

GERMANY

A Comprehensive Exploration - East, West, North & South

20 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Frankfurt

Arrive in Frankfurt, Germany.

Straddled across the River Main not long before it converges with the Rhine, Frankfurt is the capital city Germany has never actually had, having been cheated on more than one occasion of the role to which its history and central geographical position would seem to entitle it. Yet that hasn't stopped it becoming the economic powerhouse of the country, a cut-throat financial centre which is home to 388 banks, including the all-mighty Bundesbank. It is a modern international city, a communications and transport centre for the whole of Germany, with a frenetic commercial and social life that sets it apart from its relatively sleepy hinterland.

Overnight in Frankfurt.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Frankfurt: Walking Tour

Frankfurt am Main is a city of fascinating contrasts. It has an amazingly long and rich history, and a walking tour is the very best way to discover the uniqueness of Frankfurt. Our pace is leisurely, and you can expect to be on your feet for 3-4 hours on paved / cobbled surfaces.

Our guided tour includes the Roemer and the Roemerplatz, City Hall since 1405 and old town square. The Book Burning Memorial, site of the Nazi book burning, and Alte Nikolai Church, a Gothic church built in 1290. We include House Wertheim, the inner city's only original half-timbered house left at the end of WWII, and you'll learn how it was saved and why. We cross Eisener Steg, a pedestrian bridge on the Main River, covered with Love Locks, and offering a great view of the skyline and the many museums lining the riverbanks.

We see St Bartholomew, better known as the Kaiserdom, a Imperial Church which was the site for elections and coronations of the Holy Roman Emperor for centuries. We also enjoy Joerg Ratgeb's wall paintings in the Karmeliter Kloster (Carmelite Cloister), the largest religious wall paintings north of the Alps, painted in the early 1500's.

We proceed to the "Stumble Stones" (Stolper Steine), a unique way of commemorating the many victims who lost their lives under the Nazi regime, and the Jewish Holocaust Memorial Wall, a very personal memorial that the city of Frankfurt has created, to honour the memory of the 12,000 Jewish citizens who lost their lives during the Holocaust, including Anne, Margot and Edith Frank. We see the Jewish Ghetto Wall, once part of the city's defensive walls built in 1180, it later became one of the walls that surrounded the Jewish Ghetto.

We also enjoy the Klein Markt Halle (little market hall). A visitor's tour favourite, this is a wonderful produce hall filled with fruits, vegetables, chocolates, pastries, cheeses, breads, meats, fish, and delicacies from around the world.

Finally is Goethe House, where Frankfurt's favourite son was born.

Overnight in Frankfurt.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Frankfurt - Rhine Cruise to Koblenz - Koln (Cologne)

We leave Frankfurt to drive to Mainz. Seat of the government of Rheinland-Pfalz, 2,000 year old Mainz is endowed with most of the good things to be expected of a lively provincial capital: a cathedral, an archbishop's palace, an ancient university, museums, an attractive Altstadt.

The great red sandstone cathedral, with its six towers, looms over the largely pedestrianized city centre. Essentially Romanesque, though with many later additions, it has a spacious interior containing the splendid tombs of its powerful prince-bishops. A short walk from the cathedral, the banks of the Rhine hold a medley of public buildings ancient and modern, including the exuberant Renaissance-baroque Schloss housing the Romisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum. We start our stroll "inland", through the Altstadt with its half-timbered houses

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and wine taverns, at the Marktbrunnen, the delightful Renaissance fountain. Perhaps the outstanding work of modern art in Mainz is to be found in the Stefanskirche; the church's stained glass, glowing with visionary intensity, is the work of the great Russian Jewish artist Marc Chagall.

Beyond Mainz, the Rhine bends westwards and continues. Suddenly, there's a dramatic change - the river widens and swings back to a northerly course, threatening the low banks on either side, while long wooded islands block the view ahead. This marks the entry to the spectacular gorge, which, though it is only a small part of the river's total length of 1320 km (820 miles), is the Rhine of popular imagination.

