



Stadt Bern
Stadtpräsident

Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

World Historical and Cultural Cities Exposition

Nanjing, China, October 20th to 22nd

Mayors Forum, China Hall

Alexander Tschäppät, Mayor

Theme: Splendid Culture, Amazing City

Sub-theme: River: The Mother of Human Civilization
and Urban Culture

Many major cities of the world are situated on the banks of rivers. There are a number of practical reasons for that: rivers are obviously used

- as a source of water and irrigation,
- for obtaining food,
- for transport,
- as a source of hydropower,
- for bathing,
- and as a means of disposing of waste.

However, when you hear the people of Bern describing their city, you get the impression that the river that flows around the old town of Bern is something quite unique. And let me assure you: People are right about that. But why is that so?

First of all, the river Aare rises in the great Aare Glaciers of the Bernese Alps, not even 100 km away from Bern. The river water that flows through the City of Bern originates almost entirely from the Bernese Alps. Therefore the water is cold, fresh and clean. On its way to Bern the water once forms a 46 m high waterfall, before it carves through a limestone ridge. This passage is bordered by steep cliffs up to 50 m high on both sides. Today the gorge is open to the public and there are walking paths along its walls. From the gorge the river goes in and out of two lakes, and then goes on to the city of Bern.

As the river reaches Bern, its waters still flow rather quickly. Its color is often an amazing clear green. There are lots of currents and whirls in the water. It's a wild and unpredictable body of flowing water and

I'm quite sure, that is the reason why people find it so appealing.

For 23 km the river runs on the city's surface. Its riverbanks are primarily used for recreational purposes. On the paths along the water people go walking with their children and dogs, they go rollerblading or jogging or they simply sit on a bench and enjoy the tranquility and beauty of nature.

Despite its low temperatures you will find people swimming in the river throughout the year. Some seem to be addicted to take a dip in the water. Even when outside temperatures fall below zero degrees centigrade you see them swimming in the freezing water, usually followed by a waterproof bag containing their clothes and a towel.

In summer, when temperatures rise, also regular people start swimming in the river. Usually it gets pretty crowded as soon as water temperatures rise above 18 degrees centigrade. That may seem very cold to you, but for the regular Aare swimmer it's just

as good as it gets. That's when you will witness something quite unusual going on in our capital city: there will be thousands of people right in the middle of town walking upstream in their bathing suits, in order to cool off in the fresh water. Visitors are often taken aback when they see all the swimmers as well as smaller and larger boats passing by in this fast stream right in the heart of the city. Swimming in the river Aare is an exhilarating experience and once you start doing it, you will always want to do it again.

The river Aare stands for one of the most important commodities the city of Bern has to offer: its high quality of living. On the city's surface the river may have lost its original importance as a source of energy, food or transportation. But today, Bern being the capital city, a dynamic political center, the river offers people a break from their busy lives and a space to enjoy the natural environment and a chance to get some exercise.

Bern is by the way the only bigger city in Europe that has more jobs than inhabitants. This number has increased

by 4000 over the last three years to 152'000 jobs. The most important fields are the public administration, the public infrastructure companies, banks and insurance companies.

Bern is one of the cities offering the highest possible quality of living worldwide. In Bern quality of living implies that public services, public transport, schools and medical services are exemplary. Public infrastructure for events and sports is outstanding. Bern's soccer stadium, the Stade de Suisse Wankdorf, was rebuilt for the 2008 UEFA EURO. Europe's biggest Ice Hockey Stadium, the Postfinance Arena was completely renovated last year and will host the European Figure Skating Championships next January.

Bern is also a place of science: The origins of Bern's University date back to the 16th century. One of the most important scientists ever worked and lived in Bern: Albert Einstein developed some of his most revolutionizing theories about modern physics in the early 20th century in Bern. Today, Bern's University offers a wide range of education and excellent research.

The University Hospital, the Inselspital, is a world-class facility. *The Centre for Climate Change Research* is a centre of excellence for climate research of the University of Bern. It focuses on interdisciplinary research in the fields of natural, human and social sciences as well as economics and law. *The Centre of Competence for Public Management at the University of Bern* underlines Bern's importance as a centre of Public Service.

Additional factors for Bern's high level of quality of living are its political, social and economic stability and its excellent record concerning the protection of the environment.

But let me return to our river. The river Aare, just like any other river, is prone to flooding. Flooding is of course a natural part of a river's cycle. In many cases, however, human activities in rivers and floodplains have dramatically increased the risk of flooding. The city of Bern and especially one part of the city have been severely affected by flooding again and again. After a devastating flooding in the year 2005 the city

of Bern decided to invest important funds for flood control measures. So far only parts of the planned measures have been implemented. Although the short term measures have proven its worth, and no damaging flooding has taken place since 2005, what still needs to be done, is the implementation of long term flood control measures. Of course you can never entirely control nature. But through the implementation of long term flood control measures the city can eliminate as much risk as possible.

Some people claim that you have not really visited the city of Bern unless you have swum in the river. Others say that you have never lived in Bern unless you have witnessed a flooding. This shows how much the people of my city identify themselves with the river and this regardless whether it's a good or a bad thing.

Thank you for your attention.