

City tour

Solothurn is a favourite destination with its remarkable baroque buildings, the impressive Cathedral of St. Ursus and the astounding nature surrounding the town. In the vehicle-free Old Town there is much to sightsee and explore: historical heritage buildings and picture-perfect fountains, exciting museums and quiet alleyways, delicatessen shops, boutiques for fashion, gifts and lifestyle as well as countless restaurants. We wish you many enjoyable moments during your tour through Switzerland's **most beautiful baroque town**.

Start your city tour on top of the **steps of the St. Urs Cathedral (8)** from where you enjoy an excellent view of the main alleyway ("Hauptgasse"). You are now standing on the famous Italian stairway flanked by the Moses and Samson (also interpreted as Gideon) fountains created by J.B. Babel.



Continue your tour straight ahead to the **Jesuit church (10)**, where you can see one of the most beautiful sacral rooms in Swiss-South German baroque style. Follow the main alleyway and you reach the **Market square (near by 5)** with the **clock tower (5)**. Take a few minutes and have a close look at the astronomical clock work and the play of moving figures.



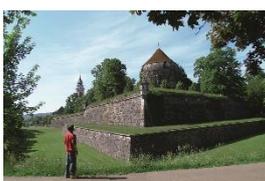
Cross the market square and follow the **Gurzeln alley (near by 2)** ("Gurnzelgasse") towards the **Biel gate (2)**. From there you turn left to the **Schmieden alley (near by 2)** ("Schmiedengasse"), where you can see houses with gothic gables. Walk further along the Schmieden alley to reach the "**Friedhofplatz**" (**end of Schmiedengasse**) (oldest square in town, with relics from the Roman castrum). Walk down the Stalden up to the **Aarequai (near by 18)** where you can enjoy a beautiful view of the **Aare (in front of 18)** and the Vorstadt part of the town on the opposite shore.

There you can discover the **Natural History Museum (27)** and the **Doll and Toy Museum (34)** as well as the **Sentimental Light Fiction Cabinet (32)**. From there you just walk up the alley and you are back at the **St. Urs Cathedral (8)**.



Now walk eastward along the Quai and glimpse the impressive **Landhaus (18)** before reaching the **Klosterplatz (near by 27)**. Alternatively, you can stroll to the right shore via the Wengibrücke, and with an impressive view of the urban silhouette walk eastwards to the Klosterplatz via Kreuzacherbrücke.

To view the **old fortifications (around 4)**, the so-called entrenchments, walk out through the **Basel gate (1)**. The town relief is to the left of the fountain. A few steps further on you can view the impressive wall. The wall, which dates back to 1667, comprised eleven bastions on both sides of the river.



Tip: From the **tower terrace of the St. Urs Cathedral (8)** you can enjoy an overwhelming view of the entire Old Town! (Opening hours: 1 April to 31 October, Mon-Sat 9.30-12.00/13.30-17.30, Sundays and public holidays 12.00-17.30)

Solothurn is considered a museum city. Four of the museums are outstanding: the **Museum of Fine Art (26)** that exhibits pictures of the most important Swiss painters from 1850 onwards; the **Old Arsenal Museum (28)**, which contains one of the most important arms and uniform collections in Europe; the **Blumenstein Historical Museum (29)** that shows how a Patrician family lived; and the **Natural History Museum (27)**, which presents the native animal and plant world. A real jewel among the museums is the **Waldegg Castle (35)** that presents the patrician lifestyle of the 18th century in its rooms and in its baroque garden. The permanent exhibition is dedicated to the history of Solothurn and shows what kind of influence the ruling Solothurn clans and ambassadors had.



An insider tip is the **hermitage (16)** ("Einsiedelei") in the romantic **gorge of St. Verena (16)**, which is known a place of power. On idyllic walking paths with inscriptions you walk through the gorge and reach the residing sister. You can reach the gorge after a 20 minute walk by following the signalling "Waldegg Castle", by car or with bus no. 4 (Rüttenen, stop St. Niklaus).

Hungry from strolling around the city? In Solothurn there are numerous **restaurants** which cater for every taste. The team of Region Solothurn Tourism is happy to advise you on your choice of restaurant.

Excursion tip: Visit the **Weissenstein (near by 38)** which you can reach comfortably from Oberdorf in just 10 minutes with the new cable car. The view that awaits you is unique and extends across the Mittelland all the way to the Alps. More information about inns, attractions and hiking options are available in the **brochure Hiking in the Solothurn Jura**, which can be obtained from the Tourist Office.

Fortifications

Solothurn, a so-called "Brückenstadt" (town of bridges), lies on the bank of the river with a nice skyline. The Roman vicus Salodurum was abandoned after the intrusion by the alemanns in the 4th century in favour of a small castrum (castle) with a bell-shaped floor plan and featured with towers. The castrum was located north of today's Wengi bridge. East of the castrum the "Stadtburg" emerged, which was an important administrative centre in the early Middle Ages, and of which you can still see the clock tower. During high medieval times, the city again expanded and had the same borders as the Roman vicus. The city was laid out in a rectangular shape on the northern riverside of the Aare. Still, some of the impressive parts of the fortifications mark the cityscape. In the outskirts, you can see the "krummer Turm" (leaning tower) and, behind the "prison", a part of the wall. After the war against the Swabians, the fortification was strengthened by the Basel gate (1504 – 1535) and the construction of four new towers (1534 – 1548). Of the latter, you can still see the Buri tower and the Riedholz tower. The entrenchments comprise eleven bastions on both sides of the river which included the older towers. Between 1835 and 1880 the entrenchments were almost completely demolished. The bastion at the Riedholz tower and the semi-entrenchment at the leaning tower can still be seen today.

