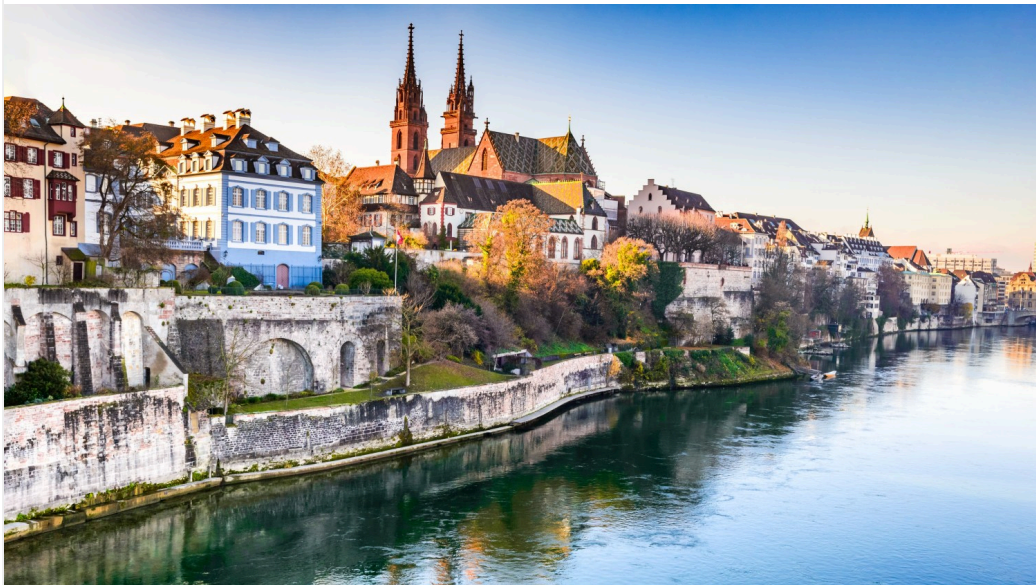


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# The art of a city break: why you can't beat Basel for culture

The Swiss city is packed with museums and street art — and visitors can enjoy it all with free transport and hefty museum discounts



Switzerland's cultural capital is a brilliant city for a weekend escape — you can even go swimming in the Rhine

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Harris Clark

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Paris and Berlin may hog the cultural headlines, but for this art-lover, Basel is hard to beat. Close to the borders of Germany and

**P** France, the Swiss city has nearly 40 museums, a thriving street art scene and a renowned art fair. Throw in free city transport and museum discounts for anyone staying overnight, return flights from Edinburgh for less than £50 and a beautiful setting on the Rhine, and Switzerland's cultural capital is a brilliant city for a weekend escape. Here's how to do it.

### Don't go anywhere without a BaselCard

There are city tourist cards and then there is the BaselCard. Issued free to all visitors at hotel check-in, the card offers 50 per cent discounts on most museums, reduced bike hire and free public transport. It's worth a weekend here for the BaselCard alone.

### Get your bearings

Basel's beautiful medieval old town is dominated by the fairytale town hall. The vivid red façade of the 16th-century Rathaus is a good starting point for a wander. Directly opposite is the family-run Confiserie Schiesser, the oldest coffee house and chocolatier in town ([confiserie-schiesser.ch](https://www.confiserie-schiesser.ch)). Then head west to Spalenberg, a street lined with quaint boutiques.



The Fondation Beyeler collection includes Rodin sculptures, above, plus works by Picasso and Warhol

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## Start with the art galleries...

The crowning glory of Basel's art scene is the Fondation Beyeler, a striking modernist building in the leafy Riehen suburb reached by the No 6 tram (£11 with a BaselCard, [fondationbeyeler.ch](https://fondationbeyeler.ch)). Its collection includes Picasso and Warhol, and it has a Matisse exhibition until January 26 (£13.50 with a BaselCard). Also on display are works from Monet's water lilies series. Head to the Kunstmuseum Basel too, a behemoth of a museum playing the greatest hits of the art world (£12 with a BaselCard, [kunstmuseumbasel.ch](https://kunstmuseumbasel.ch)).

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## ...then find more on the street

If highbrow galleries aren't your style, Basel's streets act as the perfect canvas. Some of the best street art can be found next to the Schwarzwaldbrücke bridge in the Schänzli area and at the Bell site, a 1,700 sq m wall covered in a colourful riot of ever-changing graffiti.





The Balancing Tools sculpture by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen at the Vitra Design Museum

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## Hop on an e-bike

Basel is a city built for bikes and there's a fantastic loop through Germany, France and Switzerland, taking in a sculpture park, vineyards and a beach bar — all in less than 20 miles. Better still, e-bikes cost £18 a day with a BaselCard, available from the main station on Centralbahnstrasse. The route links up with the



Rehberger-Weg, a sculpture trail connecting Fondation Beyeler with Vitra Campus, a remarkable complex with a design museum and cutting-edge buildings from architects including Frank Gehry and Zaha Hadid.



