

DESTINATION ♦ SWITZERLAND

Basel is a city with a heart of art. There are countless stories everywhere from the chasselas vines to colourful birdhouse sculptures and the Vitra Design Museum.

PICTURES: SUPPLIED, ISTOCK

DIVINE VIEWS

ART STOPPERS

Join a cultural treasure hunt that takes Basel's love for art into the great outdoors

CELESTE MITCHELL

With 40 museums designed by renowned architects – showcasing everything from Picasso to miniatures – and 25 major pieces of public art packed within its 37sq km, Basel has culture running in its veins.

And with such a cultured collection of folk calling Switzerland's oldest university city home, a public holiday in Basel obviously means museum time. I've arrived at the Fondation Beyeler museum, close to the German border in the city's north, where a Monet exhibition is headlining. But there's a queue for tickets, and no hope of making it inside before dark.

Luckily, the concept of art is fluid in this corner of Switzerland and I don't need to step inside a museum to get an art blast in Basel. I swap my meeting with Monet for a treasure hunt for public art, and set out along a 6km trail known as 24 Stops.

ART, OR SOMETHING LIKE IT

Officially called The Rehberger-Weg, the art trail links Switzerland and Germany – from the Fondation Beyeler to the architecture playground that is Vitra Campus – through 24 waymarkers created by Tobias Rehberger. The first 12 pieces were installed in 2015 and by June 2016 the treasure hunt was complete.

The art is also in the palm of my hand; having downloaded the 24 Stop app before leaving my hotel room and catching the tram out to the museum, the GPS is tracking my movements.

The start of the trail is right in front of my face, the clapper of the brass

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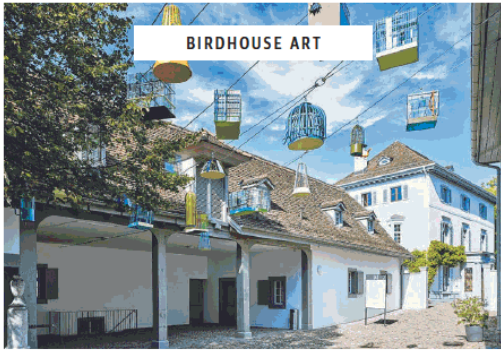
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DESTINATION ♦ SWITZERLAND



BIRDHOUSE ART

bell swinging from side to side in front of the Fondation Beyeler cafe, and as I slip away from the crowds I tick off three more before the field opens up in front of me and I find the rhythm in my steps and my thoughts.

As I wander, the app dishes up narratives to accompany select artworks. Some seem more practical than fanciful – a birdhouse, a beehive, a shelter, a rubbish bin – while others add a scientific layer, such as the Weather House. It looks like a stereo speaker hoisted up a flagpole, but the two spheres within move with the atmosphere's pressure, essentially telling if it's sunny or rainy.

**SPACES IN BETWEEN**

While I feel surprisingly excited about locating each waymarker, if only to know I'm on the right track, it's the

moments of solitude in between that I enjoy the most. I cross the shallow Wiese River and wrap around the outside of the Naturbad Riehen. Families with bulging beach bags and rugs file inside to enjoy the natural bathhouse while teenagers shoot hoops across the road. A jogger bounces down steep stairs, between rows of vines on the hillside opposite.

In my ears, architect Albert Gothe is explaining how the original bathhouse design by Herzog & de Meuron came out of an architecture competition in 1979, but it was not opened until 2014. During the 35 years in between, the public had abandoned the idea of conventional swimming pools. Inside today, the pool is biologically purified in a natural way using water plants and layers of gravel, sand and soil.



VITRA DESIGN MUSEUM

**CROSSING BORDERS**

The border crossing is unmanned and I walk on through into Weil am Rhein. There is no distinctive change as I slip from Switzerland into Germany (and by the time I reach the Vitra Campus, I'll almost be straddling the French border). I tick off a few more artworks as I cross through a main intersection, then follow street art on the bitumen as it leads me to a laneway behind neat and tidy houses with impeccable gardens. As the track turns to dirt, the view opens up to bucolic rows of chasselas vines on the right and the tower of pharmaceutical giant, Roche, back in Basel, on my left. Red poppies dance in the breeze at the end of the vines and parents pass by with kids rolling on scooters.

On the longer stretches between sculptures, the app encourages me to

spend a minute hugging a tree, or singing out loud to myself while I walk; I'm not sure the cycling group I greet on the next corner would have enjoyed my performance art.

With the teetering cantilevered blocks of the VitraHaus in my line of sight – the furniture designers' flagship store built by Herzog & de Meuron – I walk past families cooking over charcoal burners and tending to their veggie patches in small back yards.

A row of abstract and brightly coloured birdhouse sculptures brings it home on the final stretch before I cross the road and ring the final bell. The reverberation of the "bong" marks a visceral and satisfying ending.

**THE WRITER WAS A GUEST OF SWITZERLAND TOURISM**

ESCAPE ROUTE

BASEL

**GETTING THERE**

SWISS International Airlines flies to Zurich via Singapore or Hong Kong with partners Singapore Airlines and Qantas. swiss.com

**GETTING AROUND**

The Swiss Travel Pass gives unlimited access to public transport including trains, buses and boats, free access to more than 500 museums and up to 50 per cent discount on mountain railways and cableways. Children under 16 travel free with a guardian using the Pass. myswitzerland.com/rail

**SIGHTSEEING**

The BaselCard is for hotel guests, giving free public transport and Wi-Fi and 50 per cent discount on admission to Basel's museums, Zoo, Theater Basel and more. basel.com  
Get maps for Rehberger-Weg (24 Stops) from Basel Tourism offices, hotel tour desks and 24stops.info  
Vitra Campus is a design playground. Frank Gehry's first Europe project is here and Zaha Hadid's first ever. vitra.com

**STAYING THERE**

Pullman Basel Europe is close to Messeplatz. pullmanhotels.com

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