausanne – **Bern** – Zürich – St. Gallen
- IC Brig – Visp – / Interlaken Ost – **Bern** – Olten – Basel
- IC Brig – Visp – **Bern** – Zürich – Romanshorn
- IR Genève Aéroport – Lausanne – **Bern** – Sursee – Luzern
- IR **Bern** – Langenthal – Olten – Zürich – Schaffhausen
- IR **Bern** – Olten – Aarau – Brugg – Baden – Zürich
- IR **Bern** – Langenthal – Olten
- RE **Bern** – Lyss – Biel/Bienne
- RE **Bern** – Münsingen – Spiez – Zweisimmen / – Kandersteg – Brig
- RE **Bern** – Konolfingen – Wolhusen – Luzern
- RE **Bern** – Kerzers – Neuchâtel
- RE **Bern** – Jegenstorf – Solothurn (narrow gauge)

2.1.2 Bern S-Bahn trains

As of 2012, the station was also served by the following Bern S-Bahn routes:

- S 1 Fribourg–Flamatt–Bern–Münsingen–Thun
- S 2 Laupen–Flamatt–Bern–Konolfingen–Langnau
- S 3 Biel/Bienne–Bern–Belp (from 21:00, replaces the S4/S44 as far as Thun)
- S 31 Supplements the S3 on Mondays to Fridays in the Biel/Bienne–Münchenbuchsee–Belp section (since 11 December 2011)
- S 4 Langnau–Burgdorf–Zollikofen–Bern–Belp–Thun

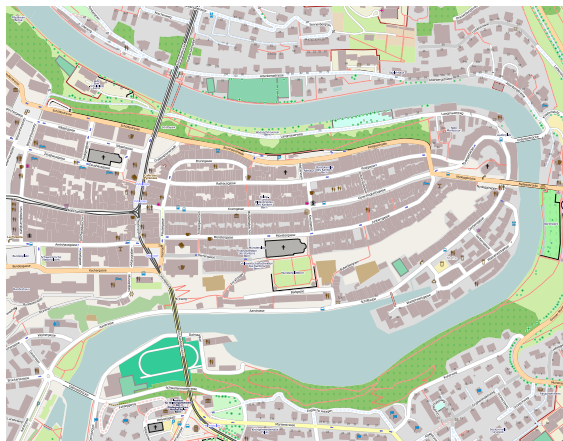
- S 44 Sumiswald–Grünen–Ramsei–/(Solithurn–) Wiler–* Burgdorf–Bern Wankdorf–Bern–Belp–Thun
- S 5 Bern–Kerzers–Neuchâtel/Murten (–Avenches–Payerne)
- S 51 Bern–Bümpliz Nord–Brünnen
- S 52 Bern–Rosshäusern–Kerzers (–Ins–Neuchâtel)
- S 6 Bern–Schwarzenburg
- S 7 Bern–Worblaufen–Bolligen–Worb Dorf
- S 8 Bern–Zollikofen–Jegenstorf (from 21:30, replaces the RE as far as Solothurn)
- S 9 Bern–Worblaufen–Unterezollikofen

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Chapter 3

Old City of Bern



The Aar flows around the Old City with a loop east expansive

The **Old City of Bern** is the medieval city center of Bern, Switzerland. Built on a narrow hill surrounded on three sides by the Aare River, its compact layout has remained essentially unchanged since its construction during the 12th to the 15th century. Despite a major fire in 1405, after which much of the city was rebuilt in sandstone, and substantial construction efforts in the 18th century, Bern's old city has retained its medieval character.

The Old City is home to Switzerland's tallest cathedral as well as other churches, bridges and a large collection of Renaissance fountains. In addition to many historical buildings, the seats of the federal, cantonal and municipal government are also situated in the Old City. It is a UNESCO Cultural World Heritage Site since 1983 due to the compact and generally intact medieval core and is an excellent example of incorporating the modern world into a medieval city. Numerous buildings in the Old City have been designated as Swiss Cultural Properties of National Significance, as well as the entire Old City.^[1]

3.1 History

See also: Early history of Switzerland and History of Bern

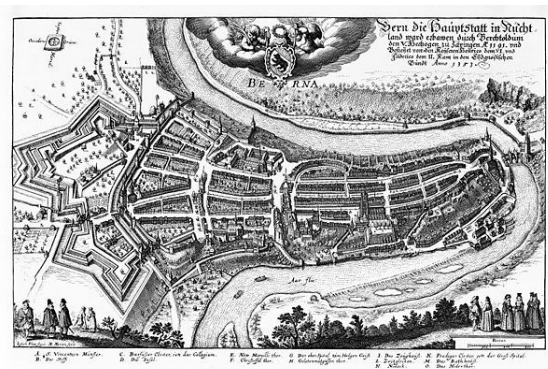
The earliest settlements in the Aare Valley date back to



The Aare River wraps around the Old City of Bern, pictured here is the old stone bridge at Nydegg

the Neolithic period. During the 2nd century BCE the valley was settled by the Helvetii. Following the Roman conquest of Helvetia a small Roman settlement was established near the Old City. This settlement was abandoned during the 2nd century AD. From that time until the founding of Bern the area remained sparsely settled.

