

GETTING TO BERN

ISSI policy: ISSI does not pay for or book travel, but Kate (fishbaughke@si.edu) and Brigitte (Brigitte.fasler@issibern.ch) will be happy to help you if you are unsure about what plans to make.

VIA TRAIN:

<http://www.sbb.ch>

VIA PLANE:

Zuerich airport (ZRH):

This is usually the most convenient option. Direct trains to Bern (with stops, but no transfers) leave twice per hour (see <http://www.sbb.ch> for schedule) and take ~1h15m. The train station is connected to the airport. Follow the signs for Exit Zurich and then for the Railbahn. You can buy your ticket at a ticket window or from an automated machine (blue – other colors are machines for local Zurich busses) that accepts Swiss Franks or many cards with pincodes and operates in many languages. Choose the 1/1 option for adults and the 1/2 option for children. Sometimes you can buy tickets on the train, but they will charge an extra fee. There are bathrooms on every train and sometimes limited snack options. *If you want to fly out of Zurich early in the morning*, please contact Brigitte (Brigitte.fasler@issibern.ch) about hotel reservations at a Zurich airport hotel for the night before.

Geneva/Genf/Genève airport (GVA):

The advantage of this airport is it's small size and the breathtaking scenery around the Lake Geneva/Genfersee/Lac Lemman. The train station is connected to the airport (follow signs for Railbahn). Direct trains to Bern (with stops, but no transfers) leave twice per hour (see <http://www.sbb.ch> for schedule) and take ~2h. Same ticket options as for Zuerich. *If you want to fly out of Geneva early in the morning*, please contact Brigitte (Brigitte.fasler@issibern.ch) about hotel reservations at a Geneva airport hotel for the night before.

Basel/Bâle – Mulhouse airport (BSL):

Basel is closer to Bern than are Zurich and Geneva, however . . . You need to take a bus from the airport to the Basel train station. Bus leaves from just outside the main airport entrance. You can buy tickets from the automated machine using Swiss coins (and maybe bills and credit cards?). Bus trip to train station takes ~20-30 min. Direct trains to Bern leave twice an hour or more (see <http://www.sbb.ch> for schedule) and take ~1h to get to Bern. Same ticket options as for Zuerich.

Important note: If you arrive late at any of these airports (after ~20:00), there might not be anyone manning the ticket windows, so you will have to use a ticket automat. If you arrive really late (~after 22:30), there may be few to no trains to Bern.

Cheaper (?) Options:

Fly into a bigger city and take a train or cheaper plane flight to Bern. Easy Jet (<http://www.easyjet.com/>) and Ryan Air are two low-cost carriers in Europe that fly from many major cities (London, Amsterdam, Berlin, and many more) to Geneva and Basel. Paris is 4h30m from Bern via TGV train (<http://www.sncf.fr>) and Milan is 4h away by train (<http://www.trenitalia.it>).

Fly into a cheaper airport and then drive to Switzerland. Europcar is a good, low cost rental company. Your U.S. license will work fine. Freeways are easier to navigate than American ones (better signage) and, contrary to Europe's reputation, spacious. Note that Autobahn just means "freeway/highway" in German, not Road of Certain Death at Unlimited Speeds. ☺ There are strictly enforced speed limits in every country (via sneaky cameras), including Germany!

If you're bringing your family for a longer vacation, you might want to consider talking to a ticket agent at a train station about *SwissPass* and other discounts. You buy the card (~100 CHF) and then all tickets are half price.

GETTING AROUND BERN

See team homepage for map of Bahnhof-hotel-ISSI area and bus instructions to hotel.

<http://www.issibern.ch/teams/martianpolar/>

Hotel Reservations: ISSI will pay for and book your hotel. Please contact Brigitte (Brigitte.fasler@issibern.ch) as soon as you make your travel arrangements so that she can book your hotel room. Your room might be small (by U.S. standards) but will be clean, comfortable, and have toilet/shower. You are unlikely to have air conditioning anywhere in Bern, including ISSI and even movie theaters.