We take a Rhine cruise to Koblenz.* It is appropriate that the name of Koblenz derives from the Latin word for confluence, as it was the Romans who first recognised the favourable properties of the site at the point where the Mosel flows into the Rhine, establishing a settlement there in AD 14. Nowadays, the town has become one of Germany's major tourist centres, profiting from its ready access to the two great river valleys and the hill ranges beyond. The connection with tourism actually has deep roots, as it was in Koblenz in 1823 that Karl Baedeker began publishing his famous series of guidebooks which aimed at saving travellers from having to depend on unreliable and extortionate local tour guides for information.

We travel from Koblenz to Koln. With the twin spires of its glorious cathedral visible far away across the surrounding plain, this is one of Germany's great metropolitan cities, a centre of culture and learning as well as industry and commerce.

* PLEASE note that, due to low late-summer river levels in recent years, our cruise may not be possible or not worthwhile if it needs to be greatly shortened. If this is the case closer to departure, we'll travel/sightsee by land en route to Koblenz.

Overnight in Koln.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Koln: City Tour

Today we will visit the famous cathedral of Koln The Dom cathedral is one of the world's great Gothic structures. Begun in the 13th century, it was completed only in the 19th, still in faithful accord with the intentions of its medieval architects, whose original drawings had miraculously survived. Externally its sheer mass is relieved by the lacelike delicacy of its masonry, while the vast interior contains such incomparable works of art as the majestic golden shrine of the Magi, the 9th century Gero Crucifix, the glorious 15th century Cologne School altarpiece painted by Stefan Lochner, and superb stained glass.

You'll have some free time this afternoon to enjoy Koln.

Overnight in Koln.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Koln - Hamburg

Today we travel by road to Hamburg with stops along the way.

With several waterways running through its center, Hamburg has maritime charm -- with more bridges than Amsterdam and Venice combined. The city of Hamburg has a well-deserved reputation as Germany's 'Gateway to the World'. It is the country's biggest port and the second-busiest in Europe, despite being located astride the River Elbe, some 100 kilometers from the North Sea. Hamburg is proud of its status as a "Free and Hanseatic City" and is an independent state, one of the Germany's 16 federal states or Bundeslander.

As Hamburg is one of the world's largest harbours, a tour here would not be complete without a harbour and canal boat tour, hopefully this afternoon or as part of our sightseeing tomorrow. From 1241 on, Hamburg was member of the Hanseatic League, a medieval trade monopoly across Northern Europe. In the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, millions left Europe on their way to the new world through the Hamburg harbour.

Overnight in Hamburg.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Hamburg: City Tour

Today we will enjoy a sightseeing tour of Hamburg, including City Hall and the Baroque church of St. Michaelis (called the Michel), a signature landmark of Hamburg. Built between 1648-1661, this is the most famous church in the North of Germany with its white and golden interior that seats 3,000 people. We will climb the spiraled top to enjoy sweeping views of the Hamburg cityscape and harbour. Hamburg was the departure point for millions of European emigrants. Our visit to the new BallinStadt Immigration Museum allows us a chance to understand the role Hamburg played in the lives of those whose destination was the New World.

We will also visit the old warehouse district (Speicherstadt) and the harbour promenade (Landungsbrücken). The warehouse district is the largest warehouse complex in the world. Narrow cobblestone streets and small waterways are lined by 100-year old warehouses, which store cocoa, silk, and oriental carpets.

Overnight in Hamburg.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Hamburg - Berlin

Today our journey continues by road to Berlin.

Berlin is both the capital and biggest city in Germany. After being separated into East and West during the Cold War, Berlin was reunited in 1990. Today this city has quickly emerged as the most cosmopolitan and exciting city in Germany for art and architecture.