3.1.1 Founding



Map of the city from 1638 showing the Old City as well as later defensive fortifications to the east.

The history of the city of Bern proper begins with its founding by Duke Berchtold V of Zähringen in 1191. Local legend has it that the duke vowed to name the city after the first animal he met on the hunt, which turned out to be a bear.^[2] Both the name of the city (*Bern* can stand

for *Bär(e)n*, bears) and its heraldic beast, come from this legend. At that time, much of today's Switzerland (then considered part of southern Burgundy) was under the authority of the house of Zähringen. The Zähringer leaders, although with no actual duchy of their own, were styled dukes by decree of the German king and exercised imperial power south of the Rhine. To establish their position there, they founded or expanded numerous settlements, including Fribourg (in 1157), Bern, Burgdorf and Morat.^[3]

The area chosen by Berchtold V was a hilly peninsula surrounded by the Aare river on three sides. This location made the city easy to defend and influenced the later development of the city. The long, narrow shape of the peninsula made the city develop as several long, parallel rows of houses. The only major cross streets (going north and south) developed along the city walls, which were moved to allow the city to expand. Therefore, the cross streets mark the stages of development in the Old City of Bern.

On the eastern end of the peninsula a small fort, called Castle Nydegg, was founded by Berchtold IV in the second half of the 12th century. Either when the fort was built or in 1191, the city of Bern was founded around the eastern end of the peninsula.^[4]

3.1.2 First Expansion – 1191

The first expansion of Bern occurred as the city was founded. Most likely the first city started at Nydegg Castle and reached to the Zytglogge (Swiss German: clock tower). The city was divided by three longitudinal streets, which stretched from the Castle to the city wall. Both the position of the town church and the shape of the eaves were typical for a Zähringer city.^[4]

During the first half of the 13th century two additional streets (*Brunngasse* and *Herrengasse*) were added. *Brunngasse* was a semi-circular street on the north edge of the city, while *Herrengasse* was on the south side of the city. A wood bridge was built over the Aare River which allowed increased trade and limited settlements on the east bank of the river.

3.1.3 Second Expansion – 1255 to 1260

During the second half of the 13th century the river side foundation of Nydegg Castle was strengthened and connected to a new west city wall. This wall was added to protect the four streets, known as the New City or Savoy City, that had sprung up outside the Zytglogge. The new west wall included a gate known as the *Käfigturm* (German: Prison Tower).

Around 1268 Nydegg Castle was destroyed, and the city expanded into the area formerly occupied by the castle.^[4] In the south east part of the peninsula below the main hill

that the rest of the Old City occupied, a section known as *Matte* grew up.

3.1.4 Third Expansion – 1344 to 1346



An illustration of the Large and Small Redoubts (Schanzen) added from 1622 to 1634

For almost a century the *Käfigturm* remained the western boundary of Bern. However, as the city grew, people began settling outside the city walls. In 1344 the city started to build a third wall to protect the growing population. By 1346 the project was finished and six new streets were protected by a wall and the *Christoffelturm* (German: St. Christopher Tower). The *Christoffelturm* remained the western border of Bern until the 19th century. From 1622 to 1634 a series of defensive walls and strong points were added outside the *Christoffelturm*. These defensive walls, known as the *Grosse Schanze* and *Kleine Schanze* (large and small redoubts respectively) as well as the *Schanzengraben* (redoubt ditch or moat), were never used as living space for the city, though the *Schanzengraben* was used for a while to house the *Bärengraben*.



Arcade in the Old City of Bern

3.1.5 Great Fire of 1405

Bern was included in the UNESCO World Heritage Sites because of “an exceptionally coherent planning concept” and because “the medieval town...has retained its original character”.^[5] Bern owes its coherent planning concept and its famous arcades to a disaster. In 1405 a fire broke out in Bern, which was mostly wooden buildings at the time. The fire raced through the city and destroyed most of the buildings in town. In the wake of this disaster, the city was rebuilt with all stone houses in similar medieval styles. The arcades were added throughout the 15th century as houses expanded in the upper stories out into the street. Throughout the next three centuries houses were modified, but the essential elements (stone construction, arcades) remained.

In the 16th century, as Bern became a powerful and rich city-state, public fountains were added to Bern. A number of fountains were topped with large allegorical statues, eleven of which are still visible in the city. The fountains served to show the power and wealth of the city,^[6] as well as providing fresh water for the citizens of the city. Overall, the city remained nearly unchanged for the next two centuries.

