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Helvetia is in its 75th year

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Fribourg – Freiburg

Some 34km southwest of Bern, Fribourg (Freiburg in German) is one of Switzerland's best-kept secrets. Its winningly attractive medieval Old Town, almost perfectly preserved, is set on a forested peninsula in a meander of the River Saane. Steep, cob-

ble streets, bedecked with wrought-iron lamp standards and ornate inn signs, are picturesque and characterful. Six bridges, from medieval wooden fords to lofty modern valley spans, provide woodcut-pretty views back across the town of the old houses piled up together on the slopes.



One of Fribourg's many bridges

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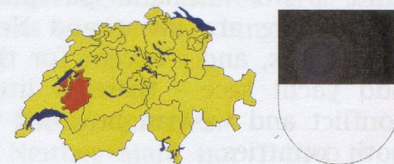
But the views only scratch the surface of Fribourg. For, behind its visual charm, Fribourg is perhaps Switzerland's most amiable and easygoing town, thoroughly modern at heart despite the medieval appearance of some quarters. It's small enough to have kept most of its city centre residential, but large enough to have attracted a lively, cosmopolitan mix of people to fuel the community atmosphere. One of the country's most prestigious universities – and its sole Catholic

one – attracts a massive student body to Fribourg from all over the country, and especially from Italian-speaking Ticino, thereby generating a social dynamism that is tangible on the streets. In addition, the Sarine (Saane in German), which carves a path through the town, is the local defining line of the Röstigraben: Fribourg is split roughly 70:30 between French speakers, who are a majority on the western bank; and Swiss-German speakers, who form a majority on the eastern bank. The town's radio station has two separate channels, many streets have two names, and almost everyone is instinctively bilingual. Some of Fribourg's older folk even cling on to the ancient Bolze dialect, a mixture, unsurprisingly, of French and German which you might be able to catch in the taverns and public squares of the Basse-Ville (Lower Town): in Bolze, the town is Frybürg, and you'll hear people calling each other Ggopäingj ("friend").

Fribourg is an understated place. For the time-pressed must-

see visitor, it merits barely an hour or two – which is all the better for those on a long, slow journey of familiarity around Switzerland, who could spend a week in the place and not see it all.

from the internet



The old city of Fribourg with St Nicholas cathedral

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