



About Berne

Berne was founded in the year 1191 by the Duke Berchtold V of Zähringen. The Old City was expanded in the years 1250 and 1350 but a major fire destroyed the original settlement in 1405. Subsequently, the wooden houses were rebuilt in sandstone, and you can admire them still today. Thanks to about 4 km of arcades, Berne has the longest shopping promenade world wide. In 1983, the Old City of Berne was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site.

In 1305, Berne became a Member of the Swiss Confederation, which at that time was not a unified state but a body of sovereign, small states, organised in a similar way as today's European Union. Berne was the most powerful state of the Confederation, and actually the second largest Republic in Europe topped only by Venice. In 1798 the City, like all of Switzerland, was occupied by the armies of Napoleon I.

After the Napoleonic era Switzerland became a Federal State. Berne got a University in 1834 and became Capital of Switzerland in 1848.



The City of Berne is located in the Swiss Midlands at an altitude of 542 m above sea level. The Canton (State) of Berne covers some 6'000 km² and reaches from the Alps to the Jura Mountains. The highest peak of the Bernese Alps is the Finsteraarhorn (4492 m above sea level), the most famous the Jungfrau with an altitude of 4158 m called the "Top of Europe".

The City of Berne was founded on a peninsula of the Aare River, which drains almost the entire Canton of Berne and ultimately flows into the Rhine. There are five major Lakes – Lake of Brienz, Lake of Thun, Lake of Morat (shared with Ct. Fribourg), Lake of Neuchâtel (shared with Ct. Fribourg and Ct. Neuchâtel), and Lake of Bienne. A number of years ago, the Canton of Berne declared the north-eastern corner of the Lake of Neuchâtel and the adjoining swamps the first protected wetland of the country in order to allow Switzerland to ratify the RAMSAR Convention.

The Municipality of Berne covers an area of 52 km² and has 125'000 inhabitants. The agglomeration of Berne, i.e. City and suburbs, comprises 326 km² inhabited by about 350'000 people. The language spoken by the locals is Swiss German. About 65 % of the people are protestants, 15 % roman-catholics, there are some other Christian communities, a small Jewish and a steadily growing Muslim community.

Wildlife in the Canton of Berne includes some 28'000 roe deer, 13'000 Alpine chamois, 1'000 Alpine ibex (re-introduced), 500 wild boar and 300 red deer, as well as wolf (occasionally), red fox, lynx (re-introduced), wild cat, pine and beech marten, polecat, stoat, mouse weasel, brown and blue hare, Alpine marmot, beaver (reintroduced), and a wide array of smaller mammals and birds.