Berlin is like no other city in Germany, or, indeed, the world. For over a century its political climate has either mirrored or determined what has happened in the rest of Europe. Heart of the Prussian kingdom, economic and cultural centre of the Weimar Republic, and, in the final days of Nazi Germany, the headquarters of Hitler's Third Reich, Berlin has always been a weather vane of European history. After the war, the world's two most powerful military systems stood face to face here, sharing the spoils of a city for years split by that most tangible object of the East-West divide, the Berlin Wall. As the Wall fell in November 1989, Berlin was once again pushed to the forefront of world events. This weight of history, the sense of living in a hothouse where all the dilemmas of contemporary Europe were nurtured, gives Berlin its excitement and troubling fascination.

Overnight in Berlin.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Berlin: City Touring

Today we have a bus tour of the highlights of Berlin. After the erection of the Berlin Wall, the Brandenburg Gate -- stranded in No Man's Land -- symbolised the division of Germany. Modelled on the Propylaea (entrance gate) to the Acropolis in Athens, it was built in 1788-91 as a triumphal arch for Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia by Langhans the Elder. Six tall Doric columns, front and back, form five passages. Under the Prussian empire, the gate made a spectacular theatre for military parades. Draped in swastikas, it also became a symbol of Nazi Germany. We finish with a visit to and into the Mitte district, the decayed heart of East Berlin, restored to life since 1990; we will pass the Palace of the Republic, HQ of the old East German state. Our tour also includes Potsdamer Platz and the the Checkpoint Charlie Museum (focusing on wall escapes).

The afternoon is yours for independent exploration. We recommend a visit to the site of the former headquarters of Nazi terror mechanisms: the Gestapo and the SS. It now houses a moving and informative documentary exhibition devoted to the victims of the Third Reich. Though much of the placards are in German only, the photos are compelling, as is a 182 m (200 yard) stretch of the Wall that stands here as a reminder of days past.

NOTE: The order of Berlin sightseeing may vary at the discretion of your Tour Leader.

Overnight in Berlin.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Berlin: Jewish Memorial & Reichstag

This morning we visit the new Jewish Memorial, located on a vast plot of land between the Brandenburg Gate and the buried remains of Adolf Hitler's bunker. The memorial has been hailed by supporters as a courageous symbol of Germany's readiness to face up to its grim past. Designed by U.S. architect Peter Eisenman, the memorial consists of 2,711 pillars, which range in height from a few centimeters to 4.7 meters (15 feet) and form a dense grid pattern through which visitors can wander. From a distance, the site looks like a dusky, placid ocean. As one descends on uneven, sloping ground into the memorial the concrete blocks grow more imposing, tilt at irregular angles, and street noise fades. The experience is intended to create feelings of unease and loneliness, encouraging discussion on the plight of the 6 million Jews who died at the hands of the Nazi regime.

Next we visit the Reichstag.* The building was used by the elected German government between 1894 and 1933, but was badly damaged by fire shortly before Hitler took power. In 1991, two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it was decided that the Parliament for the reunified Germany (known as the German Bundestag) should move from Bonn to Berlin. The building was restored and the Bundestag moved here in 1999. The renovation was designed by the British architect Sir Norman Foster. A large glass dome was added on top of the building.

* Please note: due to the popularity of this tour, they have introduced a 'lottery' system that may, at best, exclude us from participation on our preferred day; or, at worst, exclude us entirely. We apologize in advance should our luck not pan out on this one.

Overnight in Berlin (dinner on your own this evening).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Berlin: Sightseeing Continues

Our Berlin city sightseeing continues today with the recently modernised Museum of German History on Unter den Linden, and the Stasi Museum. We also go up the Fernsehturm (English: Berlin TV Tower), a television tower. Close to Alexanderplatz in Berlin-Mitte, the tower was constructed between 1965 and 1969 by the administration of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). It was intended as a symbol of Berlin, which it remains today, as it is easily visible throughout the central and some suburban districts of Berlin. With its height of 368 meters, it is the tallest structure in Germany, and the second tallest structure in the European Union (by a half-metre).

