

Amateur radio (ham radio)



Amateur (or ham) radio has considerable advantages vis-a-vis CB (citizen band) radio. Through a worldwide network of relay stations, the field of application is almost unlimited. In addition – thorough ‚EchoLink‘ – it is possible to chat over the internet; that means your partner does not necessarily have a dedicated radio equipment. A simple PC with internet connection is sufficient. The power of ham radio is also much higher than that of CB radio. Output is in the range of 50 to 100W for mobile stations (5 to 10W for handhelds) against 1 to 4W for CB equipment (without booster). This increases the operating range considerably. Further possibilities exist to protect your privacy (selective calls). Alongshore it is also possible to receive weather forecasts.

However, there is one drop of bitterness. You have to have an official license to be eligible to use ham radio. Otherwise your equipment might be confiscated. That requires passing a respective exam on basic electric and electronic knowledge and the correct international ‘language’ when establishing a QSO (direct radio connection). For Switzerland you can approach Bakom (<http://www.bakom.ch>). A beginners license (HB3 for Switzerland) should be enough to squawk with the world and is accepted among all CEPT countries. With a more challenging HB9 license you are even allowed to build your own transmitters up to 1kW and you will be definitely part of the ham radio guild. There are a number of private institutions and clubs that offer respective seminars (eg <http://www.ilt.ch>). Duration of the course is around six months. Costs vary widely (I paid 700 CHF for the HB3 license including all reference material).

Regarding manufacturer. There are a variety of famous trade marks on the market (Yeasu, Kenwood, Icom etc). Which one you choose depends finally on your taste (and budget). I opted for a Yeasu mobile station (FT-8800E) and 2 compatible hand holds (FT-60E). At least in Switzerland, the devices are only available at specialist shops; eg <http://www.gugolzfunk.ch>. With this, I am able to build a small radio network in case of emergency. The devices have dual-band capabilities (70cm and 2m band) so that I can use most of the relay stations. Through a splitter, the ham radio antenna can be shared with normal radio.