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HELVETIA

MAGAZINE OF THE SWISS SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



DECEMBER 2015 / JANUARY 2016

YEAR 81/82

Basel Christmas Market

Highlights

- Special Christmas Memories
- What does 'Heimat' mean to you?
- Battle of Morgarten Celebration
- Swiss 'Silvester' Tradition – Dinner for one

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Barfüsserplatz

Drenched in history and tradition, the Basel Christmas market is a sight not to be missed!

The City of Basel is in the far north-west of Switzerland on the River Rhine, right where the borders of Switzerland, France and Germany meet. The town is split across the Rhine into two parts: Gross Basel (great Basel) and Klein Basel (small Basel). These are connected by several bridges and of course by the famous ferries which transport passengers across the formidable river using spanned cables and oars, propelled only by the current. Although one city, there is a long-standing friendly rivalry between the two parts. This is perhaps best expressed by the figure of the "Lälekönig" (the Tongue King) who sticks out his tongue in mockery at the people of Klein Basel across the main Rhine bridge!

Basel has a most charming and hilly old town which includes remnants of its medieval walls, towers and ditches. Many of the old squares, cobbled alleyways and medieval townhouses – one even dating back to the 13th century – have remained in place. They provide the perfect and romantic backdrop to what is considered to be one of the largest Christmas markets in Switzerland. This market is spread across two

historical squares in Basel. The Barfüsserplatz (Barefoot Square) is named in honour of the barefoot Franciscan monks who built a monastery here in 1256. The Münsterplatz (Cathedral Square) is in front of the deep red sand stone Cathedral which was built between 1019 and 1500, and overlooks the Rhine River from its elevated vantage point.

Over 180 stalls – in the form of little gingerbread houses – offer a range of x-mas treats, food and drinks. The market is bathed in hundreds of twinkling lights at night time and visitors flock to it in numbers unaffected by the cold. They know that there are many cosy restaurants and cafes to choose from to thaw up those icy feet! The City of Basel takes its month-long Christmas market seriously and offers many other events, exhibitions and tours to encourage the festive spirit. Anyone is invited to enter his or her advent wishes into a special wish book located inside the beautiful town hall. Wouldn't it be nice to do a little time travel to soak up the atmosphere ... and then quickly come back to NZ summer!

Susie Wood