

Castle Road

Route 1 5 Stops

It's difficult to imagine the Middle Ages as an era of splendor and decadence—most Germans were hard-working peasants—but the architecture left behind begs to differ. Over 70 magnificent castles, not to mention grand palaces and majestic monasteries, line Germany's [Castle Road](#), a route of more than 400 miles bisecting the country from west to east. Brush up on your sagas, myths, and royal lineage, as this one's a true trip back in time.



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Stop 1 on Castle Road

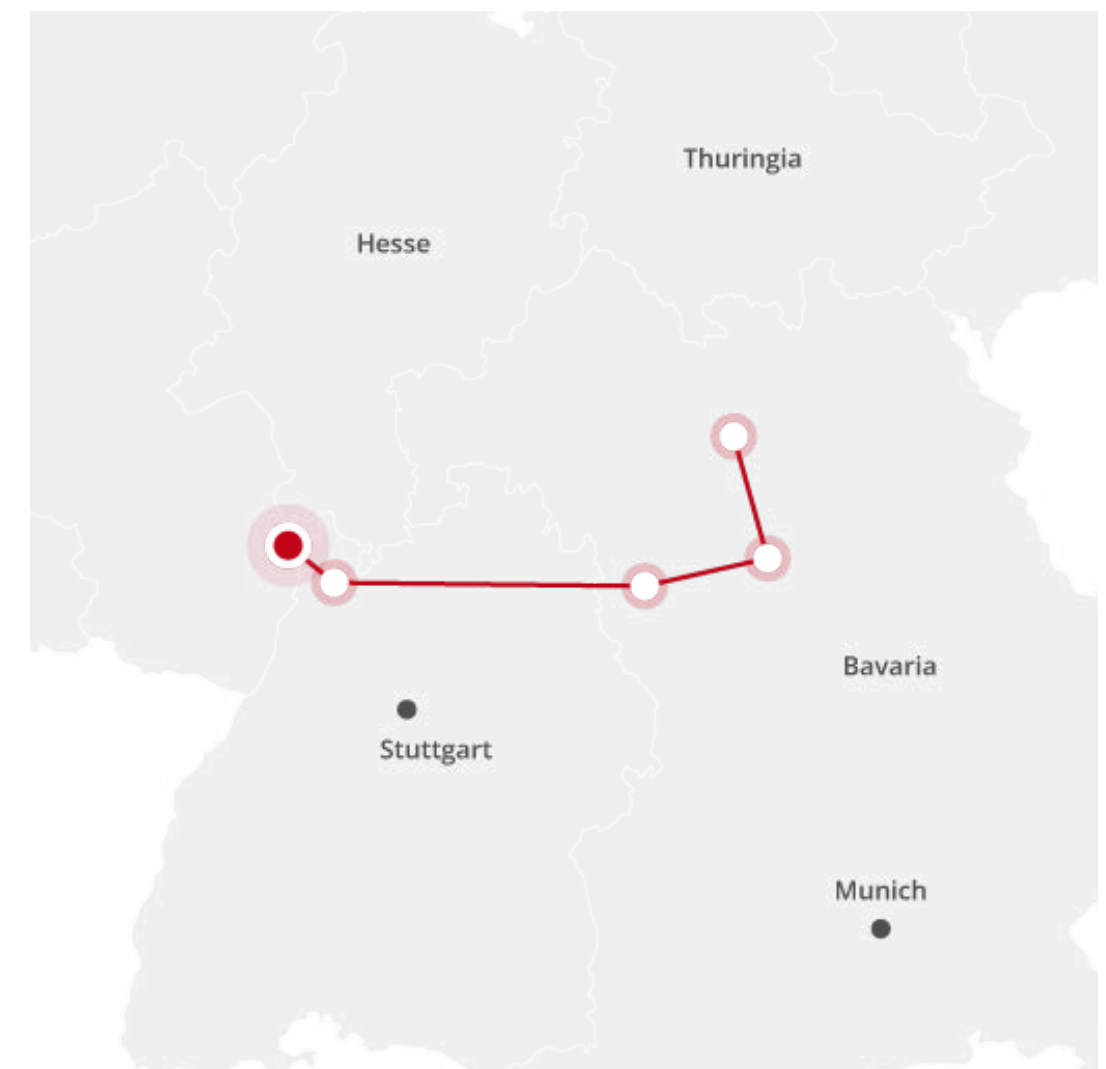
Mannheim Palace

Credit: Photo: © Stadtmarketing Mannheim/Achim Mende

With its 1,300-foot facade and immense courtyard, the first thing to notice about Mannheim's Baroque palace is its size. One of the largest such palaces in all of Europe, it was built to compete with Versailles, a flamboyant showpiece for the prince-electors of the Holy Roman Empire.

Thanks to Karl Theodor, connoisseur of the arts, it became known as a place for music, literature, and science—hosting casual visitors like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The grandest room is the Knight's Hall, but the restored rooms of the bel-étage (main floor) are also impressive, with over 800 relics (tapestries, paintings, porcelain) spread across the complex.

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Stop 2 on Castle Road

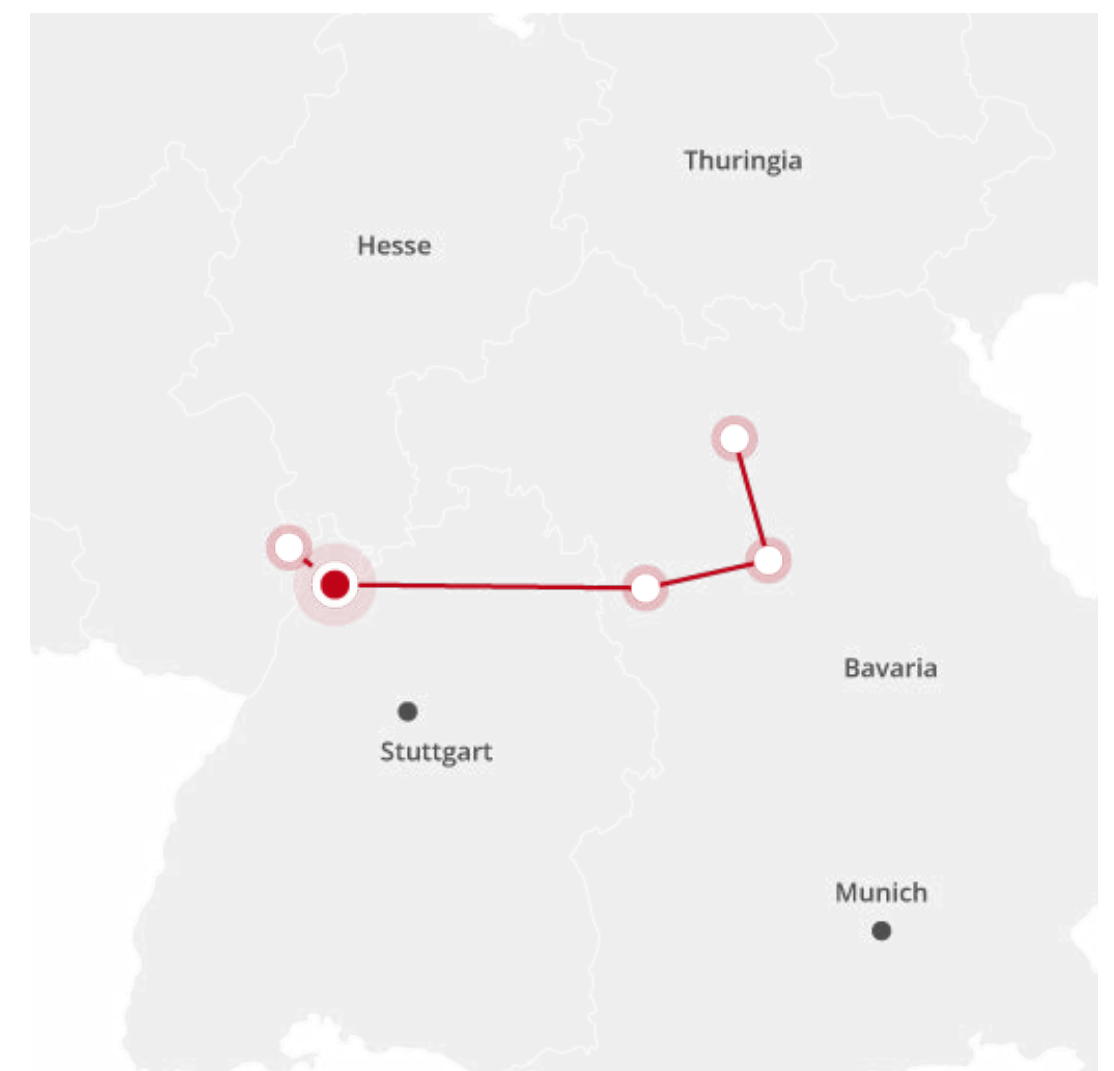
Heidelberg

Credit: Photo: © GNTB/Markus Pioro

Heidelberg has long been one of Germany's most popular cities thanks to its mix of Middle Ages charm and lively academic history (the oldest university in Germany is right here). It's still very much a university town today, with students filling the elegant cafes, restaurants, and shops and hanging out around the bustling main square.

Above it all sit the romantic ruins of Heidelberg Castle, the home of the prince-electors of the Palatinate for 500 years. The grounds contain a magnificent courtyard lined with fine Renaissance buildings, expansive gardens, and offer incredibly scenic views of the city. Sights in town include the Baroque-domed Church of the Holy Spirit, the Kornmarkt, and the Neckar River, with its iconic Old Bridge.

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Stop 3 on Castle Road

Colmberg Castle

Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/Anton Opanasiuk

There are several castles to overnight in along the Castle Road—Burg Hornberg, Schloss Heinsheim, and Burg Rabenstein among them—but the thousand-year-old Colmberg Castle, the HQ of the Bavarian kingdom throughout the 19th century, is one of the most popular. You'll find it between Rothenburg ob der Tauber and Ansbach.

History lovers will want to book one of the historic suites, complete with four-poster beds and antique paintings, furniture, and wooden ceilings. Guests will partake in Franconian and Bavarian cuisine—think dishes like wild boar, venison knuckle, and goose, plus the dark “Schwarzer Ritter,” or Black Knight, a beer only served here.

Tip: The castle is a great base for hiking in the adjacent Frankenhöhe Nature Park and for day trips to nearby towns like Dinkelsbühl and Rothenburg ob der Tauber.

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Stop 4 on Castle Road

Nuremberg Castle

Nuremberg Castle, in its day, served as a reminder of the power and importance of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Built by the ruling Hohenstaufens, the complex lies on a rocky elevation above the remains of even older buildings, with history dating back some 1,000 years. Today, it hosts a permanent exhibition that illustrates the wide-sweeping history of the castle, as well as information on the significant role Nuremberg played in the late Middle Ages.

Note: The town has one of the most famous Christmas markets in Germany, with local sausages and gingerbread, a dedicated children's market, and decorative stalls selling handicrafts—some will even teach you how to make them!

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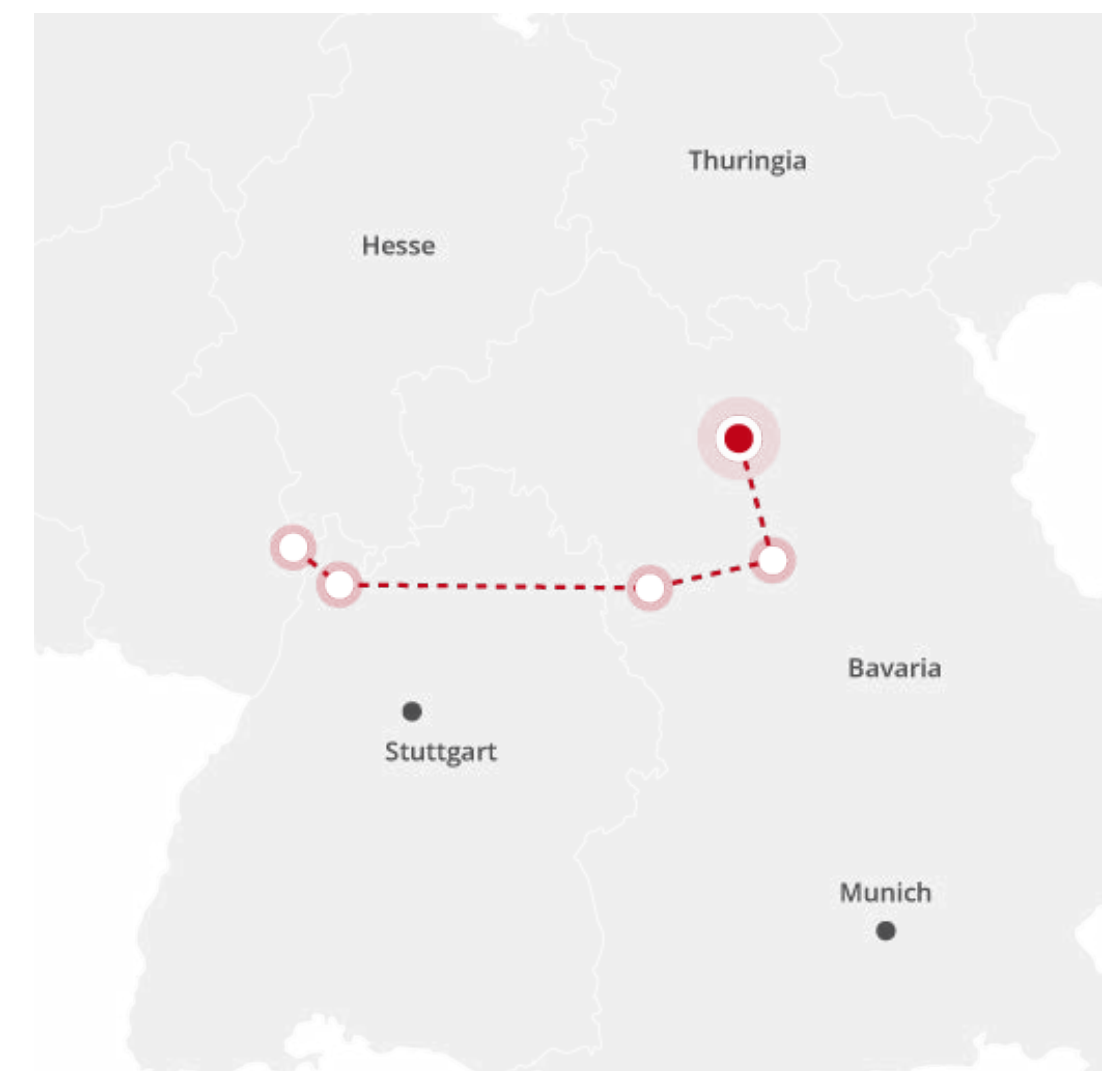
Stop 5 on Castle Road Bamberg

Credit: Photo: © GNTB/Francesco Carovillano

A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1993, Bamberg is an ancient center of imperial and episcopal power that—in an uncanny echo of Rome itself—was built on seven hills. Situated in northern Bavaria, the city has a well-preserved old town that comprises three distinctive historical centers: the City on the Hills (Bergstadt), the Island District (Inselstadt), and the Market Gardener's District (Gärtnerstadt).

As well as architecture from the Middle Ages and Baroque period, its main sight is the Romanesque-Gothic cathedral of St. Peter and St. George, which hosts the world-famous Bamberg Rider, the tomb of Henry II and Cunigunde, and the only papal grave in Germany (Pope Clement II). And don't miss out on what Bamberg does best: Rauchbier, or smoke beer, tied to brewing traditions that outdate the town's thousand-year-old architecture. Eleven in-town breweries means one will be nearby, with 48 more in the surrounding county.

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