3.1.6 Expansion and destruction of the Christoffelturm

By the early 19th century Bern had expanded as far as it could within the old city walls. An increasing number of



The tower about 5 years before its removal

people were living outside the city walls in neighboring communities. Throughout the 19th century, this ring of modern cities grew up around the Old City without forcing it to demolish the medieval city core. However, the growth around the Old City did lead to several projects.

Within the Old City of Bern, many of the old stone buildings were renovated without changing the outer appearance. The bell tower was finally finished on the *Münster* (German: Minister or Cathedral), making it the tallest church in Switzerland. A new bridge was built across the Aare at Nydegg in 1842 to 1844. The new bridge was larger than the, still standing, old bridge, called Untertorbrücke, which had been built in 1461 to 1487.

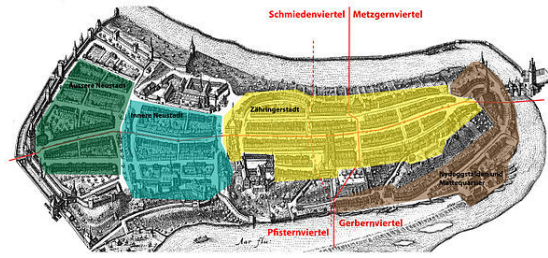
One of the biggest projects was the proposed destruction of the *Christoffelturm* to open up the west end of the city. Following a very close vote the decision to remove the Christoffelturm and city wall was made on 15 December 1864. In the spring of the following year Gottlieb Ott led the team that removed the tower. Currently, the former location of the *Christoffelturm* is a large road interchange, a major bus station and the central train station.

3.1.7 Federal Capital in the 20th century

Following the *Sonderbundskrieg* (German: Separate Alliance War) in 1847, Switzerland established a federal constitution and Bern was chosen as the capital of the



The north face of the Parliament Building showing the connection to the two flanking Bundesrathaus



The Viertel and Quartiere of the old city. (click to enlarge)

new Federal State. The vote to make Bern the federal city was met with little enthusiasm (419 vs 313 votes) in Bern^[7] due to concerns over the cost. The first *Bundesrathaus* or Parliament House was built in 1852–1857 by the city of Bern in a New-Renaissance style. The mirror image *Bundeshaus Ost* (East Federal Building) was built in 1884–1892. Then, in 1894–1902 the domed *Parlamentsgebäude* or Parliament Building was built between the other two buildings.^[8] The three parliament buildings represent the majority of the new, federal construction in the Old City. Most of the other buildings that come with a national capital were placed outside the Old City or where incorporated into existing buildings.

For centuries the famous *Bärengraben* (German: Bear Pits) were located in the Old City. According to the Bernese historian *Valerius Anshelm* the first bears were kept on *Bärenplatz* (German: Bears' Plaza) in 1513.^[2] They were moved from the modern *Bärenplatz* to the *Schanzengraben* near the former *Christoffelturm* in 1764. However, the bears remained in the Old City until the expansion of the new capital forced them out. The bears and the *Bärengraben* were moved from the Old City across the Aare River on 27 May 1857.^[2]

In the 20th century, Bern has had to deal with incorporating the modern world into a medieval city. The plaza where the *Christoffelturm* used to be, has become the central bus stop for the city. The main train station was built under the plaza, and actually includes some of the foundations from the *Christoffelturm* and wall in the train station. However, one of the biggest challenges has been integrating automobile traffic into the Old City. Due to the number of important buildings in the Old City and the central location of the Old City, it was impossible to completely close off this area to vehicles. While some streets have remained pedestrian zones, most major streets carry city buses, trams or personal vehicles.

3.2 Districts and neighbourhoods

The old city was historically subdivided into four *Viertel* and four *Quartiere*. The *Viertel* were the city's official administrative districts. They were instituted for tax and defence purposes in the 13th century, and ceased to be used in 1798 after the fall of the *Ancien Régime* in Bern.^[9]

Of greater practical importance were the *Quartiere*, the four traditional neighbourhoods in which people of similar social and economic rank congregated. They emerged in the late Middle Ages, overlap the *Viertel* boundaries and remain easily identifiable in today's cityscape.^[9]

The central and oldest neighbourhood is the *Zähringerstadt* (*Zähringer town*), which contained the medieval city's principal political, economic and spiritual institutions. These were strictly separated: official buildings were situated around the *Kreuzgasse* (Cross Alley), ecclesiastical buildings were located at the *Münstergasse* (Cathedral Alley) and *Herrengasse* (Lords' Alley), while guilds and merchants' shops clustered around the central *Kramgasse* (Grocers Alley) and *Gerechtigkeitsgasse* (Justice Alley).^[10] *Junkerngasse* (Junker Lane), which is parallel to *Gerechtigkeitsgasse*, was originally known as *Kilchgasse* (Church Lane) but was renamed because of number of patricians or untitled nobility which lived on the southern side of the peninsula.

The second oldest neighbourhood, the *Innere Neustadt* (Inner New City), was built during the city's first westward expansion in 1255, between the first western wall guarded by the *Zytglogge* tower and the second wall, guarded by the *Käfigturm*. Its central feature is the broad *Marktgasse* (Market Alley).

