

## THE MOSELLE VALLEY, LUXEMBOURG & BRUSSELS

### Following the River That Built Europe

**13 days**

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#### Day 1 Arrival in Frankfurt

Welcome to the gateway - Frankfurt is where the journey assembles. Germany's financial capital – a skyline of glass towers rising incongruously above a preserved Römerberg quarter of reconstructed medieval gables – is less a destination than a threshold, and there's something fitting about that. The city sits at the point where ancient trade routes converged, where coronations of Holy Roman Emperors took place for five centuries, where the first unified German parliament met in 1848. It has always been a place where things begin.

Overnight near Frankfurt (airport area hotel).

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

#### Day 2 Frankfurt to Cochem: Where Rivers Meet, Empires Were Built

Our coach departs Frankfurt this morning heading southwest. Within two hours we are standing at the Deutsches Eck – the "German Corner" – in Koblenz, at the precise point where the Moselle surrenders itself to the Rhine. Both rivers are visible, their different colours and temperatures merging in real time. It is one of those geographical moments that explains everything: why settlements grew here, why armies marched here, why every power that ever wanted to control this part of Europe converged on this spot.

The colossal equestrian statue of Kaiser Wilhelm I that dominates the promontory is a relatively recent imposition – the original was destroyed in World War II, the current one reinstated only in 1993. Empires, it turns out, are easier to build than to commemorate. But the strategic logic the Romans recognised here – the confluence as a natural meeting point, the hills above as natural fortification – is unchanged.

After a break for lunch in Koblenz, the coach follows the Moselle upstream to Cochem, our first valley town. This is our initial encounter with the landscape that will define the coming days: the river bending in great loops between terraced vineyard slopes, small villages clustered at the water's edge, and on virtually every defensible promontory, a castle. In spring the vineyards are an almost luminous green; come September those same slopes will be ripening toward the harvest, the vines heavy with fruit.

This evening, a stroll along the Moselle promenade introduces Cochem's medieval character – and dinner at a traditional restaurant with river views provides our first taste of the valley's hospitality.

Overnight in Cochem.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

#### Day 3 Cochem: The Castle and the River

Reichsburg Cochem does what medieval castles were designed to do: it announces power. Perched above the town on a conical hill, its towers and battlements visible from everywhere below, it was built to project authority over the river trade passing beneath it – the tolls extracted from wine and goods barges represented, for centuries, the economic engine of the region. The castle's current appearance owes more to 19th-century romantic reconstruction than to medieval authenticity, but the site is genuinely ancient, and the view from the ramparts – the Moselle looping between its vineyards, the town clustered below – makes the logic of the location unmistakable.

A guided tour leads us through the reconstructed interiors before the afternoon takes a different perspective entirely: a one-hour panoramic cruise on the Moselle itself. What the castle showed us from above, the river now shows from within – the terraced slopes rising on both banks, the villages appearing around each bend, the water reflecting the sky. It's the same landscape, experienced from its centre rather than its heights. The river that built all of this – the commerce, the castles, the wine culture – is no longer background; for an hour, it's the point.

Overnight in Cochem.

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Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

#### Day 4 Beilstein and the Moselle Loop

Not far upstream from Cochem, Beilstein has remained so determinedly unchanged that it's become something of an inadvertent museum of itself. The cobblestone lanes, the Baroque monastery church perched above the village square, the ruins of Metternich Castle (yes, that Metternich family – the Austrian statesman who reshaped post-Napoleonic Europe once owned this stretch of the valley) – all of it suggesting a place that commerce and modern development quietly bypassed. It's a gentle morning: a stroll through narrow streets, a visit to the monastery and the castle ruins, and lunch at leisure in a setting that feels genuinely unhurried.

The afternoon shifts the perspective dramatically. The drive to the viewpoint above the Moselschleife – the great loop near Bremm – delivers one of the Moselle's most arresting panoramas. Standing on the heights above Kloster Stuben, the river traces a nearly complete oxbow around a steep peninsula of vines, the geometry almost too perfect to be natural. It is the valley's logic made visible in a single image: the river carving its own path, the vines following every inch of south-facing slope, the whole system in a balance that has taken two thousand years to arrive at.

Overnight in Cochem.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

#### Day 5 Trier & the Roman Foundation - Bernkastel-Kues

Everything we've seen along the Moselle has deep roots, and today we visit those roots directly. Trier is the oldest city in Germany. At the height of the Roman Empire it was the capital of the Western Roman world – a city of 80,000 inhabitants with its own imperial palace, circus, amphitheatre, and public baths. The Romans called it Augusta Treverorum: the city of the Treveri tribe, made magnificent by imperial ambition. It administered an empire from a provincial river bank. The river made it possible.

What survives is extraordinary. The Porta Nigra – the Black Gate – is the largest and best-preserved Roman city gate north of the Alps, its massive sandstone blocks held together by iron clamps rather than mortar, blackened by centuries of urban grime into something that looks almost geological. The Imperial Baths rival anything surviving in Rome itself. The Basilica of Constantine, repurposed as a Protestant church, retains the sheer scale of imperial architecture – 67 metres long, 30 metres high – designed to make individual humans feel appropriately small. It still works.

