

Bellinzona : Switzerland's fortress of the South

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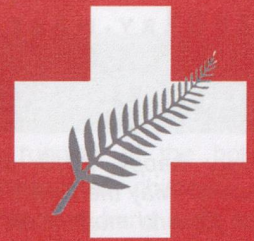
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Bellinzona's three castles
- ASO elections
- Travel and study opportunities for young Swiss abroad
- Health insurance in New Zealand

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Bellinzona: Switzerland's fortress of the South

Bellinzona (German: Bellenz) is strategically positioned where the Ticino valley narrows on the way to the Alpine passes of St. Gotthard, San Bernardino and Lucomagno (Lukmanier). The town acts as a gateway to Italy for those travelling from the North and as the keyhole to the Alps for those coming from the South.

The picturesque corners and squares, the courtyards, the neo-Classical, Italian-style theatre, and the sympathetically restored old houses tell visitors the history of what is culturally a Lombardy town. In its alleyways are richly decorated patrician houses and beautiful churches.

Yet behind the austere charm of the medieval town is all the dynamic life of a modern meeting-place. Numerous boutiques, cafés and specialist shops offering culinary delicacies invite you to linger and window-shop. Each Saturday, there is a big weekly market on the Piazza Nosetto.

The fortifications of Bellinzona are among the most important examples of medieval defensive architecture in the Alps. They have been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site from 2000.

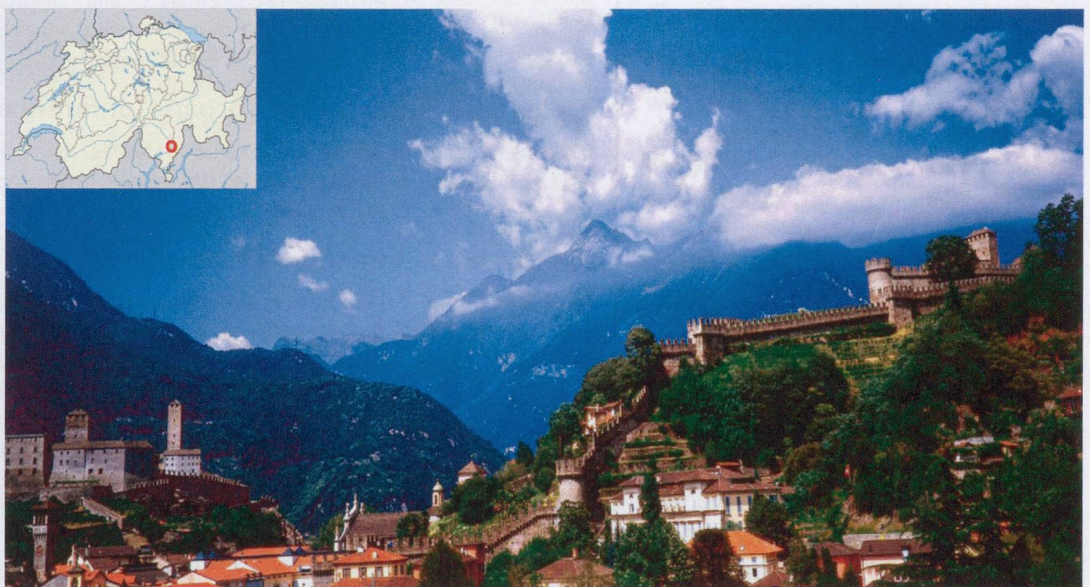
From the Castelgrande, Bellinzona's oldest and mightiest castle, there is a beautiful view over the Old Town and the surrounding area. A little museum in the Castelgrande documents the history of Bellinzona's castles and town centre. There are also museums in the other two castles.

It was the Romans who realised the strategic importance of the site and first built a castle here in the first century A.D. In the Middle Ages, this was extended to form a long, impregnable fortress.

Because of its location, Bellinzona was always a bone of contention between the Dukes of Milan and the Swiss. It was only in 1516 that the town first became part of the Swiss Federation.

Bellinzona is ideally located for excursions to the nearby holiday resorts of Locarno and Ascona, to the Southern Ticino with its main town, Lugano, up the romantic side valleys of the Ticino River, northwards into the Leventina and the Bedretto valley, or into the sunny Blenio valley.

Source: www.myswitzerland.com/en/bellinzona.html



Bellinzona, with Castelgrande to the left and Montebello Castle to the right

www.bellinzoneaturismo.ch