Situated in the northeast and southeast of the Aare peninsula, the *Nydeggsstalden* and the *Mattequartier* together constitute medieval Bern's smallest neighbourhood. Workshops and mercantile activity prevailed in this area, and medieval sources tell of numerous complaints about the ceaseless and apparently nerve-wracking noise of machinery, carts and commerce. The Matte area at the riverside features three artificial channels, through which Aare water was diverted to power three city-owned watermills built in 1360.^[11] In the early 20th century, a small hydroelectric plant was built in that loca-



The Mattequartier and the old city seen from the east, ca. 1820.



Münster of Bern, viewed from the Kirchenfeld Bridge, showing the bell tower and the large terrace

tion. Nearby, the busy *Schiffländte* (ship landing-place) allowed for the reloading of goods transported by boat up and down the river.^[12]

The last neighbourhood to be built was the *Äussere Neustadt* (Outer New City), which added a third and final layer to Bern's defences starting in 1343. All of these walls, gates and earthworks were demolished in the 19th century ending with the destruction of Bern's greatest of its three guard towers, the *Christoffelturm*. Only the four central streets were lined with residential houses in late medieval times, while the rest of the area was devoted to agriculture and animal husbandry.^[13]



Statues representing the Last Judgement, over the main portal of the Münster of Bern

3.3 Significant buildings

While the entire old town of Bern is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, there are a number of buildings and fountains within the city that merit special mention. All of these buildings are also listed in the Swiss Inventory of Cultural Property of National and Regional Significance.^[1]

3.3.1 Münster (Cathedral)

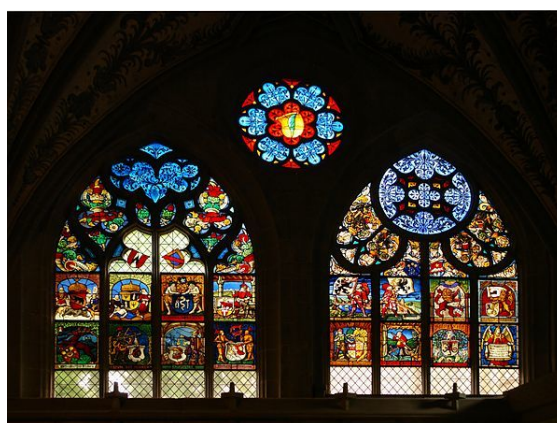
Main article: *Münster of Bern*

The Münster of Bern (German: *Berner Münster*) is a Protestant Gothic cathedral located on the south side of the peninsula. Construction on the Münster began in 1421 and finished with the bell tower in 1893. The bell tower is 100 m (328 ft) and is the tallest in Switzerland. The largest bell in the bell tower is also the largest bell in Switzerland. This enormous bell, weighing about 10 tons and 247 cm (8.1 ft) in diameter,^[14] was cast in 1611 and is still rung every day. It is possible to stand next to the bell when it is rung, but one has to cover ones ears to avoid hearing damage.

Above the main portal is a rare complete collection of Gothic sculpture. The collection represents the Christian belief in the Last Judgment where the wicked will be separated from the righteous. The large 47 free-standing

statues are replicas (the originals are in the Bern History Museum) and the 170 smaller statues are all original.

The interior is large, open and fairly empty. Nearly all the art and altars in the cathedral were removed in 1528 during the iconoclasm of the Protestant Reformation. The paintings and statues were dumped in what became the Cathedral Terrace, making the terrace a rich archeological site. The only major pieces of art that survived the iconoclasm inside the cathedral are the stained glass windows and the choir stalls.



Stained glass windows of the cathedral

The stained glass windows date from 1441–1450 and are considered the most valuable in Switzerland.^[15] The windows include a number of heraldic symbols and religious images as well as an entire "Dance of Death" window. This window shows death, as a skeleton, claiming people from all professions and social classes. A "Dance of Death" was intended as a reminder that death would come to everyone regardless of wealth or status, and may have been a comfort in a world filled with plagues and wars.

The choir, in the eastern side of the Cathedral between the nave and the sanctuary, houses the first Renaissance choir stalls in Switzerland.^[16] The stalls are carved with lifelike animals and images of daily life.