Busses/Trams: These come fairly regularly (max ~12 min wait and run until 0:00) and go almost anywhere you need to go. Buy a Mehrfarhtkarte at any Kiosk to get a punch card for 12 rides – this will save time and the aggravation of quickly looking for change to put in the ticket machine. Ding the Karte at the ticket machine at your bus stop, and you're good to go. You cannot buy tickets on the bus, and if you're caught without a ticket, fines are steep (~100 CHF) – try playing Dumb Tourist ☺. The #12 goes down the city center and will take you to many of the tourist attractions.

Main Bern tourist attractions (see city map for locations – you can get one at the Tourist Info office in the Bahnhof): **Zytglogge** (16th C. cuckoo clock, tours available), **Baerengraben** (European brown bears, city mascot), the **Muenster** (cathedral, check out the depiction of heaven and hell above the main door; go up the tower for a fantastic view of the city and the Alps), the old **Rathaus** (15th C. town hall), the **Rosengarten** (postcard view of Bern, great restaurant, great place to picnic and play with kids), **Paul Klee Zentrum** (museum dedicated to the artist), and the **Gurten** (Bern's little mountain, restaurants, hiking/jogging paths, playgrounds, excellent views of the Alps, farms).

Tourist website: <http://www.berninfo.com/de/welcome.cfm>. This website lists concerts, festivals, etc. and logistical information.

Shopping: The best place for quality, hand-crafted **souvenirs** is Heimatwerk on Kramgasse (on the right if you're walking away from the Bahnhof, toward the Baerengraben – east). The best selection of **chocolates**, both mass-produced and boutique, is at Merkur, on Barenplatz, just above the underground Coop grocery store. **Store hours** (except in Bahnhof – open later and on Sundays): Mon-Wed: ~9/10 – 18:30, Thurs.: ~9/10 – 21:00, Fri: ~9/10 – 20:00, Sat: ~9/10 – 17:00, Sun: closed. There is also a farmers market and flea market in Barenplatz and Bundesplatz on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays (open early, same closing hours). Note that 21 May 2009 is Ascension holiday, so no shops will be open.

Eating: ISSI will pay a per diem of 65 CHF per day, and breakfast is included at your hotel. But note that dinner can very easily run upwards of 70 CHF/person. Check out the maps of good dinner and lunch locations posted on the team homepage: <http://www.issibern.ch/teams/martianpolar/> (cheaper options are noted). Most restaurants are closed 15:00-17:00. After dinner, many restaurants close at 22:00. Reservations are recommended for groups bigger than 4 people for any night – but most especially for Thursday night! Brigitte will be happy to help you make reservations if you ask nicely. ☺

Excursions: Please feel free to email Kate (fishbaughke@si.edu) if you'd like any excursion ideas. Great hiking in the Alps is only ~45 min (Kandersteg and the Oeschinensee) to 2 h (Grindelwald) away. Note that lifts are closed in spring and fall, so hikes are long. Otherwise, within 2 h by train, you can visit everything from the Roman capitol of Switzerland at Avenches (then Aventicum), to castles at Thun and Neuchatel, to the cosmopolitan city life in Geneva, to the medieval walled town of Muerten, to bike rides through vineyards around the Genfersee. In short, there's lots of options very close by.

Safety: Bern, and Switzerland in general, are very safe. As anywhere, it's best, especially for women, not to walk anywhere alone late at night, though if you're in the city center, you're fine. Men and women might want to avoid the river, the Bahnhof, and the Grosse Schanze alone late at night. Pick-pocketing happens every now and then, and unattended laptops are frequently stolen on trains (take it to the bathroom with you!).

Runners?: There's lots of great 3–8 km (2-5 mile) running routes in Bern. If you'd like a good route, let Kate (fishbaughke@si.edu) know. If you need a longer route, umm . . . you're going to have to ask someone else. ☺