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basel
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Though best known as an international meeting place for business executives, there is a fun to be had and elegance to be savoured in this sophisticated “border town” by **Elyse Glickman**
photographed by the author

WITH FRANCE ON ONE SIDE and Germany on the other, it is not surprising that a lot of culture and sophistication runs through **Basel**, from its impressively efficient trams to its Rhine River



I heard that Jennifer Aniston has a new boyfriend. *Your point being?* Sorry, I'm busy reading Lucire.

All you need to feel fulfilled is your *Lucire*.



Are you even on Kate's guest list?

1. Yes, but my dog ate the invite.



location. Though not as obvious a [destination](#) as Zurich or St Moritz (note the presence of classically attired women and business-suited men), Basel is quintessential Switzerland, from the storybook architecture of the old town, to a plentiful array of museums to regional cuisine lovingly crafted from fresh local ingredients.

In fact, our sharp guides and other locals advised that with our lunches and dinners, we dig deeper than the fondue pot. We did, and were thoroughly delighted with our glamorous dining experiences at **Brasserie Les Trois Rois**, **Schloss Bottmingen** and **Gasthof zum Goldenen Sternen**—all internationally acclaimed and housed in historically relevant buildings as rich in culture as the museums we visited. **Schloss Bottmingen**, offering dishes with a fantastic range of flavors and textures, is housed in a fourteenth-century castle that is just as storied and complex. If you have the good fortune to experience lunch and the million-dollar Rhine view from the **Brasserie Les Trois Rois**, make it a point to see the rest of the [hotel](#), which is a feast for the eyes mixing baroque elegance and art deco. You would be in good company, as past guests have included Bob Dylan, the Dalai Lama, HM Queen Elizabeth II and the Rolling Stones. Rufus Wainwright, meanwhile, is a regular visitor to their spectacular penthouse, decorated art-déco style with a hot tub on the roof.

Though we stayed at the far simpler, but fabulously located **Hotel Basel** (great breakfast and helpful staff, too), almost everything we could want to see was just steps away, including the landmark buildings in **Marktplatz**. If it wasn't (as was the case for the **Beyeler Foundation** and a bus that would take us into Germany for a visit to the Frank Ghery-designed **Vitra Design Museum**), most of the city's tram lines were.

Beyond the views of the city from both sides of the Rhine, **Kunstmuseum of Fine Arts**, displaying world-class collections of painting and sculptures from Renaissance to modern, and the **Beyeler Foundation**, focused on modern masters and located in a gorgeous park-like setting in neighbouring Riehen, are both musts. Also worth a look is the **Tinguely Museum**, featuring Jean Tinguely's trippy, whimsical automated sculptures, the **Puppenhaus Museum** (for doll and toy enthusiasts) and the **Basel Historical Museum** (which recently underwent a major remodel at its main Barfüsserkerche location, a former church). We also noticed, when walking around the **St Alban-Tal** district, that the paper museum had an exhibition on the 50th anniversary of the Helvetica typeface originating in Switzerland.

Even with subdued style predominating, the streets swirling around the Hotel Basel and Marktplatz brimmed with adorable, shoebox-sized [boutiques](#) as well as a surprising abundance of shoe stores.

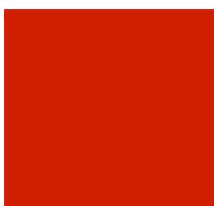
Buckles & Belts charms with its neat arrangements of buckles on one end of the story and straps on the



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other. **Boutique Gelatine's** accessories are also eye-popping fun, while **Klein Basel** (Kleinbasel.net) and **Hot Lemon** offer a delicious blend of Swiss and continental designers.

However, stores that recall another era, such as the hat shops or the landmark shop of **Johann Wanner** (Spalenberg 14, 4051 Basel), have a very special, local appeal. For the spirited and smiling Wanner, Christmas is not just a year-round love affair, but an evolving fashion statement for home and entertaining. You could spend hours in his shop or (during the fall and early winter) nearby café not only admiring the thousands of hand-crafted glass ornaments but also listening to him discuss major colour trends for the upcoming holiday season or stories about Christmases past that keep him youthful and enthusiastic. Though he has put his stamp on White House Christmases and celebrity Yuletide celebrations, what is most impressive about him is his humility. He won't drop celebrity names so he can be as accessible to everybody else—even school-aged kids buying special ornaments with their allowance.

Though much of Basel's nightlife is more about lingering after dinner with a glass of good wine, one clubby alternative is **Bar Rouge**—a chic but decidedly un-snobby place with a nice wine list, fun cocktails, fresh electronica and an interesting international mix of patrons—attractively dressed businessmen cutting loose after long days of meetings and hand-shaking, and locals casually kicking back and enjoying the scene. •



For more information on Basel and booking a tour with Jacqueline Bloch, contact Basel Tourismus, Guided Tours at guidedtours@basel.com, visit www.basel.com or call 41 61 268-68-32. Also check out www.myswitzerland.com.

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