3.3.2 Zytglogge

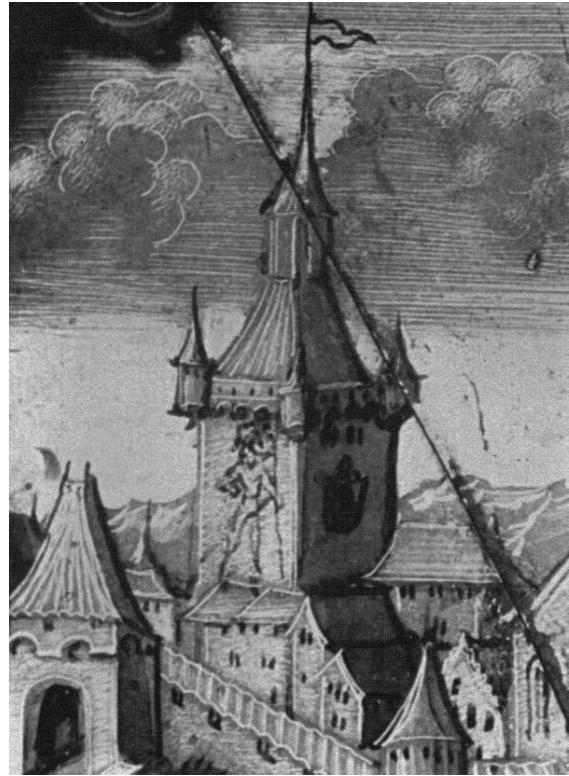
Main article: Zytglogge

The **Zytglogge** is the landmark medieval clock tower in



The eastern face of the Zytglogge

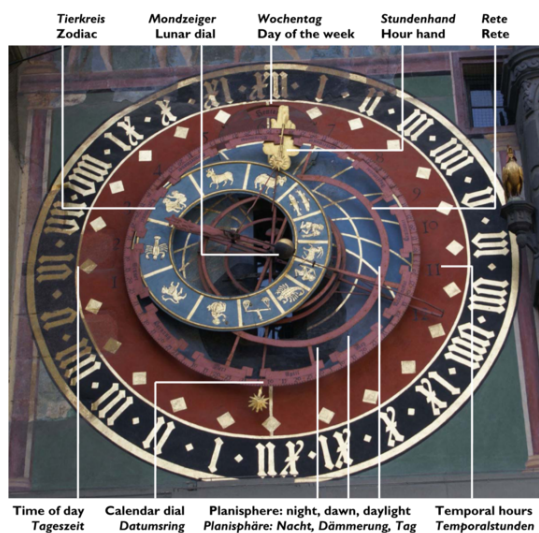
the Old City of Bern. It has existed since about 1218–1220^[17] and is one of the most recognisable symbols of Bern. The name Zytglogge is Bernese German and translates as *Zeitglocke* in Standard German or *time bell* in English. A "time bell" was one of the earliest public time-keeping devices, consisting of a clockwork connected to a hammer that rang a small bell at every full hour.^[18] The Zytglogge clock is one of the three oldest clocks in Switzerland.^[19]



The Zytglogge as shown on a 1542 glass painting.

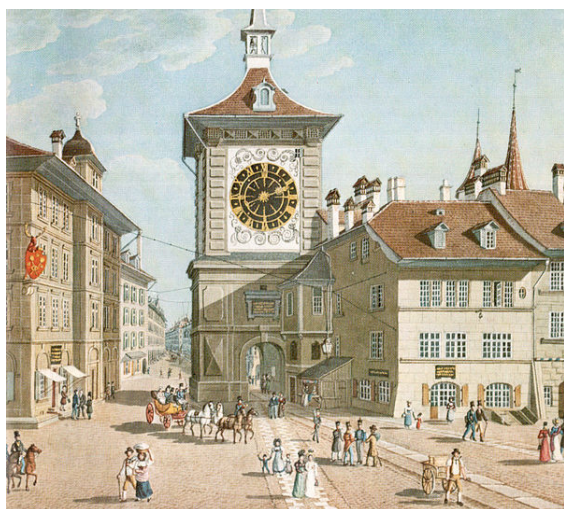
Following the first expansion of Bern the Zytglogge was the gate tower of the western fortifications. At this time, it was a squat tower of only about 16 m (52 ft) in height which was open in the back.^[19] During the second expansion, to the Käfigturm, the Zytglogge wall was removed and the tower was relegated to second-line status. Around 1270–1275 an additional 7 m (23 ft) was added to the tower to allow it to overlook the surrounding houses.^[18] After the third expansion, to the Christoffelturm, the Zytglogge was converted into a women's prison. Most commonly it was used to house *Pfaddendirnen* – "priests' whores", women convicted of sexual relations with clerics.^[20] At this time, the Zytglogge also received its first slanted roof.^[21]

In the Great Fire of 1405, the tower was completely burned out. The structural damage would not be completely repaired until 1983. The prison cells were abandoned^[22] and a clock was installed above the gate. This clock, together with a bell cast in 1405, gave the tower the name of Zytglogge. In the late 15th century the tower was decorated with four decorative corner towerlets and heraldic symbols.^[23] The astronomical clock was extended to its current state in 1527–1530. In addition to the astronomical clock, the Zytglogge features a group of mechanical figures. At three minutes before the hour the figures which include a rooster, a fool, a knight, a piper, a lion and bears, put on a show.^[24] The animals chase each other around, the fool rings his bells and the rooster caws. During the day it is common to see small crowds gathered around the foot of the Zytglogge waiting for the show to



Photograph with labeled parts (click to enlarge – see image without labels).

start.