Historical information

Solothurn lies directly on the river Aare east of the three Jura lakes. The oldest historical roots can be traced back to the middle stone age. One of the bridges might already have existed from the time of Augustus in the celtic oppidum (a main settlement) and in a vicus (a small urban settlement) until the middle of the 3rd century. Due to the castrum (castle) and the burial places of the Theban martyrs Urs and Victor, the settlement survived the turbulent times of the migration period. In 1481 Solothurn was the 11th Canton to join the Swiss Confederation. A decisive factor in the further development of Solothurn was the permanent residence of the French ambassadors (1530 – 1792). They recruited



mercenaries from Solothurn for the French king. As a result of the close relationship with the French, the city's upper class was predominant, the cityscape received an aristocratic character (city of ambassadors) and numerous summer residences with a typically French touch were built in Solothurn's surroundings.

The history of Solothurn is inextricably linked with the number eleven. The St. Urs Cathedral, Solothurn's landmark, is the masterpiece of the "magical eleven". The impressive stairs lead up to the cathedral by way of three times eight steps. Inside there are eleven altars and the tower is six times eleven metres high and has eleven bells.

Places of interest



St. Urs Cathedral (8)

It is the most important Swiss building of early classicism built with light marble from Solothurn. Between 1762 and 1773, it was completely rebuilt on this site according to plans by Gaetano Matteo Pisoni from Ascona. His nephew, Paolo Antonio Pisoni, was responsible for the construction during a later phase. In the clock tower, there are eleven bells (1764 – 1768) made by the Kaiser foundry in Solothurn. Inside the cathedral you can see a high altar by Carlo Luca Pozzi in the shape of a sarcophagus. The St. Urs Cathedral Treasury can be found in the basement of the tower.



Jesuit Church (10)

It is one of the most excellent baroque buildings in Switzerland and was built between 1680 and 1689. It is assumed to have been planned by brother Heinrich Mair following the principles of the Vorarlberg mayor to create a richly structured baroque singular space. Inside you can see impressive stucco work in Italian style with different motives. The high altar of 1704 frames the picture "Maria Himmelfahrt" by Franz Carl Stauder; in the gable a delicately carved superstructure with the arms of the donor Hartmann; magnificent tabernacle in Rococo forms, donated in 1756 by F.A.V. von Roll.



Basel gate (1)

This is a masterly built fortification which forms an impressive architectural group together with the St. Urs tower. It was built after the war against the Swabians as a replacement for the old gate. Construction work started in 1504 under Hans Gibelin. The tower of the gate has five storeys and the frames of the gate have pointed arches with profiles from late gothic times. At the corners of the gate, there are two round towers which were finished in 1535. At the site of the outer Baseltor: Fountain of 1781, the largest long trough created from a Solothurn monolith.



Old Arsenal Museum (28)

It is a unique museum with an enormous collection of weapons and uniforms. It was built between 1609 and 1614 in place of the “Rüsthaus” of 1548 (the relief can be seen in the basement). A stately, inward-sloping ascending seven-storey and seven-axle cube building with an early baroque form, underneath a ruptured, hipped gable roof; articulated in a free rhythm by means of slightly asymmetric aligned openings which are linked with cornices. Semicircular arch opening; portals rusticated in a Mannerist way. It was a role model for numerous other representative buildings in the canton.



Clock tower (5)

It is the city's oldest building around which many myths exist. In the 15th and 16th century it was equipped with the famous astronomical clockwork. The clock tower was built in the first half of the 12th century and expanded in different stages. 1467 Construction of the clock storey, 1545 astronomical clock by Lorenz Liechti and Joachim Habrecht (father of the creator of the Strasbourg astronomical clock) In the clock itself you can see the different phases of the moon and above it the automatic figures (knight, Grim Reaper and the King (of Fools)). The big astronomical clock face indicates the day, month and the season of the year. If you look eastwards, you can see the alleyway with the Jesuit Church and the façade of the St. Urs Cathedral. (Additional information is available from the Tourist Office)



Landhaus (18)

It was earlier called “Weinland”, which is the name of a wharf for wine transport. It is a well-proportioned massive building with a distinctive corner towards the river. After a fire, it was reconstructed in 1955 on the basis of the old walls and adapted for new purposes. In the community hall there is a large, three-colour Sgraffito by Hans Jauslin, 1958; episodes from the history of Solothurn. In the hall, Apollo and the Muses, by Maurice Barraud; Three Women, Bronze, by Oscar Wiggli. The “Landhaus” was one of the first multi-purpose buildings of Switzerland.



St. Peter's chapel (12)

The chapel features new gothic shapes with a choir, and pointed arch windows with tracery. The prosaic classically decorated inside was reverted to its original style between 1970 – 1972, and the baroque paintings on the ceiling were reconstructed. While doing so it was possible to restore the high-baroque decorative painting and reconstruct the colourful ceiling from a few fragments. Inside the church you can see a picture displaying the crucifixion of Peter (by Niklaus Hermann, 1653) and statues of St. Verena and Queen Berta. On the altars in the nave, there are statues of St. Ursus and Victor.

Sources: H. E. Gerber and “Schweizerischer Kunstführer, Altstadt Solothurn (in German) by G. Loertscher (the texts were adapted for translation and enhanced)

