KANTON AARGAU

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Canton Aargau

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Brief Portrait

Canton Aargau is one of 26 cantons (member states) in Switzerland. Aargau is the canton with the fourth largest population. It is known for its regional variety.

Numbers and Facts

Canton Aargau has over 700'000 inhabitants, a quarter of which are citizens of other countries. The canton covers 1404 km², 11 districts (Bezirke), and nearly 200 communities (Gemeinden). The capital is Aarau. The official language is German. The canton includes many decentralised regions with their own central towns. The most important towns are Aarau, Baden, Brugg, Wohlen, Bremgarten, Zofingen and Rheinfelden. The regions differ in landscape, culture, and economy.

History

Canton Aargau was founded in the year 1803. The areas that the French Emperor Napoléon Bonaparte combined to form Aargau had great political, confessional, and economic differences. This is still true to some extent today. Until approximately 1900 agriculture was very important. Industrialisation brought many changes. Canton Aargau still has rural elements, but it also has an industry comprised of international corporations and many small and medium-sized companies. Since the Second World War many immigrants have moved to the canton. They have contributed significantly to the economy and still do so today.

Customs and Traditions

The many regions and communities in the canton have different customs and traditions. Due to historical diversity, there is not one "shared" tradition for the entire canton. The bigger towns Aarau, Baden, Brugg, Lenzburg, and Zofingen host youth festivals, the highlight of the cultural calendar, at the beginning of the summer. The celebrations have hardly changed for centuries. The Fasnacht (carnival) that takes place in the winter is important in some regions. Many villages and rural areas have customs surrounding fertility in spring and harvest in autumn. In addition various Christian holidays are celebrated.

Aargau - "Rüebliland"

Aargau is known as "Rüebliland" (carrot country). How the canton got the nickname is unknown. It is not related to growing or eating carrots. The typical Aargauer carrot cake (Rüeblitorte) is known throughout Switzerland. Once a year Aarau hosts a big carrot market (Rüeblimarkt).

Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-aargau.ch/en/canton-aargau/brief-portrait

Political System

The political power in Switzerland is divided into three levels: the confederation, the cantons (states), and the communities. The Swiss vote on political matters.

The Swiss Confederation

The Swiss Confederation was founded in 1848. The capital is Bern. Switzerland does not form an ethnic, linguistic or religious entity. Because it is comprised of different cultures that came together of their own free will the term "Nation by Choice" (Willensnation) is used. Switzerland takes up a neutral position in international politics.

Federalism

In Switzerland the cantons and communities have a great deal of independence. This is called federalism. The 26 cantons and over 2000 communities have fully developed state structures. Canton Aargau has its own constitution and government, a parlament, and courts. The cantons and communities are responsible for many public duties. This is why the school systems are built differently in the different cantons. Federal laws apply throughout the country. Cantons have their own laws which apply only within the canton. Even communities can enact own rules. In order to fulfill their duties the cantons and communities as well as the confederation raise taxes.

Separation of Powers

To prevent a concentration of power Switzerland has three independent powers: the legislative power, the executive power and the judiciary power. In Canton Aargau the following authorities exercise these powers:

- Legislative power: Grand Council (Grosser Rat) (140 members, elected by the public every four years)
- Executive power: Cantonal Government (Regierungsrat) (5 members, elected by the public every four years)
- Judiciary power: Various courts on the levels of the districts and the canton

The communities also have a legislative power (community assembly or parliament) (Gemeindeversammlung, Parlament) and an executive power (city council or community council) (Stadtrat, Gemeinderat). The national government (7 members) is called the Federal Council (Bundesrat). On the national level there are various courts. The Federal Tribunal is the highest instance where, for example, cantonal rulings can be appealed against.

Democratic rights

The Swiss have the right to vote and to stand as candidates. They elect the political bodies on a community, cantonal and federal level and can run as candidates. In addition popular votes are held on political matters on a community, cantonal and federal level (direct democracy). Popular initiatives enable citizens to bring issues that are important to them to vote. Foreigners who live in Canton Aargau do not have the right to vote or to run as candidates. They may however address the authorities by filing a petition.