The Zytglogge's west façade in 1830, after the 1770 restructuring.

The Zytglogge's exterior was repainted by Gotthard Ringgli and Kaspar Haldenstein in 1607–10, who introduced the large clock faces that now dominate the east and west façades of the tower.^[22] The corner towerlets were removed again some time before 1603.^[25] In 1770–71, the Zytglogge was renovated by Niklaus Hebler and Ludwig Emanuel Zehnder, who refurbished the structure in order to suit the tastes of the late Baroque, giving the tower its contemporary outline.^[26]

Both façades were again repainted in the Rococo style by Rudolf von Steiger in 1890. The idealising historicism of the design came to be disliked in the 20th century, and a 1929 competition produced the façade designs visible today: on the west façade, Victor Surbek's fresco "Beginning of Time" and on the east façade, a reconstruction of the 1770 design by Kurt Indermühle.^[26] In 1981–83, the

Zytglogge was thoroughly renovated again and generally restored to its 1770 appearance.^[27]

3.3.3 Parliament buildings

Main article: Federal Palace

The Parliament Building (German: *Bundeshaus*, French:



South face of the Parliament Building from across the Aare River



Dome of the Federal Palace. The name Jura can be read at the bottom of the picture, indicating where the coat of arms of the Canton of Jura is located.

Palais fédéral, Italian: *Palazzo federale*, Latin: *Curia Confoederationis Helveticae*) is built along the southern edge of the peninsula and straddles the location of the former Käfigturm wall. The building is the used by both the Swiss Federal Council or Executive and Parliament or Federal Assembly of Switzerland. The complex includes the *Bundeshaus West* (built in 1852–57), the central Parliament Building (built in 1894–1902) and the *Bundeshaus East* (built in 1884–1892).^[8] The central plaza in front of the Parliament building was built into a fountain in 2004. The plaza was paved with granite slabs and 26 water jets, one for each canton, were hidden under the plaza. The design of the plaza has won two international awards^[28]

The central Parliament Building was built to be visible and is topped with several large copper domes. The interior was decorated by 38 artists from every corner of



North face of the Parliament Building and the Bundesplatz (Confederation Plaza)



The Untertorbrücke in 2005

the country. Three major themes tied all the works together. The first theme, national history, is represented by events and persons from Swiss history. This includes the *Rütli Schwur* or the foundation of Switzerland in 1291 and figures such as William Tell, Arnold von Winkelried and Nicholas of Flüe. The second theme is the fundamental principles that Switzerland was founded on; including independence, freedom, separation of government powers, order and security. The final theme is the cultural and material variety of Switzerland; including politically (represented by Canton flags), geographically and socially.^[8]

The two chambers where the National Council and the Council of States meet are separated by the *Hall of the Dome*. The dome itself has an external height of 64 m, and an internal height of 33 m. The mosaic in the center represents the Federal coat of arms along with the Latin motto *Unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno* (*One for all, and all for one*), surrounded by the coat of arms of the 22 cantons that existed in 1902. The coat of arms of the Canton of Jura, created in 1979, was placed outside of the mosaic.

3.3.4 Untertorbrücke

Main article: [Untertorbrücke](#)

The *Untertorbrücke* (German: Lower Gate bridge) is the oldest bridge in Bern still in existence. The original bridge, most likely a wooden walkway, was built in 1256 and spanned the Aare river at the Nydegg Fortress. The bridge was destroyed in a flood in 1460. Within one year, construction began on a new stone bridge. The small Mariakapelle (*Mary's Chapel*) located in the side of the bridge column on the city side was blessed in 1467. However the bridge wasn't finished until 1490. The new bridge was 52 meters (171 ft) long with the three arches spanning 13.5 m (44 ft), 15.6 m (51 ft) and 13.9 m (46 ft).^[29] The bridge was modified several times including the removal of the stone guard rails which were replaced with iron rails in 1818–19.^[29]

Until the construction of the [Nydeggbrücke](#) in 1840, the Untertorbrücke was the only bridge crossing the Aare

near Bern. See [List of Aar bridges in Bern](#).

3.3.5 Nydegg Church

Main article: [Nydeggkirche](#)

The original Nydegg Castle was built around 1190 by



Nydegg Church

either Duke Berchtold V. von Zähringen^[30] or his father Berchtold IV.^[31] as part of the city defenses. Following the second expansion, the castle was destroyed by the citizens of Bern in 1268. The castle was located about where the Choir of the church now stands, with the church tower

resting on the southern corner of the *donjon*.^[32]

From 1341 to 1346 a church with a small *steeple* was built on the ruins of the castle. Then, between 1480 and 1483 a tower was added to the church. The central nave was rebuilt in 1493 to 1504. In 1529, following the Reformation, the Nydegg Church was used as a warehouse for wood and grain. Later, in 1566, the church was again used for religious services and in 1721 was placed under the *Münster*.