At some point in our Berlin program, we will also visit Museum Island, a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its unique ensemble of buildings and cultural artefacts. The opening of the Altes Museum in 1830 made historically significant collections and art accessible to the general public for the first time. Over the next century, four other museums were added to the island, leading to its being dubbed "Museum Island" from the late 1870s. The roots of the ensemble date back to the Enlightenment and its educational ideals and the buildings reflect the evolution of modern museum design over more than a century.

Overnight in Berlin.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Berlin - Leipzig: Walking Tour

Today we travel by rail* (2 hours) to Leipzig, founded by Slavic settlers in the 7th and 8th centuries.

By the 10th century Urbs Libzi, the town of the "lime" trees, had become a German stronghold and a flourishing centre where the great east-west and north-south trade routes intersected on the Thuringian-Saxon plain. Today Leipzig is Saxony's largest city, a major industrial, shopping, cultural and administrative centre with 480,000 inhabitants, renowned for its long association with trade, science, humanism, music and publishing, as well as the popular grassroots church-led movement that spawned the move toward reunification in 1990. Much has changed since the time of communism, and one can see many renovated buildings and old derelict factories that are now being converted into offices and trendy loft apartments. There is a sense of optimism that is tangible as Leipzig comes back to life after its long "sleep."

On arrival we will have a walking tour of Leipzig. Much of the city centre is now traffic-free, with fine old squares, gardens, courtyards and shopping arcades opening out of the central pedestrianized areas. Our guided walk focuses on the story of the 1989 street protests, and includes time in the Nikolai Church whose Monday evening prayer meetings were the catalyst for the demonstrations. As well as the 1989 history, Leipzig has a wonderful collection of Art Nouveau buildings, the 18th century church where Bach worked (and is buried), fine civic buildings, and what is reputed to be the largest station in Europe, now an excellent shopping mall.

After a coffee break we will visit the new Museum of Contemporary German History, one of two museums, one sited in Bonn with a West German focus, the other here in Leipzig focusing on the story of East Germany. We finish at the Stasi Museum in the former Leipzig area HQ building.

* All rail journeys second class, non-smoking.

Overnight in Leipzig.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Leipzig - Dresden: Walking Tour

We have some free time in Leipzig this morning before travelling by train to to Dresden (1 hour, 10 minutes).

The name of Dresden stands alongside Hiroshima as a symbol of the horrendously destructive consequences of modern warfare. What was generally regarded as Germany's most beautiful large city -- the "Baroque Florence" -- survived World War II largely unscathed until the night of February 13 and 14, 1945. Then, in a matter of hours, it was reduced to a smouldering heap of ruins in the most savage saturation bombing ever mounted by the British and American air forces against civilian targets. At least 35,000 people died -- though the total may have been considerably higher (according to one estimate, by as much as 100,000), as the city was packed with refugees fleeing from the advancing Red Army.

With this background, it's all the more remarkable that Dresden has adapted to the economic framework of the re-united Germany better than anywhere else in the former GDR. Like Berlin, it's an exciting place to be at the moment: be prepared for striking visual changes as the post-Communist authorities put into effect their new policy of restoring all the historical buildings once left in ruin.

The highlight of our visit will be a tour of Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady), a Lutheran church. An earlier church building was Roman Catholic until it became Protestant during the Reformation, and was replaced in the 18th century by a larger Baroque Lutheran building. It is considered an outstanding example of Protestant sacred architecture, featuring one of the largest domes in Europe. It now also serves as a symbol of reconciliation between former warring enemies. Built in the 18th century, the church was destroyed in the bombing of Dresden during World War II. The remaining ruins were left for 50 years as a war memorial, following decisions of local East German leaders. The church was rebuilt after the reunification of Germany, starting in 1994. The reconstruction of its exterior was completed in 2004, and the interior in 2005. The church was reconsecrated on 30 October 2005 with festive services lasting through the Protestant observance of Reformation Day on 31 October. The surrounding Neumarkt square with its many valuable baroque buildings was also reconstructed in 2004.

Overnight in Dresden.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Dresden - Nuremberg - Munich

Today we drive to Munich via Nuremberg (Nürnberg).

Crowning the outcrop of warm red sandstone from which much of Nuremberg is built, the Burg, or castle, goes back to the city's founding years in the 11th century. Kings and emperors resided here for some 500 years, and the sprawling complex of buildings was added to, demolished and rebuilt throughout this time. Thus the tall five-sided tower dates from 1040, the two-tier Imperial Chapel from the 12th century and the stables from the late 15th century.

Directly below the castle are timber-framed and gabled houses crammed up against the ramparts. Albrecht Durer lived in this quarter from 1509 until his death in 1528. The Durer Haus has good interiors and displays, though there are more copies than original works. In the Burgstrasse is the 16th century Fenbohaus, now the city museum.

We continue to Munich (München), the "capital" of the Black Forest and de facto capital of Bavaria.

Overnight in Munich.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Munich: City Tour

Today we begin our exploration of Munich.* With its exuberant atmosphere and vitality, it is one of the great cultural centres of Europe. The city has a seductive flavour -- blue and cream trams, tree-lined boulevards, fountains, parks, pavement cafes, beer halls and beer gardens.

The heart of the city and its Altstadt is the Marienplatz; the pedestrian centre fans out from here in an approximate circle of one square kilometre, with the central market, the royal palace and the most important churches. Marienplatz marks the most central spot in the city. At 1100 and 1200, the square fills as the carillon in the Rathaus jingles into action, displaying two events that happened on this spot: the marriage of Wilhelm V to Renata von Lothringen in 1568, and the first Schafflertanz (coopers' dance) of 1517, intended to cheer people up during the plague.

Located close by is the Hofbrauhaus "the most famous pub in the world", which is the epitome of the Munich beer hall. Originally the court brewery, it boasts an uninterrupted tradition dating back to 1589, though the present building is some three centuries younger.

We will also visit the astonishing Asamkirche, the ultimate statement in Rococo, with no square inch unadorned in its dark, compact interior. Officially known as St-Johann-Nepomuk, it is one of the most enchanting examples of a Rococo church in Bavaria. It is the crowning effort of the partnership of the two Asam brothers, who successfully achieved their goal of a building whose architecture was completely integrated with all aspects of its interior decoration.

* The ultimate order of Munich sightseeing could vary at the discretion of your Tour Leader.

Overnight in Munich.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Munich: Deutsches Museum & Englischer Garden

Today we visit the 18th century Englischer Garden, one of the oldest landscaped parks on the continent. The Englischer Garten takes its name from the 18th century landscaping fashion which tried to create parks resembling untouched nature. Occupying what was formerly marshland, it was created at the instigation of Bavaria's most unlikely statesman, the American-born Benjamin Thompson, who was a leading minister under the garden-loving Elector Carl Theodor.

Today we visit the Deutsches Museum, a fabulous science and technology museum. Covering every conceivable aspect of technical endeavour, from the first flint tools to the research labs of modern industry, this is the most compendious collection of its type in Europe.

Overnight in Munich.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Munich: BMW Factory & Brewery Visit

While in Munich, we will also tour the BMW Group Plant, where we will get an exciting look behind the scenes of automobile manufacturing. The tour of the BMW Group parent plant takes you through all production areas from the press works to assembly. Approximately 7,700 employees from over 50 countries work at this site, 850 being trainees. As a part of the BMW Group's worldwide production network, the BMW Group Munich Plant builds more than 950 cars and more than 3,000 engines a day. We also visit the BMW Museum, located in a separate building.

We will also have the opportunity to tour one of the local breweries. It is said that over 650 kinds of beer are brewed in Bavaria, including those made privately. Munich is the home of six of Germany's major producers. We will learn the various steps of beer making -- from germination of the barley to bottling the brew.

Overnight in Munich (dinner on your own this evening).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

Day 17 Munich - Lake Constance - Offenburg, Black Forest

Today we travel by road toward Offenburg. We'll take the slower, scenic route by way of Lake Constance (Bodensee) where we'll have a break for lunch.

Nicknamed the schwäbische Meer (Swabian Sea), Lake Constance – Central Europe's third-largest lake – straddles three countries: Germany, Austria and Switzerland. It was formed by the Rhine Glacier during the last ice age and fed and drained by that same river today.

We continue our journey to the environs of Offenburg near which our hotel is located in the heart of the wine region Ortenau. To the west is the Black Forest at the Upper Rhine. This is our base for two nights and a full day tomorrow to walk the hills and enjoy some of the wines of the region as we go. On arrival we'll enjoy a wine tasting before dinner.

Overnight near Offenburg.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Black Forest 'Wine Walk'

There are 13 wine regions in Germany with more than 23,000 vineyards. The wine area of The Black Forest is the 3rd largest and southern-most wine region in Germany (called Baden); the climate here is warm as the vineyards are sheltered by the surrounding mountains and the Rhine River Valley. Due to this warm climate, Baden produces the only wine-zone B class wines in Germany. Wine-zone B is the same category as the famous French wine areas of Alsace, Champagne, and the Loire Valley. The Baden Wine Road is 160 kilometers long, connecting numerous old wineries and tiny villages. For today's hike, our Wine Trail is set in one of those beautiful wine villages, with a castle overlooking the town, no less.

After breakfast you'll have some time to explore the town before we begin our walk at 11 am with a local guide.* This is an 'easy' walk with limited elevation gain/loss (+/- 200m) through beautiful scenery, while taking in good food and great wine. Although the hike itself is only about 7.5 km, it will take us all day to take it all in. We have included 5 stops in the vineyards where we will enjoy some food and wine; we will be back at our hotel around 5:00pm where we will enjoy our last 'course' of the day. Our schedule, more or less:

First wine stop. To kick off your wine hike we invite you to an appetizer and a glass of champagne. Crossing through town you will arrive in the vineyards. Wine in the Black Forest grows on hillsides – which means there is a bit of elevation change to this tour.

Second wine stop. A walk through the vineyards will bring you to the next stop – a restaurant overlooking the wine area. This can be a busy place – great way to do some local-watching.

Third wine stop. Now it is up up up the hill. After a climb up the vineyards you get to walk through portions of the Black Forest – a great way to cool down. The next stop offers a surprise – an old castle ruin!

Fourth wine stop. This is easy – a straight shot down the vineyards back into town. Time for dessert!

More wine stops. There are many more interesting stops on the wine trail for you – at the last stop you will also enjoy a cheese tasting.

We do not include a full evening meal given the gluttonous nature of our day, but if you need a snack later on a visit to a Strausswirtschaft ("broom restaurant") set up by local farmers in the fall is an excellent choice for a very 'local' experience. Typically it is a pub run by winegrowers and winemakers themselves, in which they sell their own wine directly to the public. The food served is usually simple, regional cold dishes.

* A contingency plan will be put into place in the event of inclement weather -- still you have to be prepared with rain protection, sunscreen, and sturdy shoes.

Overnight near Offenburg (dinner on your own this evening).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 19 Return to Frankfurt via Heidelberg

Today we return to Frankfurt by bus. En route we make a stop in Heidelberg with a break for lunch and some time to explore this attractive city.

Heidelberg is considered one of the most beautiful cities in Germany. The picturesque ensemble of the castle, the Old Town, and the river Neckar surrounded by hills, which inspired the poets and artists of romanticism, still fascinates visitors today. It was mostly left intact after World War II resulting in beautiful homes in a fascinating mix of different styles, some dating back to the 17th century. The highlight here is definitely the Old Town, a great place for strolling, window shopping, and enjoying the many sidewalk cafes and restaurants.

This evening we enjoy our farewell dinner together.

Overnight in Frankfurt.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 20 Departure

Departure from Frankfurt.

GUTE REISE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast