



Open markets and spectacular scenery greet visitors to Basel.

## Switzerland's Second City

*Basel may not get the glory, but you may be surprised*

Story & photo by  
Chris Potter

To be honest, if I hadn't taken a Rhine cruise last summer, Basel might have remained a blank on my list of travel experiences. And that would have been a pity.

Sitting in stately splendour where the Rhine bends to the north, Basel is on the intersection of three countries; Switzerland (it's that nation's second-largest city, with a population of 200,000), France, and Germany. It's the terminus of several Rhine cruise itineraries, and a convenient base for touring around this part of Europe.

We stayed in a charming, small hotel—Au Violon—in the old part of town, in a portion of what used to be the city jail. Our room looked over the old church square (Leonardskirchplatz), and its bustling Saturday-morning market. The higgledy-piggledy building housing Au Violon dates, in some places, to Roman times, and has since been a castle, a monastery, and a prison. Its incarnation as a hotel is very

recent—so recent that the taxi driver, arriving to take us to the train station for our trip back to Amsterdam—asked incredulously: "You stayed in the jail?" Although, as was pointed out to me by one of the partners, "It has always been a hotel of sorts, especially when it was a monastery and a prison!"

Basel is a city of culture. Its 31 museums are dedicated to just about every interest. Take time to browse around the Culture Museum, featuring the largest ethnological collection in Switzerland, and visit the Art Museum, where you'll be greeted by Rodin's bronze grouping, Citizens of Calais.

Above all, take time to visit the Münster (Cathedral) and its Cloisters (some parts dating to the original building of 1019), and the recently restored City Hall. They are nothing short of magnificent, and the latter has been the city's symbol for 400 years. Its combination of costly late gothic and renaissance elements make it architecturally unique, and the rich frescoes decorating the inner courtyard

can be viewed from multiple vantage points. The wealth shown in the town hall is reflected in the library (1787) overlooking the Rhine. It's worth stepping inside to gaze around the 18th-century ideal of what a library should be.

Don't get the idea that this is a city devoid of modern-day offerings. There's plenty of nightlife to suit most tastes. Basel has been known as a jazz town since the 1920s, and features many and varied musical offerings, including huge rock concerts in the St. Jakob football stadium where the Rolling Stones and Tina Turner have performed.

I was in Basel for only two nights and was sorry to leave. Don't make the same

mistake: stay a while.

### If You go:

You can fly from Vancouver with KLM Royal Dutch Airlines to Amsterdam, where you can board the MV Deutschland (a riverboat in the KD Cruise fleet) for a five-night cruise to Basel.

Au Violon hotel: Im Lindenhof 4, 4051 Basel, Tel: 011-41-61-69-87-11 One night double room with breakfast, about \$110.

More information on Basel, and Switzerland in general, from Switzerland Tourism, 926 The East Mall, Etobicoke, ON, M9B 6K1 Tel: 416/695-2090 Fax: 416/695-2774 or web:

www.Switzerland-Tourism

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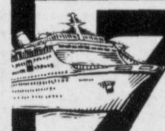
## TRAVEL SCAMS

A New Version of the Crying Game

"The sights and smells of the souk (market) in this North African city are very exciting. Exotic souvenirs, exotic people and what's this, a group of 'Nuns' following us at a distance. Maybe they are curious about our dress and customs. Hmmm...maybe not. We go through a particularly crowded area and the 'Nuns' brush by us. We realize shortly afterward that my wife's purse has a slash in the side and fortunately, only her eye glass case was stolen." - A traveller's true account.

In the same city, a veiled "woman" in black follows us through the maze of tiny alleyways. "Her" demeanor is a bit gruff and "she" seems to be very interested in what we buy, where we put our wallets and where we go next. - Another true story

Comments: The "nuns" and the veiled "woman" were, most likely, men in disguise. Not that women cannot perpetrate crimes, but the disguise technique certainly disarms travellers and sometimes they may even lower their guard and relax a bit. After all, would a "nun" steal your wallet? Would a veiled "woman" even approach a man with criminal intent in mind? This technique is very successful in some countries where tourists simply are not aware of scam artists and all the ruses at their disposal. The lesson is to never let your guard down. Always be aware of your surroundings. Always safeguard your possessions - even if you are alone and there is only a group of "nuns" in the vicinity.



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