3.3.6 Holy Ghost Church

Main article: [Church of the Holy Ghost, Bern](#)

The Holy Ghost Church (German: *Heiliggeistkirche*) is



Holy Ghost Church

a Swiss Reformed Church at *Spitalgasse 44*. It is one of largest Swiss Reformed churches in Switzerland. The first church was a chapel built for the Holy Ghost hospital and abbey. The chapel, hospital and abbey were first mentioned in 1228 and at the time sat about 150 meters (490 ft) outside the western gate of the first city wall. This building was replaced by the second church between 1482 and 1496. In 1528 the church was secularized by the reformers and the last two monks at the Abbey were driven out of Bern.^[33] During the following years it was used as a granary. In 1604 it was again used for religious services, as the hospital church for the *Oberer Spital*. The second church was demolished in 1726 to make way for a new church building, which was built in 1726–29 by Niklaus Schiltknecht.^[34]

The first organ in the new church was installed in 1804,

and was replaced in 1933 by the second organ. The church has six bells, one of the two largest was cast in 1596 and the other in 1728. The four other bells were all cast in 1860.^[35] The interior is supported by 14 monolithic columns made of sandstone and has a free-standing pulpit in the northern part of the nave. Much like the *St. Pierre Cathedral* in Geneva, the Church of the Holy Ghost holds about 2,000 people and is one of the largest Protestant churches in Switzerland.^[35]

From 1693 to 1698 the hospital's chief minister was the Pietist theologian, Samuel Heinrich König. In 1829 and 1830, the vicar of the church was the poet Jeremias Gotthelf.

3.3.7 Fountains

Main article: [List of fountains in Bern](#)

There are over 100 public fountains in the city of Bern of which eleven are crowned with Renaissance allegorical statues.^[6] The statues were created during the period of civic improvement that occurred as Bern became a major city-state during the 16th century. The fountains were originally built as a public water supply. As Bern grew in power, the original fountains were expanded and decorated but retained their original purpose.

Nearly all the 16th-century fountains, except the *Zähringer fountain* which was created by Hans Hiltbrand, are the work of the Fribourg master Hans Gieng.

- **Läuferbrunnen**

From east to west, the first fountain is the *Läuferbrunnen* (German: Runner fountain) near the Nydegg Church on *Nydeggstalden*. The trough was built in 1824, but the figure dates from 1545.^[36] The Runner has moved several times since its creation, and until about 1663 was known as the *Brunnen beim unteren Tor* (Fountain by the lower gate). Originally the *Läuferbrunnen* had an octagonal trough and a tall, round column. The trough was replaced with a rectangular trough before 1757^[37] which was replaced in 1824. The round column was replaced with the current square limestone pillar in the 18th or 19th century.

- **Gerechtigkeitsbrunnen**

The next fountain is the *Gerechtigkeitsbrunnen* (German: Justice fountain) on *Gerechtigkeitsgasse*. Built in 1543 by Hans Gieng, the fountain is topped with a representation of **Justice**. She stands with her eyes and ears bound, a sword of truth one hand and the scales in the other. On the pillar below her feet are four figures; the Pope, a Sultan, the Kaiser or Emperor and the *Schultheiß* or Lord Mayor. This represents the power of Justice over



The Läufer or Runner Fountain

the rulers and political systems of the day; Theocracy, Monarchy, Autocracy and the Republic.^[36]

The statue has been widely copied in towns throughout Switzerland. Currently, eleven “fountains of Justice” remain in Switzerland, and several others have probably been destroyed.^[38] Direct copies exist in Solothurn (1561), Lausanne (1585), Boudry, Cudrefin and Neuchâtel; designs influenced by the Bernese statue are found in Aarau (1643), Biel, Burgdorf, Brugg, Zürich and Luzern.^[39]

- **Vennerbrunnen**

The *Vennerbrunnen* (German: Banner Carrier or *Vexillum*) is located in front of the old city hall or *Rathaus*. The Venner was military-political title in medieval Switzerland. He was responsible for peace and protection in a section of a city and then to lead troops from that section in battle. In Bern the Venner was a very powerful position and was key in city’s operations. Each Venner was connected to a guild and chosen from the guild. Venner was one of only two positions from which the Schultheiß or Lord Mayor was chosen.^[40] The statue, built in 1542 shows a Venner in full armor with his banner.^[36]

- **Mosesbrunnen**



Justice fountain.

The Moses fountain, located on *Münsterplatz* (German: Cathedral Plaza) was rebuilt in 1790–1791. The Louis XVI style basin was designed by Niklaus Sprüngli. The Moses figure dates from the 16th century. The statue represents Moses bringing the Ten Commandments to the Tribes of Israel.^[36] Moses is portrayed with two rays of light projecting from his head, which represent Exodus 34:29–35 which tells that after meeting with God the skin of Moses’ face became radiant. The twin rays of light come from one longstanding tradition that Moses instead grew horns.

