



 Basel Cathedral



Day 6: Day OFF in Basel

Basel in 24 hours (From the blog "Executive class")

Unlike Zurich, Basel in the Northwestern border of Switzerland, is less likely to appear on most leisure traveler's lists of cities to visit. Basel is a wealthy city with its fair share of attractions, but most of us associate Basel with business. True enough, Basel is a popular pit-stop for global executives who come to visit BASELWORLD, the annual watch and jewelry fair, or the city's cutting-edge pharmaceutical industry. Other than that, Basel is an almost entirely local affair. Too bad, because as we discovered recently, the city on the border of Germany and France also happens to offer a sophisticated art scene. And the shopping's cool, too.

Here's a short list of things to do when in town for the day:


The Art Scene

Basel's art scene is definitely world class. In a city of just about 200,000 residents, Basel boasts of more than 40 museums - most of them dedicated to art. You see, few people other than hard core art enthusiasts know this. In fact, every year, the city hosts ART BASEL, the biggest and most important art fair in the world.

First on any visitor's list is the BASEL KUNSTMUSEUM in the heart of downtown. The museum is said to house the first public art collection in the world. But that's not the only distinction. The museum displays some of the most important art works on the planet - including the most extensive collection of Holbeins and an impressive selection of Van Goghs. Of course, the museum also keeps important art pieces from every period since the Renaissance.

The one other museum you shouldn't miss is the FONDATION BEYELER named after the Swiss philanthropists Hildy and Ernst Beyeler. The museum is compact but the Beyeler's modern art works are perhaps the best of any privately held collection. The museum features an all star cast of modern artists: Matisse, Mondrian, Rothko, Warhol, Giacometti, Picasso, Cezanne, just to name a few. But more than just the names represented are the actual art pieces themselves. There are paintings, installations and sculpture that are recognizable to most everyone.



 Take your time exploring basel

I find this to be the one of the best curated museums in the world and if you only have an hour to take in the most influential art works and artists of modern times - the Fondation Beyeler is it. The building by the legendary architect Renzo Piano is itself a wonderful work of art. Try to visit during the spring and summer months when the Basel landscape seen from the glass panels of the museum offers a striking juxtaposition to the sculpture on display.

If you find yourself with more time in Basel, there are two more museums that modern art and architecture enthusiasts ought to include on their list of things to do. Fans and collectors of mid-century furniture will enjoy the collections on display at the VITRA MUSEUM. And if you're looking for a unique Basel art experience - head to the TINGUELY MUSEUM where the interactive and mechanical sculpture of Basel's own Jean Tinguely is housed. For a free and fun taste of Tinguely's sculpture, the TINGUELY FOUNTAIN in the middle of town is also worth a visit.

A walk through old town

What impresses visitors about Swiss towns and cities is the sight of extremely well preserved buildings and streets. This is largely because, unlike her immediate neighbors France, Germany and Italy, Switzerland's policy of neutrality spared the country from the ravages of the 20th century's world wars. Thanks to this, Basel's street architecture is one of the most beautiful in Europe.

The other joy of strolling around the Old Town is peering into the traditional shop houses. We recommend starting your walking tour at the ancient SPALENTOR gate at the tip of SPALENBERG street. The Gate is one of the oldest standing structures in the city and from here you pass by the many window displays selling an eclectic mix of antiques, vintage toys, curios and bleeding-edge fashion.

Follow the street down to MARKTPLATZ for a chance to experience the lively outdoor market scene. Every day except Sundays produce from and beyond Switzerland finds its way to the square. Vendors are very friendly and they offer generous samples of the cheese, sun-dried tomatoes, olives, bread and sausages for sale. Like most things Swiss, the quality of food is exceptional so even the veal bratwurst sausages grilled in front of you are enough to satisfy a gourmand's taste buds.



The Tinguely Museum is a good rainy day option

After a light meal at the market, head to the imposing RATHAUS that dominates the Marktplatz skyline. This is the old town hall and it still functions as such. The influence of Basel's guilds on the architecture is evident and the building features a melange of styles that spans the 14th to the 19th century. The art nouveau touches are particularly interesting as are the colorful and well-preserved frescoes.

The rest of the town center can be traversed on foot, and, ultimately, this is the best option since what greets you at almost every turn is a lovely building, fountain or church.

The Pfalz and the Munster

The highlight of any walking tour of Basel is reaching one of the highest and most scenic points of town. This is the PFALZ, a tree-covered oasis of quiet overlooking the RHINE river just behind Basel city's most famous landmark - the MUNSTER. The small park is where many young Baslers end their day taking in the striking views of the river and the low-rise cityscape across.

The Munster is itself a beautiful building and a repository of Basel's spiritual history. The cathedral was once the seat of Basel's Roman Catholic Archdiocese. Even a pope was elected here. When the Swiss Reformers took over the property and established a new Church, they stripped the building of all Catholic iconography. Today, it is the exterior of the Munster that is more interesting, with intricate bas-relief sculpture depicting the lives of saints and prophets and an extraordinary set of two clocks - one mechanical and the other a sun dial.

Time your visit just about when the sun is about to set and take a seat at the Pfalz and see Basel washed in a hue of amber. A more serene way to experience the end of day is within the Cathedral's cloisters where the play of sun and shadows leaves you with one of the most memorable images of Basel.