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THERE'S MORE THAN JUST MOUNTAINS

Gerry takes us on a stroll round Neuchâtel



The spectacular view from one of the lakeside bedrooms of the Hotel des Alpes, a good choice for those transport enthusiasts who travel with their loved ones!

To many people Switzerland is a country of mountains, wooden chalets, chocolate and the world's best transport system which always runs to time. We know there's more to it than that.

Although the central and southern areas of Switzerland possess dramatic landscapes the north western region which borders onto France is unjustifiably often overlooked. The Jura, pronounced with a "j" not a "y" has much to offer the holidaymaker as well as the transport fan.

The centre of this region is the Pays de Neuchâtel. Its capital, the very attractive city of Neuchâtel, sits on the north bank of the lake of the same name.

During previous visits to Neuchâtel the sun has always seemed to shine and down by the lakeside it has an almost Mediterranean

feel. This is probably because the city has a very French atmosphere. This is enhanced by the architecture and the pureness of French spoken but with Swiss overtones.

Neuchâtel offers good connections for us railway fanatics with the magnificent intercity tilting trains running from Geneva through to Biel and Basel or to Bern, Olten and Zurich to St. Gallen. The station stands above the city with the underground caterpillar funicular taking travellers down to the lakeside.

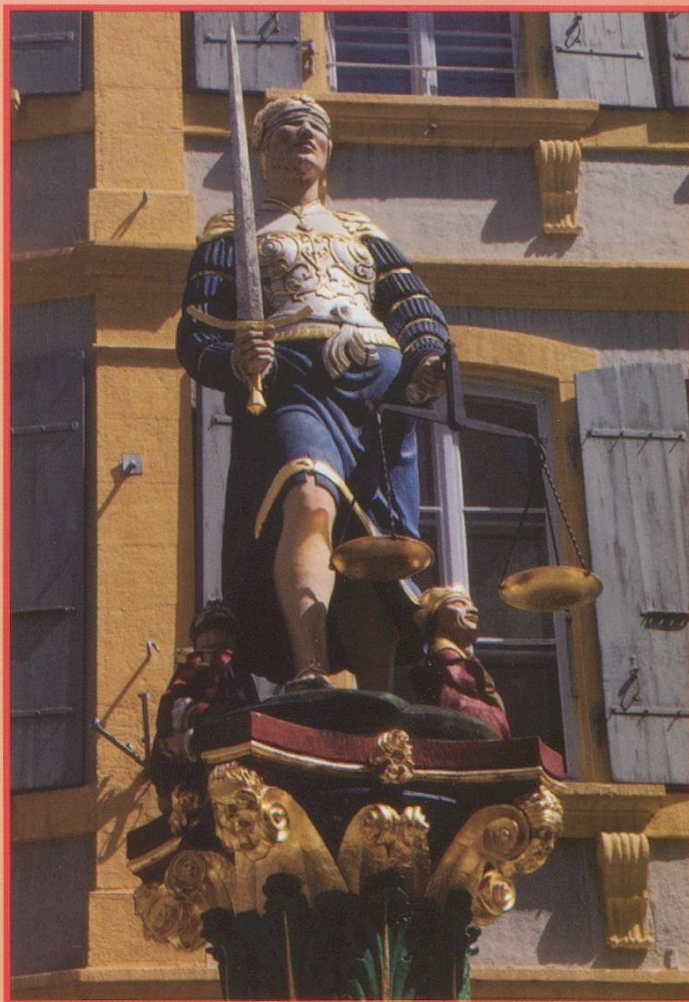
For the explorer wishing to visit not only Neuchâtel but also the surrounding areas a good base is the Hotel Alpes et Lac, in a French style mansion just a few metres across the road from the station. This medium priced hotel has very friendly and helpful English speaking staff. The quality of the

food is very good and reasonably priced. The recently refurbished en-suite rooms are a good size with all the facilities you would expect from a modern hotel. The spectacular views from the rear overlook the town below, then Lac Neuchâtel and beyond towards the Freiburg Alpen mountains in the distance.

For those whose interest in Switzerland goes beyond its railways Neuchâtel has very much the appearance of a European city that has existed since medieval times.

