

SCHAFFHAUSEN - Ghid turtistic



Capital of the northernmost Swiss canton that shares its name, **SCHAFFHAUSEN** has one of the most captivating medieval town centres in the whole of Switzerland. In addition, just 3km down river are the mighty [Rhine falls](#), a blockage to shipping on the otherwise navigable river that to this day forces boats making the journey from the Bodensee to unload their goods (or passengers), and then load up again beyond the falls for the journey on towards Basel. Almost as if too far north to be of concern to most visitors to Switzerland, Schaffhausen is nonetheless an unsung, uncelebrated gem.

A bankside docking point had already developed into the thriving market town of **Scafusun** by 1045. (The name of the town probably derives from its many riverside boathouses – boat is *Schiff* in German.) During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Schaffhausen grew rapidly, handling salt and cereals from Bavaria and the Tyrol for sale at the town market and for transport on beyond the falls. Granted the status of a free city in 1415 during the Council of Konstanz, Schaffhausen joined the Swiss Confederation in 1501. With an expansion of trade, the town maintained steady growth, its eighteenth-century merchants indulging in the fashion for adding ornate **oriel** windows to the pre-existing Gothic or Renaissance buildings. Hydroelectric works built in the nineteenth century to exploit the flow of the Rhine brought the area into the industrial age.

During **World War II**, Schaffhausen was the only Swiss town to be **bombed** by Allied aircraft: about 100 civilians were killed during a raid by American bombers on April 1, 1944. The US claimed that pilots had mistakenly identified Schaffhausen – the only sizeable chunk of Swiss territory on the north bank of the Rhine – as a German target. They apologized profusely and paid out compensation ... only to make the same mistake again on February 22, 1945, this time killing sixteen in Schaffhausen and nine in Stein-am-Rhein (also on the “wrong” side of the river). Records that could possibly throw light onto the allegation that the bombings were in fact an Allied response to Schaffhausen’s munitions industries supplying arms to the Nazis in breach of Swiss neutrality are, as yet, still classified.

In recent years, Schaffhausen has developed into a busy modern town, now expanded well beyond its medieval centre, and capitalizing on its position on the fulcrum between Germany and Switzerland to act as a commercial and cultural bridge between the two. It has also

absorbed a high number of **Sri Lankan** immigrants and asylum seekers, leading to an unusually broad ethnic mix on the streets and plenty of local advertising posters in Tamil.

HOTELS

The quality **campsite** *Rheinwiesen* (052/659 33 00; May–Sept) is on the south bank of the river at Langwiesen, 2km southeast of the centre. Dorms cost Fr.23 in the modern HI **hostel** at Randenstrasse 65, in the suburb of Breite, 1km northwest of the station (052/625 88 00, fax 624 59 54; a; March–Oct; bike rental available), or you can spend the same for dorms in another, older HI hostel in Schloss Laufen, a castle overlooking the Rhine falls 3km west of town (052/659 61 52, fax 659 60 39; a; mid-March to mid-Nov).

There's not a big choice of **hotels** in the centre, and the best budget deals are to be found in surrounding suburbs. The least expensive is the comfortable old guesthouse *Löwen*, at Im Hösli 2 in Herblingen, 3km north of the centre and reachable on bus #5 (052/643 22 08; b), although its rooms are all modern and renovated. In the centre of run-of-the-mill Neuhausen, ten minutes' walk from both Schaffhausen and the Rhine falls, you'll find the *Edelweiss*, Pestalozzistrasse 20 (052/672 34 34, fax 672 34 35; b), and the *Rheinfall*, Zentralstrasse 60 (052/672 13 21, fax 672 14 29; b), both of them simple and serviceable. On the edge of Schaffhausen's Old Town is *Park Villa*, Parkstrasse 18 (052/625 27 37, fax 624 12 53; b–c), an atmospheric old mansion complete with chandeliers and Persian carpets: one lovely shared-bath room which opens onto the garden can undercut the other, en-suite rooms by Fr.40 or more. The central *Kronenhof*, Kirchhofplatz 7 (052/625 66 31, fax 624 45 89; c), has slick business-class rooms, but Schaffhausen's most characterful choice is the *Fischerzunft*, Rheinquai 8 (052/625 32 81, fax 625 32 85; d), a super-modern hotel on the riverfront with just ten rooms – not all with Rhine views.

VISITING THE TOWN

Schaffhausen's beautiful riverside Old Town is crammed full of well-preserved architecture, which lend the narrow, cobbled streets a charm to rival any town centre in Switzerland. A good place to begin is the central **Fronwagplatz**, the town's marketplace during the Middle Ages. Dominating the long square is the **Fronwagturn**, within which originally hung the market's massive scales; the clock and astronomical device on the top dates from 1564. Beside it is the late-Baroque **Herrenstube**, one of the town's most distinguished townhouses, although the facade of the **Zum Steinbock** house, 100m west at Oberstadt 16, is even more impressive, covered in stucco Rococo curlicues.

If you stroll north on Fronwagplatz, past the square's two medieval fountains – the **Metzgerbrunnen** (1524), topped by a statue of a Swiss mercenary, and the **Mohrenbrunnen** (1535), with a Moorish king – you'll come to the **Zum Ochsen** house, one of the most grandiose in the city, at Vorstadt 17. The late-Gothic facade of this former inn was remodelled in 1608 and decorated with striking Renaissance frescoes of classical heroes. The oriel window is especially graceful: it shows, in five panels, a woman embodying each of the five senses – holding a mirror (sight), a glove (touch), a flower (smell), a stringed instrument (hearing) and a cake (taste). These oriels were often tacked on to existing buildings during renovation work in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, both to demonstrate the houseowner's wealth and good taste, and also to give people inside a clear view up and down the street. Goethe visited Schaffhausen three times – in 1775, 1779 and 1797 – and apocryphally remarked that the locals must be very curious folk, not least because as well as 170-odd proper oriels dotted around the Old Town, there are dozens of half-oriels, often with spyholes in the floor to allow people within to look directly down on the heads of callers. Suitably enough, one of Schaffhausen's many nicknames is **Erkerstadt**, or the City of Oriel Windows.

North of the Zum Ochsen, a short detour past the frescoes of the Zum Grossen Käfig house at Vorstadt 43, showing the triumphal parade of the medieval Mongol king Tamerlane, brings you to the northern gate of the city, the **Schwabentor**. The tower itself dates from 1370, but on the outer face, just above the arch, is a small panel added during renovations in 1933, which shows a boy with a pig under his arm dodging the traffic. The dialect inscription *Lappi tue d'Augen uf* translates as "Silly people should keep their eyes open" – a reference to the increasingly heavy motorized traffic of the 1930s.

Munster & Museum

Schaffhausen's lofty **Münster zu Allerheiligen** (Cathedral of All Saints) is the focus of the Old Town. The first church on the site dated from 1049, very soon after the founding of the town itself, and was replaced in 1103 by the building which still stands today. The beautifully restored Romanesque church tower gives a hint as to the interior (Tues–Sun 10am–noon & 2–5pm), in which twelve huge columns of Rorschach sandstone line the austere, mostly unadorned, Romanesque nave. Beside the cathedral, the Romanesque-Gothic **cloister** is the largest in Switzerland, a lovely broad walkway circling the Junkernfriedhof, or noblemen's cemetery, many of whose inhabitants are commemorated on plaques set into the wall. In the cathedral courtyard sits the gigantic **Schiller Bell**, cast in 1486: its Latin inscription of *vivos-voco/mortuos-plango/fulgura-frango* ("I call on the living, lament the dead, halt the lightning") is supposed to have inspired German poet Friedrich Schiller to compose his *Song of the Clock* ... despite the fact that Schiller never set foot in Schaffhausen. Just beyond is the atmospheric little **herb garden**, precisely recreated according to medieval records.

In the same complex as the Münster is Schaffhausen's principal historical museum, the **Museum zu Allerheiligen** (May–Oct Tues–Fri 10am–noon & 2–5pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm; Nov–April Tues–Sun 10am–noon & 2–5pm; free; www.allerheiligen.ch). Unfortunately, although the collections are interesting, the desk can't help out with recent English notes and there's also been so much reorganization in recent years that the museum's own plan is out of date. The ground floor is mostly given over to the vast archeological collection but, as with the rambling historical collections spread over this and the upper floors, there's little coherence. The place is like a labyrinth, and you could either wander, enjoying the surprise of coming across a roomful of early medieval religious art, or a restored Gothic chapel, or a display on Schaffhausen's military history, or instead cut your losses and head for the topmost floor, which holds an engaging collection of **art** by Swiss painters and sculptors of the last five hundred years.

Baumgartenstrasse marks the southern boundary of the cathedral quarter. In an old textile factory metres from the river at no. 23 is the **Hallen für Neue Kunst** (Contemporary Art Spaces; May–Oct Sat 2–5pm, Sun 11am–5pm; Fr.14; www.modern-art.ch). Pricier than it need be, and with awkwardly limited opening hours, this impressive gallery is still well worth a visit, with work by artists, known and unknown, from the 1960s to the present spread over several vast floors. Particularly striking in such airy surroundings are the geometrical games in two and three dimensions of Robert Mangold, and Sol LeWitt's dazzling cube installations.

Vordergasse and Munot

Karstgässchen leads from opposite the Zum Ochsen house into **Platz**, its fountain sporting another grim-faced mercenary. From here, alleys bring you south onto the main **Vordergasse**, a shopping street sloping downhill to the east. On the corner of Münstergasse is Schaffhausen's most celebrated house, the **Zum Ritter**, its facade covered in a spectacularly intricate design acclaimed as the most significant Renaissance fresco to survive north of the Alps (although the original is now preserved in the town's Museum zu Allerheiligen and this is a 1930s copy). Originally dating from 1570, the fresco depicts, over three storeys, various elements of knightly virtues (*Ritter* means "knight"): the central panel shows Odysseus in the Land of the Lotus-Eaters, tempted by a voluptuous woman, while above is a Roman knight who sacrificed himself for the glory of his country. Below is a trusting girl, symbolizing virtue, protected by a king (the government) and a woman holding a mitre (the church). From the Zum Ritter, alleys head southwest to another of Schaffhausen's broad open squares, **Herrenacker**, surrounded by tall, dignified facades, with, on the west side, the town's massive **Kornhaus** (1679).

From the Zum Ritter house, Vordergasse continues east to the Gothic, five-naved **Kirche St Johann** (Mon–Sat: April–Sept 9am–6pm; Oct–March 10am–5pm), expanded six times since it was begun in the eleventh century. In a niche on the south side of the tower is a small statue of the Madonna and Child without any feet: they were removed during the Reformation when a wall was built to hide the image. A few steps east, in front of a fountain statue of William Tell, is the magnificent double-fronted Rococo mansion **Zur Wasserquelle und Zieglerburg**.

Some 50m north of the Zur Wasserquelle is a footbridge over the main Bachstrasse road, which brings you onto steps climbing the hill to the **Munot**. This is Schaffhausen's trademark circular fortress, built by forced labour in 1564 after the religious wars of the Reformation. The interior

(daily: May–Sept 8am–8pm; Oct–April 9am–5pm) is dark and gloomy, with massive stone vaulting strong enough to support the 40,000-tonne superstructure. An internal spiral ramp – one of only three such designs in Europe (see also [here](#)) – brings you out onto the circular roof of the bastion, with good views over the town. A different door exits onto stairs running through the vines planted on the Munot hill, down to the small riverside quarter known as **Unterstadt**; Schaffhausen’s annual Old Town shindig, held on a weekend in late June, still passes on alternate years between the salt-of-the-earth folk of the Unterstadt and their toffee-nosed neighbours of the town centre further west.

The Rhin Falls

Schaffhausen’s best excursion is the short trip westwards to the **Rhine falls**, Europe’s largest waterfall. They are truly magnificent, not so much for their height (a mere 23m) as for their impressive breadth (150m) and the sheer drama of the place, with the spray rising in a cloud of rainbows above the forested banks. The turreted castle Schloss Laufen on a cliff directly above the falls to the south completes the spectacle. August 1 – the Swiss National Day – is particularly impressive, with a huge fireworks display mounted on the riverside.

Getting to the falls is simplicity itself: the 3km riverside **walk** from Schaffhausen to the suburban town of Neuhausen, where the falls are located, takes about 45 minutes; or you could take city **bus** #1 or #6 to Neuhausen Zentrum, from where the well-signposted falls are five minutes’ walk away. Schloss Laufen even has a **train** station (April–Oct only), served by hourly trains on the line between Schaffhausen and Winterthur. (Neuhausen’s own station is awkwardly far from the falls.)

