

Fribourg, Neuchâtel & Jura



A far cry from the staggering Alpine scenes more readily associated with Switzerland, this gentle corner in the west of the country remains a 'secret'. From the evocative medieval cantonal capitals of Fribourg and Neuchâtel to the mysterious green hills and thick dark Jura forests, from the land of three lakes to gorgeous medieval villages like Gruyères and St Ursanne, it proffers a wealth of sights and scapes off the tourist track.

Be it listening to frogs singing in lakeside bogs, marvelling at palatial ice creations between pine trees or following the call of the devilish green fairy into the Val de Travers, travelling here is a brilliant sensory experience...and that includes the taste buds: savour monks' heads (strong, nutty-flavoured cheese), see how one of Switzerland's best-known AOC cheeses is made and sample sweet feather-light meringues smothered in rich, thick double cream. When it all gets too much, thousands of kilometres of waistline-saving walking, cycling and cross-country skiing trails – not to mention sailing, skiing and wakeboarding on lake water – kick in.

This chapter covers (from south to north) the cantons of Fribourg, Neuchâtel and Jura, and the northwestern tip of the Bern canton. The trio of lakes wedged between the Fribourg and Neuchâtel cantons – Lac de Neuchâtel, Lac de Morat and Bieler See – and the Fribourg canton fall mostly within the Plateau Central (Mittelland) plain. French rules everywhere bar the eastward edge of the latter canton, where German predominates.

HIGHLIGHTS

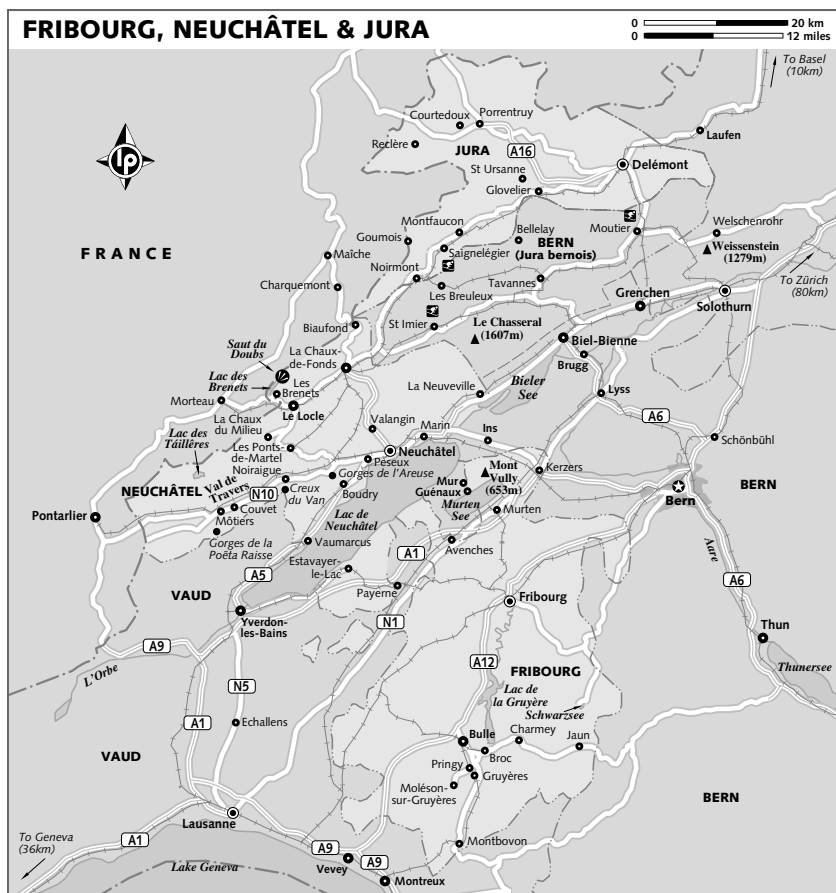
- Stuffing yourself silly on cheese, meringues and thick cream in **Gruyères** (p132)
- Stamping on the big red button to make the creations of modern artistic prodigy Jean Tinguely (p269) tick in **Fribourg** (opposite) and revelling in the town's industrial nightlife
- Taking a big hearty gulp of Vully wine, *saucisson du marc* and old-fashioned fresh air at **Owl Farm** (p132) near Murten
- Being enchanted by medieval **Neuchâtel** (p134) and the Val de Travers' (p139) green fairy
- Delving deep into the **Jura** (p140) to discover local life on a Jurassien farm and its Jurassic past at Préhisto Parc (p143)



■ POPULATION: 496,500

■ AREA: 3311 SQ KM

■ LANGUAGE: FRENCH



Getting There & Around

Rail connections to/from the main cities, Fribourg and Neuchâtel, make light work of getting around. By road, the A12 freeway linking Bern with Lausanne and Geneva roars down the Canton de Fribourg's central spine.

CANTON DE FRIBOURG

The southernmost of the three cantons, Canton de Fribourg (population 258,250) tots up 1671 sq km on the drawing board. Pre-Alpine foothills rise grandly around its cold craggy feet; Gruyères with its sprinkling of small mountain resorts pierces its heart; and Fribourg heads the canton up north, where

pretty lakeside villages slumber between vineyards and fruit orchards.

What makes this canton most fascinating is its *Röstigraben* (linguistic divide): west speaks French, east speaks German.

FRIBOURG

pop 33,420 / elevation 629m

Nowhere is Switzerland's language divide felt more keenly than in Fribourg (Freiburg) or 'Free Town', a medieval city where inhabitants on the west bank of the Sarine River speak French, on the east bank of the Sanne speak German. Throw Catholicism and a notable student population into the cultural cocktail and you get a fascinating town with a feisty nightlife and a healthy waft of originality.