A specialist Roman heritage guide leads the morning's exploration, turning impressive ruins into a comprehensible civilisation. After lunch in Trier's market square – itself Roman in its bones – Trier Cathedral and the Church of Our Lady show how completely the medieval city absorbed and built upon what came before.

Late afternoon, the coach follows the river upstream to Bernkastel-Kues, our base for the next three nights.

Overnight in Bernkastel-Kues.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

#### Day 6 Bernkastel-Kues: The Wine Capital

If Trier represents the Roman foundation of this valley, Bernkastel-Kues represents its medieval flowering – the point at which the wine trade generated enough wealth to produce one of the most beautifully preserved market towns in Germany. A guided walking tour this morning leads through the historic centre: the famous Spitzhäuschen, the precariously leaning "Pointed House" that has been defying gravity since the 17th century; the Renaissance market square surrounded by half-timbered facades; the ruins of Landshut Castle above the town, a reminder that defending the trade routes remained as important as exploiting them.

The afternoon moves from the town to the source of its prosperity. A winery visit and tasting lunch explores what the Moselle actually produces – specifically, why Moselle Riesling occupies a category of its own in the wine world. The steep slate hillsides that make these

vineyards so dramatic to look at are also the key to the wine's character: dark slate absorbs heat during the day and releases it at night, extending the growing season and preserving the acidity that balances Riesling's natural sweetness. The result — in a good vintage — is a wine of unusual delicacy and longevity, the river's mineral character somehow present in the glass (non-alcoholic options available).

Overnight in Berncastel-Kues (dinner on your own this evening).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

### Day 7 Traben-Trarbach: Art Nouveau and Underground Empires

Traben-Trarbach sits downstream from Berncastel-Kues and tells a different chapter of the Moselle's story — one from the wine trade's 19th-century apex, when the valley's merchants were wealthy enough to commission architecture in the fashionable Art Nouveau style then sweeping Europe. The result is a town of unusual visual character: the organic curves and natural motifs of Jugendstil applied to wine merchant mansions, their elaborately decorated facades a record of prosperity expressed in the international language of the moment.

A guided walking tour explores this architectural heritage, but the day's most distinctive element lies underground. Beneath the town, vast vaulted chambers carved into the hillside once held millions of litres of Riesling awaiting export to markets across Europe. These accessible cellars are an unexpectedly powerful reminder of the industrial scale the wine trade achieved here — and of how much of what the Moselle Valley looks like today is the product of organised, sustained commercial ambition rather than picturesque accident.

Overnight in Berncastel-Kues.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 8 Berncastel-Kues, Germany - Luxembourg: The Fortress Country

The coach departs this morning on a two-hour journey northwest, following the Moselle toward its source as the valley narrows and the landscape shifts toward the rolling, wooded terrain of the Grand Duchy. Luxembourg is easy to underestimate. A country of 2,600 square kilometres and fewer than 700,000 people — smaller than many English counties — it has nonetheless been successfully independent for over a thousand years, hosts the headquarters of the European Court of Justice and the European Investment Bank, and is, on a per-capita basis, one of the wealthiest nations on earth. The geography explains everything: the Alzette and Pétrusse rivers have carved such deep gorges into the plateau that Luxembourg City's old town sits atop a natural fortress that no army managed to conquer for most of its history. Geography, it turns out, is a form of policy.

Arriving late morning, the afternoon is spent unlocking the city's layers with a local guide. The upper town — the Place d'Armes, the Place Guillaume II, the Grand Ducal Palace — gives way to the Chemin de la Corniche, a promenade along the cliff edge with the most dramatic views in the city: the deep gorge falling away below, the lower town of Grund far beneath, the old walls and towers framing a UNESCO World Heritage skyline. Descending to Grund by the Pétrusse Express train or the public elevators, we encounter a completely different Luxembourg — intimate, residential, the café terraces occupying the same valley floor that the fortifications above once defended.

The Bock Casemates complete the picture: 17 kilometres of underground galleries tunnelled into the cliff, once housing 35,000 soldiers, today one of Europe's most unusual self-guided experiences. The rock that saved Luxembourg is also what you walk through.

Overnight in Luxembourg City.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 9 Luxembourg: The Kitchen as Culture

Luxembourg's culinary identity is a layered thing — French finesse, German heartiness, and a distinctly local sensibility shaped by centuries of being a crossroads. Today's hands-on cooking class pulls that identity into focus, spending a morning learning the techniques and traditions behind Luxembourgish cuisine before sitting down to the lunch we've helped create.

The afternoon is yours — Luxembourg City rewards unhurried independent exploration. The Mudam (Luxembourg's contemporary art

museum, housed in a building designed by I.M. Pei), the National Museum of History and Art, or simply the café terraces of the Place d'Armes invite the kind of extended, unscheduled time that travel rarely allows.

The evening is at leisure – a last independent night in the Grand Duchy before the journey takes its final turn north toward Belgium tomorrow.

