

# Bern buskers – Switzerland's biggest busker festival

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**By Bill Harby**

The streets of Bern's Old Town will be crazy alive in two weeks with [150 musicians, clowns, puppeteers, actors, dancers and other performers](#) from 25 countries. Plus lots of tasty international food.

Bern buskers festival 2016 – credit: Philipp Zinniker

The 14th annual Buskers Bern Street Music



Festival begins Thursday night and continues Friday and Saturday (18h – 24h) at over 20 venues. The dates are 10 – 12 August 2017.

The first night shows how the festival turns the Old Town into a colorful circus of wild and wonderful music and performance.

Bern buskers festival 2016 – credit: Philipp



## Zinniker

Last year in an urban sea of oddball acts, some of the oddest were at “The Bazaar” stage by Münster Cathedral. Here, the line between actors and audience was delightfully blurred as performers reached into the crowd. And sometimes the crowd reached back, like the woman who plopped herself down in a chair

onstage and explained she was there “because I’m drunk.”

While the entire spectacle is a delight for the child in all of us, there’s a [special area for children](#), also by the Cathedral. Besides face-painting and puppets, there’s a flea market run by kids selling goodies kids will love.



Bern buskers festival 2016 – credit: Philipp Zinniker

Nearby on Postgasse next to the Lischetti fountain are two youth stages where young musicians, dancers, actors and performance artists do their thing.

Bern buskers festival 2016 – credit: Philipp



## Zinniker

Hungry and thirsty festival goers will find dozens of stands selling international street food, and most of the Old Town restaurants are open for those who prefer some calmer off-street seating. The festival even has its own [specially brewed beer](#).

This, the largest street buskers festival in Switzerland is the brainchild of two sisters, Christine and Lisette Wyss, who still run the festival 14 years later. “The combination of us two was ideal”, says Christine, a former school teacher, now the festival’s director. Initially the sisters’ interest in street festivals was due to Lisette’s background as an international street musician (she toured Europe with an all-female saxophone quartet). Then Christine went to the Swiss international exposition in 2002, and decided to study festival management. She now holds a master’s degree in Cultural Management.

“Bern was dead in 2003, no big summer feast or festival in the city”, says Christine. “The cultural department of the city was happy to have our offer and supported it quickly”.

The first small festival was a success. “We hit the nerve/spirit of the times,” says Christine,

who now works on the festival part-time year-round. She also points out that Bern's Old Town – a UNESCO World Heritage cultural site – is ideal for such a street festival thanks to its covered arcades and intimate cobblestone streets.

The festival has steadily grown each year since. Attendance in 2015 was about 70,000.





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The performers are not paid by the festival, though they receive free room and meals while in Bern, plus some funds for transportation. But any fees come from the generosity of their audiences when the hat is passed around. They must do OK because last year the festival

organizers had to turn away 750 acts that wanted to perform here.

Only five acts from previous years were invited back. “We absolutely want new performers each year to keep it fresh”, says Christine.

The festival is partly supported by the Bern city government with CHF 100,000, but the total budget comes to about CHF 800,000. More funds come from the food and drink stalls. “But we absolutely depend on the selling of bracelets” to festival goers, says Christine.

(Green: CHF 10; Red for children: CHF 5; Black for patrons: CHF 20. The black includes entry to after-hours parties at the Buskerhouse.)

Buying a bracelet isn't required, but strongly encouraged to help cover costs.

The festivities continue on Friday and Saturday nights. It's an ideal year to experience

Switzerland's biggest and best street music festival.

**More on this:**

[The festival's website](#) (in English)