This is derived from a misinterpretation of the Hebrew phrase *karan`ohr panav* (קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו). The root קָרַן *Q-R-N* (qoph, resh, nun) may be read as either “horn” or “ray of light”, depending on vocalization. *’Ohr panahv* (עוֹר פָּנָיו) translates to “the skin of his face”.^[41]

Interpreted correctly, these two words form an expression meaning that Moses was enlightened, that “the skin of his face shone” (as with a *gloriole*), as the KJV has it.^[41]

The Septuagint properly translates the Hebrew phrase as *δεδοξασται ἡ ὄψις*, “his face was glorified”; but Jerome translated the phrase into Latin as *cornuta esset facies sua* “his face was horned”.^[41]

With apparent Biblical authority, and the added convenience of giving Moses a unique and easily identi-



Vennerbrunnen

able visual attribute (something the other Old Testament prophets notably lacked), it remained standard in Western art to depict Moses with small horns until well after the mistranslation was realized by the Renaissance. In this depiction of Moses, the error has been identified but the artist has chosen to place horns of light on Moses head to aid in identification.

- **Simsonbrunnen**

The *Simsonbrunnen* or Samson fountain represents the Biblical story of Samson killing a lion found in Judges 14:5–20. According to the story, Samson was born to a sterile Israelite couple on the conditions that his mother and her child (Samson) abstain from all Alcohol and that he never shave or cut his hair. Because of his commitment to live under these conditions, Samson is granted great strength. As a young man he falls in love with a Philistine woman and decides to marry her. At this time, the Philistines ruled over the Israelites and Samson's decision to marry one causes great concern among his family. He calms their concerns and travels to marry his love. On the way he is attacked by the lion and with his incredible strength kills the lion. Later, he sees that bees have built a honeycomb in the lion's body. He uses this event as the basis of a riddle, which when not answered, gives him a pretext to attack the Philistines and lead an unsuccessful rebellion. The fountain, built in 1544 by Hans Gieng, is modeled after the *Simsonbrunnen* in Solothurn.^[36]



Moses with the Ten Commandments

- **Zähringerbrunnen**

The *Zähringerbrunnen* was built in 1535 as a memorial to the founder of Bern, Berchtold von Zähringer. The statue is a bear in full armor, with another bear cub at his feet. The bear represents the bear, that according to legend, Berchtold shot on the Aare peninsula as he was searching for a site to build a city.

- **Kindlifresserbrunnen**

One of the most interesting statues is the *Kindlifresserbrunnen* (Bernese German: Child Eater Fountain but often translated Ogre Fountain) which is located on *Kornhausplatz*. The fountain was built in 1545–46 on the site of a 15th-century wooden fountain. Originally known as *Platzbrunnen* (German: Plaza Fountain), the current name dates to 1666.^[42] The statue is a seated giant or ogre swallowing a naked child. Several other children are visible in a sack at the figure's feet. There are several interpretations of what the statue represents;^[43] including that it is a Jew with a pointed Jewish hat^[44] or the Greek god Chronos. However, the most likely explanation is that the statue represents a *Fastnacht* figure that scares disobedient children.^[45]

- **Anna Seiler Brunnen**



Samson killing a lion



The Zähringer fountain with Zytglogge in the background

The Anna Seiler fountain, located at the upper end of *Marktgasse* memorializes the founder of the first hospital in Bern. Anna Seiler is represented by a woman in a blue dress, pouring water into a small dish. She stands on a pillar brought from the Roman town of Avenicum (modern Avenches). On 29 November 1354 in her will^[46] she asked the city to help found a hospital in her house which today stands on *Zeughausgasse*. The hospital initially had 13 beds and 2 attendants^[24] and was to be an *ewiges Spital*^[46] or a perpetual hospital. When Anna died around 1360^[47] the hospital was renamed the *Seilerin Spital*. In 1531 the hospital moved to the empty Dominican Order monastery *St. Michaels Insel* (St. Michael's Island) and was then known as the *Inselspital*, which still exists over 650 years after Anna Seiler founded it. The modern *Inselspital* has about 6,000 employees and treats about 220,000 individuals per year.^[48]

3.4 See also

- List of World Heritage Sites in Europe
- Bern
- Swiss Federal Council
- Herrengasse 23 (Bern)



The Ogre has a sack of children waiting to be devoured.



Statue of Anna Seiler, founder of Bern's hospital in 1354.

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3.6 External links

- Official UNESCO listing for Old City of Bern
- UNESCO Evaluation of the Old City of Bern (.pdf only)
- Tourist Office of the city of Bern
- The Website of the Clock Tower (Zytglogge) in English and German
- list of Swiss Inventory of Cultural Property of National and Regional Significance for Canton Berne

Coordinates: 46°56′53″N 7°26′50″E﻿ / ﻿46.947932°N 7.447307°E﻿ /

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3.7.2 Images

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