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- 2 ETH – Swiss Federal Institute of Technology**  
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Wildlife park at the city walls
- \* When the Polybahn is not in operation, go by foot along Hirschengraben and Schienhutgasse to ETH.



# Zurich on foot

## A walk through the University District



## 1 Polybahn

There are four «mountain railways» in the City of Zurich. With the exception of the Uetliberg railway, the oldest is the «funicular railway to the Polytechnic Institute» which began operation in 1889. It was originally powered with water ballast and was converted to electricity in 1897. The 176 metre long track travels a vertical distance of 41 metres in just over two minutes and mostly transports members of the university communities from the Old Town to the «platform».

Hours: Mon–Fri 6.45 a.m.–7.15 p.m., Sat 7.30 a.m.–2 p.m.

## 2 ETH – Swiss Federal Institute of Technology

ETH Zurich, founded in 1855 as the Polytechnic Institute, is one of the most international universities of Switzerland. Of the 18,000 students in 2013, 37 per cent come from more than 110 countries. Foreign countries with the largest contingents of students are Germany (2251), Austria (406), Italy (365), China (331), Greece (244), France (210), India (180) and USA (155). 21 Nobel Prize winners are connected with ETH Zurich, among them Albert Einstein who used to study and teach here. The ETH Main Building was designed by the renowned German architect Gottfried Semper (1803-1879) and was opened in 1864. Its south wing was home to the university until 1914, and between 1915 and 1924 there was a renovation and expansion project, which added the rotunda which is crowned by a cupola.

## 3 University of Zurich

Established in 1833, the University of Zurich began admitting female students in 1867 – as the first German-speaking university to welcome women. Female students remained a minority for over 130 years, but the ratio tipped in their favor in 2000 and, in 2013, 57 percent of all students were women. By contrast, the teaching staff is still primarily male, with only a 32 percent female representation. The university's main building (built 1911–1914) was designed by architect



Chaise lounge by Pipilotti Rist in the university's atrium courtyard. Photo: Frank Brüderli, 2008.

Karl Moser (1860-1936), and the large atrium with its café is worth a visit. There you can find an oversized chaise lounge, a work by Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist. It is a monument to the first female Swiss lawyer and university professor, Emilie Kempin-Spyri (1853-1901).

Hours: Mon–Fri 7 a.m.–10 p.m. (during the semester break until 6 p.m.), Sat 7 a.m.–13:30 p.m.

## 4 Harald Naegeli

In 1977, stick figures suddenly started appearing on the walls of Zurich's buildings, even though the owners never asked for them. Up until 1979, the artist Harald Naegeli (b. 1939) sprayed his filigreed figures on more than 400 walls of private and public buildings. His wall murals triggered a veritable scandal at the intersection of art and law. In the course of years, almost all of his murals have again disappeared. One of his typical works has been preserved on the back of the Deutsches Seminar (Schönberggasse 9); it shows an extended, seemingly floating female figure which represents the water nymph «Undine». In 1995, the Cantonal Building Department classified it as worthy of preservation and thus saved a piece of Zurich's cultural history for future generations.



«Undine» wall mural by Harald Naegeli. Photo: Mark Wüst, 2009.

## 5 Bibliothek der Rechtswissenschaften (Law Library)

A massive building with two impressive entryways was erected in 1909 for the new Cantonal School and for the university's Chemical Institute. Stylistically, the building marks the transition from the artistic school known as Historicism to Art Nouveau. Inside it there is an architectural jewel, the university's Law Library, which was built from 2000 to 2004 by the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava (b. 1951). It is striking due to its formal elegance. A six-storey gallery in an elliptical shape surrounds an atrium, which is covered with a glass dome.

Hours: Mon–Fri, 8 a.m.–9 p.m.; Sat 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

## 6 focusTerra

Since 2009, the ETH Hall of Science, erected in 1916 by Gustav Gull and recently renovated, has been home to a permanent exhibition of topics related to earth sciences. Through easy to understand models, up to date experiments and spectacular exhibits, it illustrates how earthquakes come to be, how volcanoes erupt, how raw materials form and how the Alps were created. The displays are distributed over three storeys and a modern exhibition space. The presentations are periodically enhanced with events and rotating exhibits addressing current topics.

Hours: Mon–Fri, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sat 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

## 7 ETH Sternwarte (Astronomical Observatory)

Gottfried Semper, the architect of the ETH Main Building, built the Swiss Federal Astronomical Observatory from 1861 to 1864. Today it is almost impossible to imagine that this building was originally located in an open field, surrounded by vineyards and pasture land. Step by step, the observatory was encircled by buildings belonging to the University Hospital and ETH. Increasing levels of man-made light plus air pollution made it increasingly difficult to perform astronomical observations, so operation ceased in 1980. Since 1997, the building has been home to the «Collegium Helveticum» of ETH Zurich. As an interdisciplinary forum, it encourages dialogue between science, technology and the humanities.



ETH Observatory, from the southwest, around 1890. Source: Archive of Building History, City of Zurich.

## 8 The hill of villas

In the second half of the 19th century, Zürichberg (Mt. Zurich) became the preferred address for wealthy citizens. Villas and large multi-family homes continued to creep up the slopes. From an architectural point of view, they were leaning towards Historicism until around 1910. An impressive example is the double villa «Zum Rosegg» on Moussonstrasse, which was built in 1902 by Gustav Gull (1858–1942). The massive structure built of quarry stone with its corner tower, stepped gables and a variety of window shapes imitates a castle from the Middle Ages. In the same style, but incomparably more monumental, is the Swiss National Museum which Gull built just several years earlier.