Fundamental Rights

The fundamental legal principles are documented in the Federal Constitution (Bundesverfassung). The fundamental rights which are based on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) form an important part of the Federal Constitution. They protect human existence (e.g. right to life, right to assistance when in need) and protect individuals from state violence or protect groups from majorities. They guarantee that nobody be discriminated against based on origin, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation. Victims of racial discrimination receive free support and advice in Canton Aargau. Freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press prevail in Switzerland.

Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-aargau.ch/en/canton-aargau/political-system

Religion

Switzerland has a Christian tradition. Today many members of other religious groups call Switzerland home. Freedom of religion is guaranteed and public schools are religiously neutral.

Religion and State

Switzerland has been traditionally influenced by the Christian religion. The cantons are responsible for defining the relationship between religion and state. Most German-speaking cantons, including Canton Aargau, recognise Christian religious organizations as public institutions (regional churches, Landeskirchen). In effect, the state grants the regional churches certain rights, such as collecting taxes from their members. In Canton Aargau the regional churches are Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Christian Catholic.

Religions Groups in the Canton Aargau

In addition to the publicly recognized religious institutions (regional churches) there are many other religious communities in Canton Aargau. The majority of Aargau's residents belong to a Christian religious group. In the past years the number of Muslims has risen. Nearly a fifth of the inhabitants do not affiliate themselves with any religion.

Freedom of Religion

The Swiss constitution guarantees religious freedom. Everybody has a right to their religious beliefs as well as a right to express and pass on these beliefs. Nobody can be forced to join a religious group or participate in religious acts. Persons may gather to practice religious rituals and celebrations. Nobody may be discriminated against based on their religion or their beliefs.

Religion and School

Compulsory schooling is religiously neutral. This does not mean that religious issues cannot be a part of education. There are two kinds of religious education: the denominational religious education offered by the regional churches and the religious education offered by the school which is called "Ethics and Religion". This subject discusses religious and ethical matters that are relevant to all people. It is compuslory on the primary and first upper level. Participation in the denominational religious education offered by the regional churches is optional. Some other religious communities offer religious education for children outside of school.

Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.hallo-aargau.ch/en/canton-aargau/religion

Leisure

Canton Aargau offers many attractive leisure activities. Clubs are particularly important. They offer the opportunity to meet people.

Clubs

Many residents in Canton Aargau are members of a club (Verein). There are clubs for a wide range of interests. Even small communities have athletic, cultural, and other clubs which are an excellent way of meeting people. Most clubs are open for everyone. Information regarding clubs can be found on the community websites.

Offers for Young People

For young people in Canton Aargau there are many recreational offers that give them a chance to meet their peers. Many communities have meeting points and various recreational activities. The young people are supervised, can contribute ideas, and realize projects (Jugendarbeit). Most offers are free. Youth clubs are an opportunity to take part in outdoor activities with peers. The offers are provided by clubs, communities, or regional churches and are open for all young people. The community of residence will provide further information.

Excursions and Culture

Canton Aargau offers many excursions and a rich cultural life. It is famous for its historic old towns, castles, rivers, lakes, and thermal baths. In addition, there are beautiful hiking and biking trails. Numerous museums hold exhibits on a wide variety of subjects. The Aargauer Kunsthaus and the Stapferhaus in Lenzburg are known throughout the country. Aargau Tourism (Aargau Tourismus) has information on excursions and events. Information on cultural events may also be found in local newpapers.

Volunteer Work

Volunteer work (Freiwilligenarbeit) is an unpaid contribution to society and the environment. In Switzerland many tasks are traditionally performed by volunteers. A large part of the work is done by clubs. Those wishing to get involved can join a club that is involved with culture, sports, social causes, education, animal and wildlife protection, health, or other causes. Information regarding volunteer work and volunteer opportunities is provided by the office for volunteer work Benevol, Caritas Aargau, or the Swiss Red Cross Aargau (SRK).

Sports / Culture / Education

Persons with limited financial means are offered discounts for athletic, cultural or educational events when using the Kulturlegi pass. Applications for the pass are made through Caritas. Caritas will provide additional information and verify whether the requirements are met.

Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

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