The “effortlessly cool” Matt and Elly Brewery & Kitchen

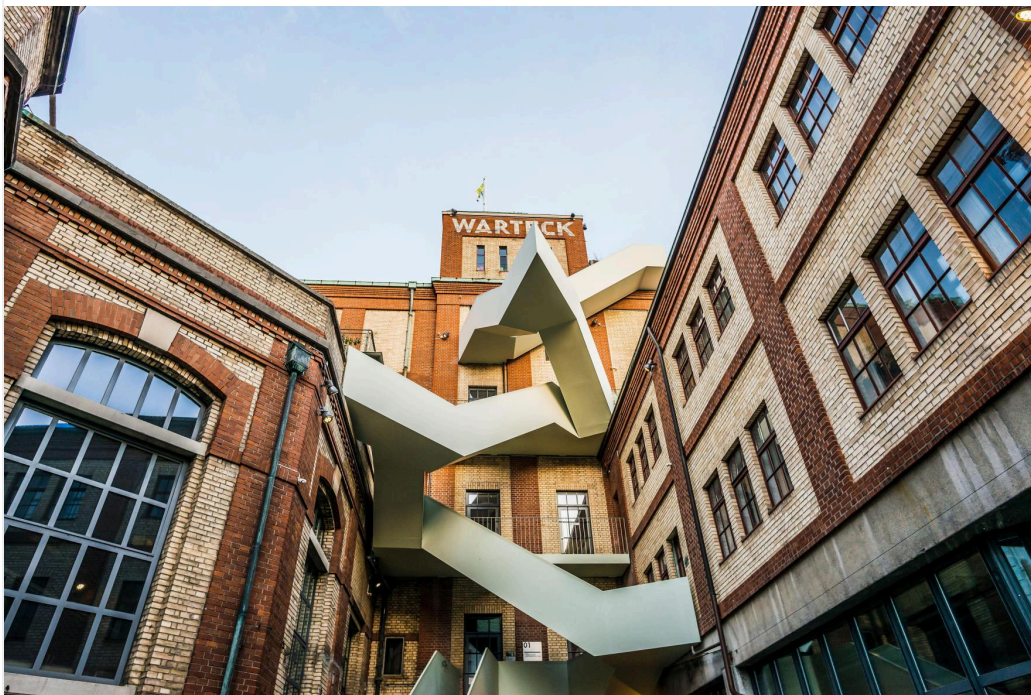
## Get the beers in

Forget wine pairings, craft beer is where Basel is at — and nowhere does it better than Matt and Elly Brewery & Kitchen.



Effortlessly cool, the restaurant does fun food-beer pairings — think gazpacho with hoppy IPAs, traditional cream horns with sour cherry beers (£105 for a four-course menu with beer pairings, [matt-elly.com](https://matt-elly.com)).

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The bar at Werkraum Warteck accessed by an Escher-like staircase

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## Have a sip on a roof

Basel doesn't have the wildest nightlife, but rather a couple of waterholes full of quirk and character. Werkraum Warteck is situated on the site of a former red-brick brewery and the bar is located close to the top of the distinctive boiler-house tower, accessed by an Escher-esque staircase. Once you've managed to find the entrance, kick back with a local beer or tasty cocktail on the roof garden and take in the splendid views (cocktails £13.45, [werkraumwarteckpp.ch](https://werkraumwarteckpp.ch)).

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The Rhine is warm enough to swim in until mid-October

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## Or take a dip in the Rhine

Swimming in the Rhine is non-negotiable in summer (and still manageable until about mid-October). Dry bags/buoyancy aids (aka Wickelfisch) can be rented at tourist information centres (£9 a day), then you can drift along on the current, taking in the old town from the water. The best place to start is the beach below Museum Tinguely ([tinguely.ch](https://www.tinguely.ch)), then float downriver to one of the many buvettes (snack stands) for a warming schnapps.

## Choose your base

A stone's throw from the main station, Mövenpick Hotel Basel has elegant, modern rooms styled by the architect and designer Matteo Thun (room-only doubles from £199, [all.accor.com](https://www.all.accor.com)). Or try the hip youth hostel Jugendherberge Basel, right on the Rhine and recently given a funky design facelift (B&B doubles from £135, [youthhostel.ch](https://www.youthhostel.ch)).

Harris Clark was a guest of Basel Tourism ([basel.com](#)) and Switzerland Tourism ([myswitzerland.com](#)). Fly from Edinburgh to Basel from £45 return ([easyjet.com](#))

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