## 9 Rosa Luxemburg

The commemorative plaque on the villa at Plattenstrasse 47, an example of neo-classical architecture, is a remembrance of a famous woman who lived in this home. The Marxist Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) sublet here from a seamstress for a short time. Starting in 1889, she studied macroeconomics and law at the University of Zurich and received her doctoral degree in 1897. At the time, this institution was a favourite place for Russian citizens to study, especially women. She left Switzerland in 1897, became a leading theoretician of German social democracy and was a co-founder of the German Communist Party. She was assassinated together with Karl Liebknecht in 1919 in Berlin.



Rosa Luxemburg speaking at an SPD party congress in 1906. Source: Photo Archive of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation.

## 10 Johanna Spyri

Besides Harry Potter, Heidi is likely the best-known children's fictional character in the world. The story of this young girl from the Swiss mountains has until now been translated into around 35 languages and has been turned into several films. Both Heidi novels (1880/81) were written by the Zurich resident Johanna Spyri (1827–1901). The successful author of children's books lost her husband and son in 1884 and then moved into one of the stately Escher homes (Zeltweg 9). Here she led a secluded life and worked intensively on her books until her death. Today, the Swiss Institute for Children and Youth Media of the Johanna Spyri Foundation is located at Zeltweg 11. It is dedicated to the research and documentation in the area of children's and youth literature and has a library which is open to the public.

Hours: Mon–Fri 9 a.m.–5 p.m.



«Heidi» illustration by Rudolf Mürger (1862–1929). Source: www.wikipedia.org.

## 11 Schauspielhaus (Theatre)

Theatre pieces have been performed at this spot since 1884, initially in a wooden building which was part of the inn «Zum Pfauen». Today's ornate living and commercial complex with an integrated theatre was built in 1889, and since then it has been expanded and modernised many times. Between 1933 and 1945, countless emigrants from Nazi Germany came to what become known as the «peacock stage» and turned the theatre into a melting pot of anti-fascism. In this period, the Schauspielhaus transitioned from a stage oriented to entertainment to a theatre of the spoken word with an international reputation. Ambitious classics and pieces critical of the time were on the programme. In 1938, the private theatre was converted into a public limited company with the city taking a stake in it. Since 2000, the Schauspielhaus has had a second stage in a former factory building in the «Schiffbau» near Escher-Wyss-Platz (Escher Wyss Square).

## 12 Kunsthau (Museum of Fine Arts)

The Kunsthau Zurich is home to one of the largest art collections in Switzerland with works from the Middle Ages to the present. The museum has been expanded multiple times since the erection of the first building in 1910, and today it's bursting at the seams. Only 10 per cent of the collection can be exhibited at any time. Thus, an addition is planned for the eastern side of Heimplatz. The project is to be built according to plans developed by the winner of a competition in 2008, the British architect David Chipperfield (b. 1953). The new wing is intended to exhibit art from the 1960s onward.

## 13 Rechberg Palace

The area directly in front of the former Neumarkttor (New Market Gate) was settled centuries ago. Countless residences and commercial buildings from that time have been preserved through today. Especially impressive is the Rechberg Palace, erected from 1760 to 1769, with its graceful facade. Behind the building, a geometrically arranged baroque garden extends up the hillside. During the warm months, this terraced complex is a favourite place for students at the nearby universities to relax.

## 14 Hirschengraben (deer trench)

Today, the Hirschengraben separates the Old Town from the University District. Previously it was part of the Middle Age city fortifications, which consisted of walls and trenches. Its name is a reference to deer which were kept in the trench starting in the 16th century. With a guardian to care for them, they were considered an attraction for visitors from near and far. In 1774, the deer were given a new home elsewhere, the trench was filled in and the resulting area was turned over to rope makers as a place to ply their trade (Seilergraben). Later, it was turned into a street. In the rear-facing section of the building at Seilergraben 55 it is still possible to see remains of the city wall.



Hirschengraben from the north, pen and ink drawing, around 1755. Source: Archive of Building History, City of Zurich.

## A walk through the University District

Actually, I should know the University District inside out because I moved to Zurich in 1976 to study at ETH. But even in a neighbourhood where you feel right at home, there's plenty to discover or to get a new view of things with the distance of time. Just stand in front of the filigreed figure by Harald Naegeli and it's hard to believe that just 30 years ago this artwork provoked anger and indignation.

## Zurich on foot – always a new discovery

Zurich has countless tales to tell, and «Zurich on foot» brings a few of them to life. In the process, you'll see that our pedestrian infrastructure is already quite good, but we want to make it even better. Walkways should be designed to be direct, safe and attractive and be usable wherever possible with walking aids or baby carriages.

A third of all trips within the city are made on foot, and that provides proof as to which is Zurich's most important «means of transportation»: our feet!

I wish you much enjoyment while out and about.

*Leutnegger*

City Councillor Filippo Leutnegger  
Head of the Civil Engineering and Waste Management Department

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approx. 2 hours

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## Zurich on foot:

- 1 The Inner City ↻
- 2 Wollishofen
- 3 Along the River Sihl ↻ ↓
- 4 Wiedikon ↓
- 5 Aussersihl und Hard ↓
- 6 Limmat and Zurich West ↻
- 7 University District
- 8 Witikon
- 9 Seefeld
- 10 Altstetten
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- 13 Affoltern
- 14 Oerlikon ↻
- 15 Schwamendingen
- 16 Seebach ↓
- 20 2000 Watt Society ↻
- 21 All about football ↻
- 22 With children ↻
- 23 All around water ↓

↻ audio play available

↓ unobstructed path

«Zurich on foot» maps are directly available in the Pavilion at Werdmühleplatz or can be ordered at the City of Zürich Civil Engineering Department: 044 412 50 99, [www.stadt-zuerich.ch/stadtverkehr2025](http://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/stadtverkehr2025)

 Stadt Zürich

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