Astride the Rhine where Switzerland, France and Germany touch, **Basel** (Bâle in French) is a logical staging post en route north. Despite its pan-European location, the city has gained a reputation for insularity. Certainly, Basel feels like a working city; it’s neither as picturesque as Bern or Luzern, nor as vibrant as Zürich. Yet it’s a wealthy place and boasts first-rate museums and galleries, in addition to some superb contemporary architecture. It also holds a massive three-day **carnival** in February ([fasnacht.ch](http://www.fasnacht.ch)), beginning at 4am on the Monday after Mardi Gras. The River Rhine curves through the city, flowing from east to north. On the south/west bank (1km north of the main station) is the historic Old Town, centred on **Barfüsserplatz**. Across the river, on the north bank lies **Kleinbasel**, historically scorned by the city’s merchants as a working-class quarter. Nowadays, the steps down to the Rhine are a popular place to catch the sun.