Once you’re within sight of the falls, though, you’re inevitably brought down to earth with a bump by the hordes of tourists crowding both banks in search of the best camera angle, and by the circus of souvenir stalls and dismal restaurants all around. The worst of it is on the north bank; crossing by the arched footbridge over to the south bank – which can still get unpleasantly overrun – at least means you can experience the power of the falls at close quarters. Damp steps (Fr.1) lead from the souvenir shop at Schloss Laufen down to various platforms at the very edge, from where the roaring waters tumble inches from your nose.

The best way to see the falls is from one of the daredevil **boats** which scurry around in the spray; Rhyfall-Mändli (052/672 48 11) is the best-known operator, running a host of very popular trips continuously throughout the day (June–Aug 10am–6pm; May & Sept 11am–5pm; Fr.5–6.50). Boats depart from easy-to-spot jetties on both banks.



Restaurants

Schaffhausen has a good range of places to **eat**, from the self-service *Manora* diner just off Fronwagplatz upwards. The best budget dining is to be done at the cosy *Fass-Beiz*, Webergasse 13 (closed Sun), a co-operative-run café-bar which offers plenty of wholesome, home-cooked veggie dishes for under Fr.15. Unterstadt is lined with cheerful, inexpensive places in which to join the locals for some hearty nosh: typical among them is *Zum Schäfli* at no. 21, with *menus* of standard Swiss fare from Fr.14. *Zur Flamme*, above a WWF shop at Vorstadt 9 (052/624 09 05; closed Mon eve and Sun) is an informal veggie restaurant, offering excellent food for well under Fr.20 – or go for the five-course evening *menu* for Fr.45. Pizza and pasta dishes are available for Fr.20 or so at the bright, funky *Sternen*, Webergasse 38, while *Falken*, Vorstadt 5, has quality Swiss food for roughly the same price. Moving up the scale is *Zum Frieden*, Herrenacker 11 (052/625 47 15), an atmospheric tavern-style place with a good-value *Stübli* at ground-floor level and a pricier formal restaurant upstairs serving Frenchified mains for around Fr.40. Top of the heap is the spectacular *Fischerzunft*, Rheinquai 8 (see "Accommodation"), rated in the top half-dozen restaurants in the country and offering a unique cuisine blending French and East Asian elements: don't expect change from Fr.100 per head.

There's any number of places at which to **drink**: café-bars line all the Old Town squares, with those on Fronwagplatz particularly well placed for people-watching. *Fass-Beiz* (see above) is a quiet little nook to savour a beer or three, while there's a lively café-bar (closed Mon & Tues) attached to the *Kammgarn* cultural centre at Baumgartenstrasse 19. *Zum Weissen Rössli*, Repfergasse 28, is the loudest, smokiest bar in town.

Arrival

Schaffhausen's **train station** is at the northwestern edge of the compact Old Town, served by both Swiss SBB and German DB trains (the latter running along the northern bank of the Rhine and terminating at Basel Bad. station). Counters inside deal with money changing (Mon–Sat 7am–7pm, Sun 9am–7pm) and bike rental (Mon–Fri 6am–8pm, Sat & Sun 8am–8pm). Opposite is the main **post office** (CH-8201 Schaffhausen 1). One block east from the station is bustling Fronwagplatz, where you'll find, under the big clock tower, the main **tourist office** (July–Sept Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat 10am–4pm, Sun 10am–1pm; Oct–June Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat 10am–noon; 052/625 51 41, www.sh.ch), with plenty of information and excellent guided **walking tours** of the Old Town (May–Oct Tues, Wed, Fri & Sat 2.15pm; Fr.10), which include a tasting of five wines in a vintner's after the walk.

The best way to arrive at Schaffhausen is **by boat** from further up the Rhine. At least three boats a day (May–Sept) make the beautiful journey along the river from Kreuzlingen via Stein-am-Rhein, a peaceful ride between wooded banks on just about the only stretch of the Rhine to be free of heavy industry. Boats dock in Schaffhausen at Freier Platz, just beside the main road bridge at the southeastern corner of the Old Town.