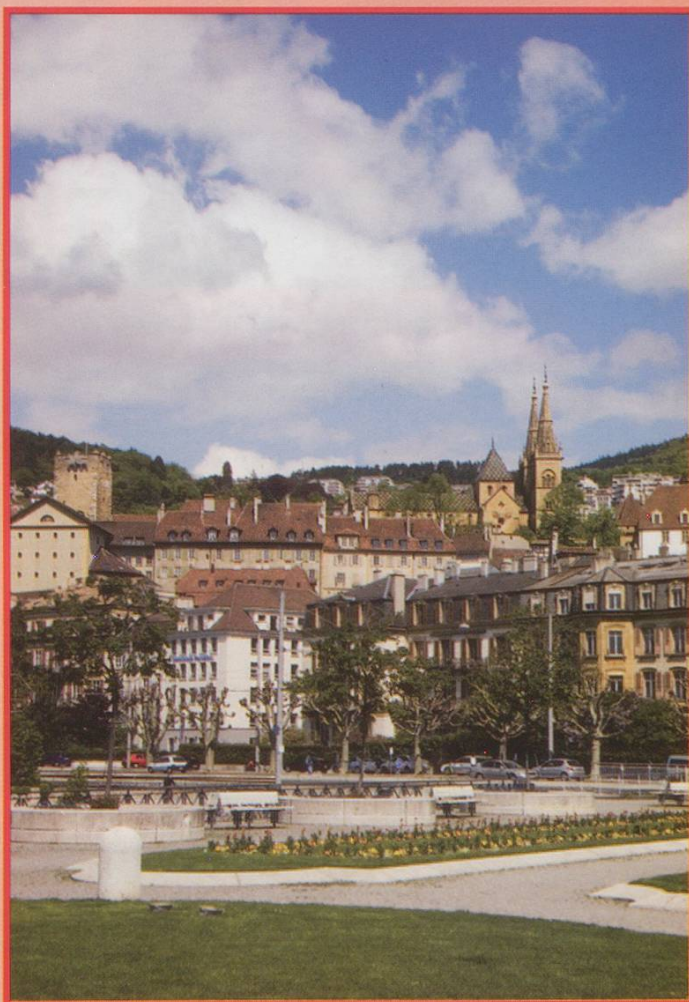
The Tourist Office, based at the Hôtel des Postes down by the lakeside, offers a clear walking guide to take you around the town and its history. The 16-page guide is in English, French and German with photographs and a numbered map to lead you round the route. The tour will ensure a pleasant morning or afternoon taking about 2 hours.

As you follow the route you will become aware of the classic French influence in the 18th century style architecture that surrounds the statued fountains so typical of towns and cities in Switzerland. One of the most notable of these is the Fountain de la Justice from the mid 1500s. The walk passes through the Hôtel de Ville with a model on display of the town as it was in the 18th century. Just to the north of the market square and the old covered market is the Corbets Passage with exterior stone spiral staircases reminiscent of those found in Lyon, France. The wide market square of Place des Halles with the 16th century pinnacled market hall opens out onto the lake. The walk now takes you up hill to the Château, which dates back to the 12th century. There's much to take in around the Château including the Collégiale Church. From the grounds there is a good view of the railway line west of the station and if you know the times of the services you will see a selection of trains including the TGV. You'll need a telephoto lens for the camera though, to get the best shots. Proceeding downhill you will pass the medieval stone tower prison



ABOVE: La Fontaine du Justice.

BELOW: Looking up from the lakeside





which is open to the public. The tower is believed to date back to the 10th century. Continuing downhill the guide takes you to the main shopping area of Neuchâtel. This widens out into Place Pury, which can cause excitement in some people as it is the hub of Neuchâtel's bus and trolleybus services and, of course, trams in the past. It is a bustling and attractive area. If you want to play safe you can use the pedestrian subway under the busy main road which separates the town from the lake. This also leads the lakeside terminus of the TN light rail service that runs south west along the lake before turning inland to Boudry. The walk continues east along the lake back to the harbour and the Tourist Office.

If you explore the many sights more fully, the tour may well take up a lot more of your time but could be well worth it. The walk can be joined anywhere as it is circular.

Neuchâtel will show you that there is a lot more to Switzerland than just mountains, wooden chalets, chocolate and the world's best transport system.



TOP: A trn Nina approaches Neuchâtel. Taken from the Château using a telephoto lens.

CENTRE: The 13th Century Eglise de Collégiale.

BELOW: A trolley bus leaves Place de Pury for Boucle Parc on route 8. Although perhaps not quite as exciting as when there were trams dashing round; it's still a trolleybus mecca!