Overnight: Luxembourg City (dinner on your own).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

### Day 10 Luxembourg - Brussels, Belgium: The Continent's Capital

The train north from Luxembourg City this morning covers barely two hours of Belgian countryside before delivering us into the heart of a city that has become, almost by accident, the administrative capital of a united Europe. Brussels was chosen for this role for reasons that say everything about how Europe works: it belonged to a country too small, too carefully balanced between larger neighbours, and too diplomatically nimble to threaten anyone. In that sense it is the logical endpoint of a journey that began in the Roman river valley – another small place that punched, and continues to punch, considerably above its weight.

The afternoon is an introduction to the city on foot. The Grand Place – Brussels' central square, its guildhalls and town hall dripping with gilded Baroque excess – is one of the great urban set pieces in Europe, the kind of space that stops conversation. The covered Galeries Royales Saint-Hubert nearby, built in 1847, was the first shopping arcade in Europe – a vaulted glass passageway of bookshops, chocolatiers, and cafés that has been doing its quiet, elegant work for nearly two centuries.

This evening, dinner in Brussels means an initiation into the other great culinary tradition of the Low Countries and a beer culture so deeply embedded in national identity that UNESCO added it to the Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2016. After the Riesling country and the Luxembourgish kitchen, it is a fitting turn at the table.

Overnight in Brussels.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 11 Bruges: The City That Time Curated

There is a reason Bruges appears on more European bucket lists than almost any other city of its size. In the 14th and 15th centuries it was one of the wealthiest cities in the world – the northern terminus of Mediterranean trade routes, where Italian banking houses established their northern offices and Flemish masters produced paintings of extraordinary refinement for wealthy merchant patrons. Then the River Zwin silted up, the trade moved to Antwerp, and Bruges simply stopped. The 19th century that industrialised and rebuilt most of Europe largely bypassed it. What we see today is not a reconstruction – it is a medieval commercial city in a state of remarkable, almost uncanny preservation.

Our morning train from Brussels takes just over an hour, and a short walk from the station delivers us into the Markt – the great central square where the medieval Belfry rises 83 metres above the city, its carillon of 47 bells having marked the hours of Bruges life since the 13th century. A guided walking tour moves through the city's layers: the Burg square with its Basilica of the Holy Blood; the canal network that once carried the merchandise of half the known world; the almshouse courtyards and beguinages where medieval civic charity left its quiet mark on the urban fabric.

Lunch is at leisure – Bruges rewards time spent without a programme. The Groeningemuseum for those drawn to the Flemish Primitives, the brewery visits, the chocolatiers, or simply the canals on foot, the light falling on the water the way it falls in the paintings. Return train to Brussels at your leisure; to maximize flexibility, we do not include a group dinner this evening.

Overnight in Brussels.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

## Day 12 Brussels: The European Idea and a Final Afternoon

A full day in Brussels reveals a city of considerably more depth and character than its reputation as a bureaucratic capital might suggest. This morning, a guided walk through the European Quarter — the glass and steel district around the Berlaymont building, headquarters of the European Commission — offers something quietly profound for travellers who have spent nearly two weeks moving through the aftermath of Roman empire, medieval rivalry, and the fortress logic of small sovereignties. This is not merely an administrative zone but a physical expression of an idea: that the nations of a continent that spent centuries at war with each other could choose, deliberately and painstakingly, to build something together. The arc from Trier to Brussels — from the empire that first unified this part of the world by conquest to the union that chose to do it by consent — closes here, on foot, in the morning light.

The afternoon belongs to us. The Sablon district — antique shops, chocolate ateliers, and the Church of Our Lady of the Sablon framing one of the city's most elegant squares — rewards unhurried browsing. The Galeries Royales Saint-Hubert offer a vaulted glass corridor of bookshops, praliniers, and cafés. The Grand Place terraces invite a final coffee or Belgian beer, the guildhall facades catching the afternoon light. For those who prefer to range further, the comic strip art trail or the Royal Museums of Fine Arts are within easy reach.

This evening, our farewell dinner — the last shared table of the journey. Brussels does this well: the restaurant culture is serious, the ingredients exceptional, and there is something entirely fitting about ending a journey through the river valleys and small nations of northern Europe at a table in the city that, more than any other, represents what those nations eventually chose to build together.

Overnight in Brussels.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 13 Departure The Journey Complete

Departures from Brussels Zaventem Airport.\*

Our open-jaw routing — Frankfurt arrival, Brussels departure — means we leave from a different city than we arrived in, which is as it should be. We have travelled in one direction: from the Roman foundations of the Moselle, through the medieval wine country, across the fortress duchy, to the capital of a united continent. The river, somewhere behind us, is still running north.

\* A note on departure transfers: Brussels is one of those rare exceptions where we happily set aside our usual policy on pre-arranged airport transfers. The train from Brussels Central to Zaventem Airport runs every ten minutes, takes under twenty minutes, depositing you directly beneath the departures hall. It is faster, cheaper, and more flexible than a taxi, and your Tour Leader will make sure you're fully briefed before the journey ends.

Bon Voyage!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast