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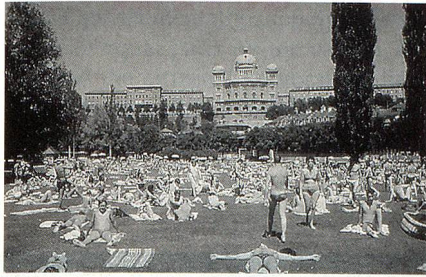
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View from the Rose Garden:
Berne's medieval townscape
radiates and contains many
secrets. (Photo: Marcus Gyger)

IMPRESSUM

Swiss Review, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 22nd year of issue and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in more than 20 regional editions. It has a total circulation of over 310,000. Regional news appears four times a year.

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Summer at last! No city in the world longs for the warm days with more longing than Berne. When the first buds open and the cobblestones give off the heat the proverbial reserve of the population starts to melt. Berne and its mentality become unrecognisable. In offices jackets and ties are cast aside in favour of smart shorts and airy shirts. Restaurants spill out on to the pavements. In the cool shade of the plane trees on the cathedral terrace bowls roll. The players assuage their thirst from the fountain. Market stands overflow with fresh fish, meat, cheese and vegetables. Cyclists weave skilfully through the narrow alleys. Street artists collect the small change of passersby. Rock music shakes the medieval city. Everything comes to life. Bare feet remind us of Spain where endless nights start when the heat wanes. Berne is in bloom. Bright red geraniums adorn the window sills.

The River Aare beckons. Bold water rats emerge as the temperature rises: at 14°C they dive through the rushing waters. Thousands of people jump into the river at midday and evening after work. They let themselves be carried by the flow, above their heads the wide arches of the bridges, before them on the skyline the federal parliament, behind them the snow-capped Bernese Alps. In a hot summer up to half a million people swim in Berne's River Aare – as many as there are Swiss Abroad.

On the banks fires blaze, sausages sizzle. Girls bronze in the sun. Rubber dinghies bounce by on the waves. Fishermen cast their flies. Now everything is on the move. Berne is alive. Only politics, whose wheels turn slowly anyway, comes to a virtual standstill: office bearers and dignitaries are out of town, information desks are empty, employees let their hair down. Within the city walls freedom has no limits.

Berne has many functions. As capital of the country since 1848 and of its own canton it is home to much administration. It serves itself and others. Every eighth inhabitant is an official. 28,000 of these (not counting teachers and auxiliaries) work in the city and nearby. They earn about Sfr. 2.1 billion every year. Berne is also the seat of the diplo-

matic corps and various international organisations. These also provide work. And we should not forget the exhibitions and congresses: 600 people will visit this year's Congress for the Swiss Abroad alone. Berne lies between two cultures, the Swiss-German and the French-speaking. Dialect is as often heard as other languages. "As usual it's been decided by the gentlemen in Berne", the rest of Switzerland says with more or less respect about the federal capital. Berne is an international city if a small one.

It does not have an international air about it though, life is comfortable and leisurely. It has deep roots, it gives a long-established impression. It is provincial, the "mulish Bernese squarehead" is legendary. The Bernese are measured in what they do and what they say. Berne is the heart of Switzerland. It is where people have to come if they want to get to know our country. "Berne is beautiful, rich and well situated", said "The Mirror of the Whole World", published in Nuremburg as early as 1707. Berne is as sweet as its chocolate. The faint glow from the Alps as the evening backdrop of the old city is sometimes almost unbearably beautiful.

Berne was born under the sign of Capricorn. It embodies much that is conservative. Stability, security, dependability: these make up the real spirit of Berne. But its stately character sometimes paralyses initiative. In cultural matters, the principle of indiscriminate all-round distribution is the order of the day. Politics tends to encourage moderation. Swing, tempo, decisiveness, action – these qualities are often absent. Berne is at rest. "Time passes – Berne exists", says the old proverb. Berne wants to keep it that way. The Aare flows slowly most of the year. But don't forget: he who swims with his ear under the water hears the pebbles moving on the river bed.



Alice Baumann

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