

# Plan Your Trip to Germany

**6 Routes**   **30 Stops**



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How do you take an entire country—one with a history spanning from the Roman Empire to the Cold War, one that stretches across cultures, mountains, lakes, and seas—and truly see it? How do you take your precious travel days and squeeze them for all they're worth?

Start here. Germany has [dozens of travel routes](#) to pick from, each focusing on one incredible facet of this country to create a how-to-experience guide that's sure to stoke your wanderlust—even if it's just virtually for now. Choose one, and you'll be off exploring a thousand years of architecture; clockmaking, savoring asparagus, or tasting wine; ancient volcanoes and forests; or even routes dedicated entirely to fairytale castles and remnants of Roman influence.

Below, we present you six exemplary routes and outline a handful of their best stops. Mix and match, stick to the path, take on one or all—here's where you get the chance to choose your own Germany adventure.

## Routes

1. Castle Road
2. German Avenues Route
3. German Fairytale Route
4. German Half-Timbered Houses Route
5. Romanesque Route
6. Romantic Road





# 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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Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/xbrchx



Stop 1 on Castle Road

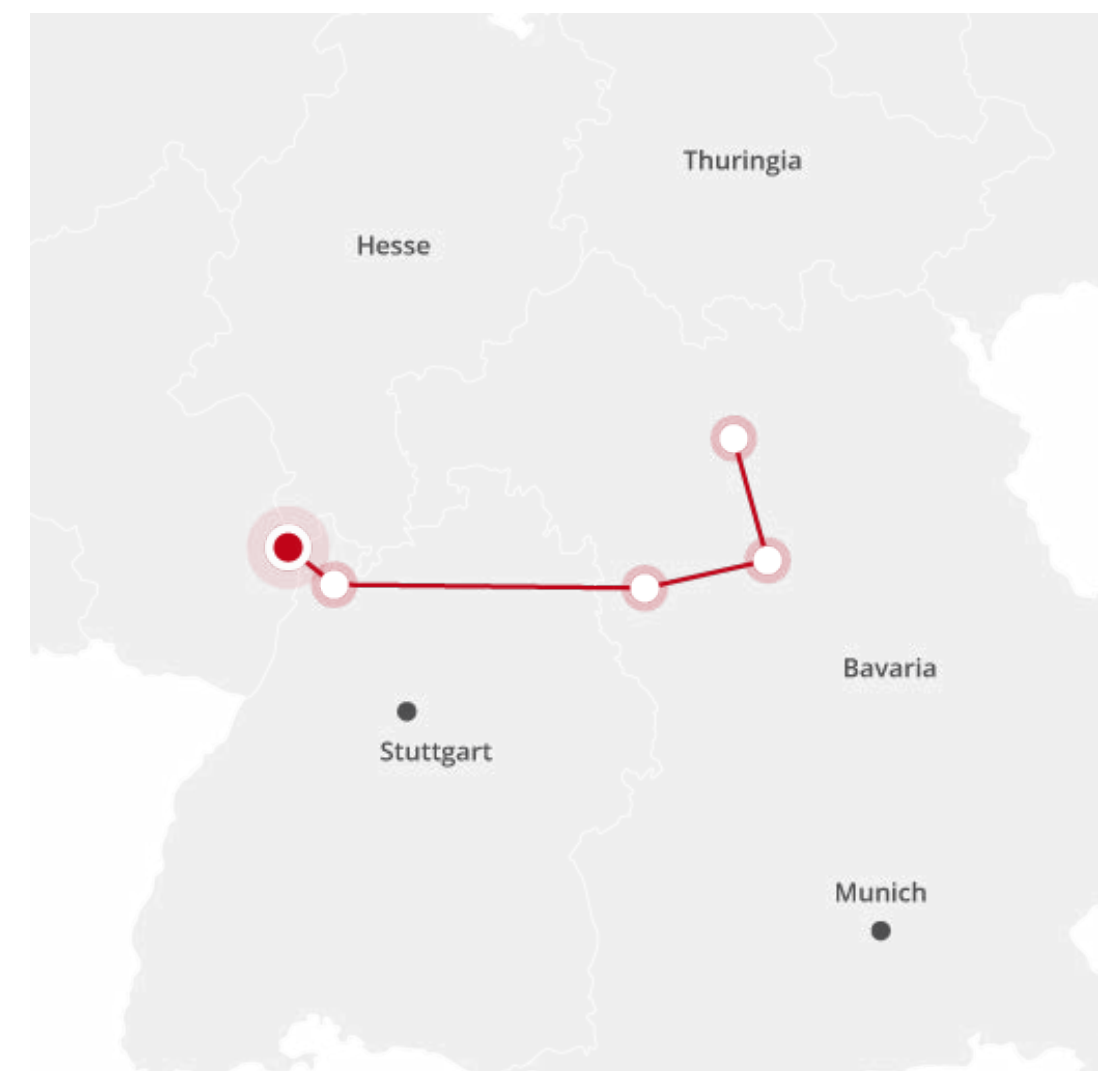
# Mannheim Palace

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.

[Click here for more info](#)





Stop 2 on Castle Road

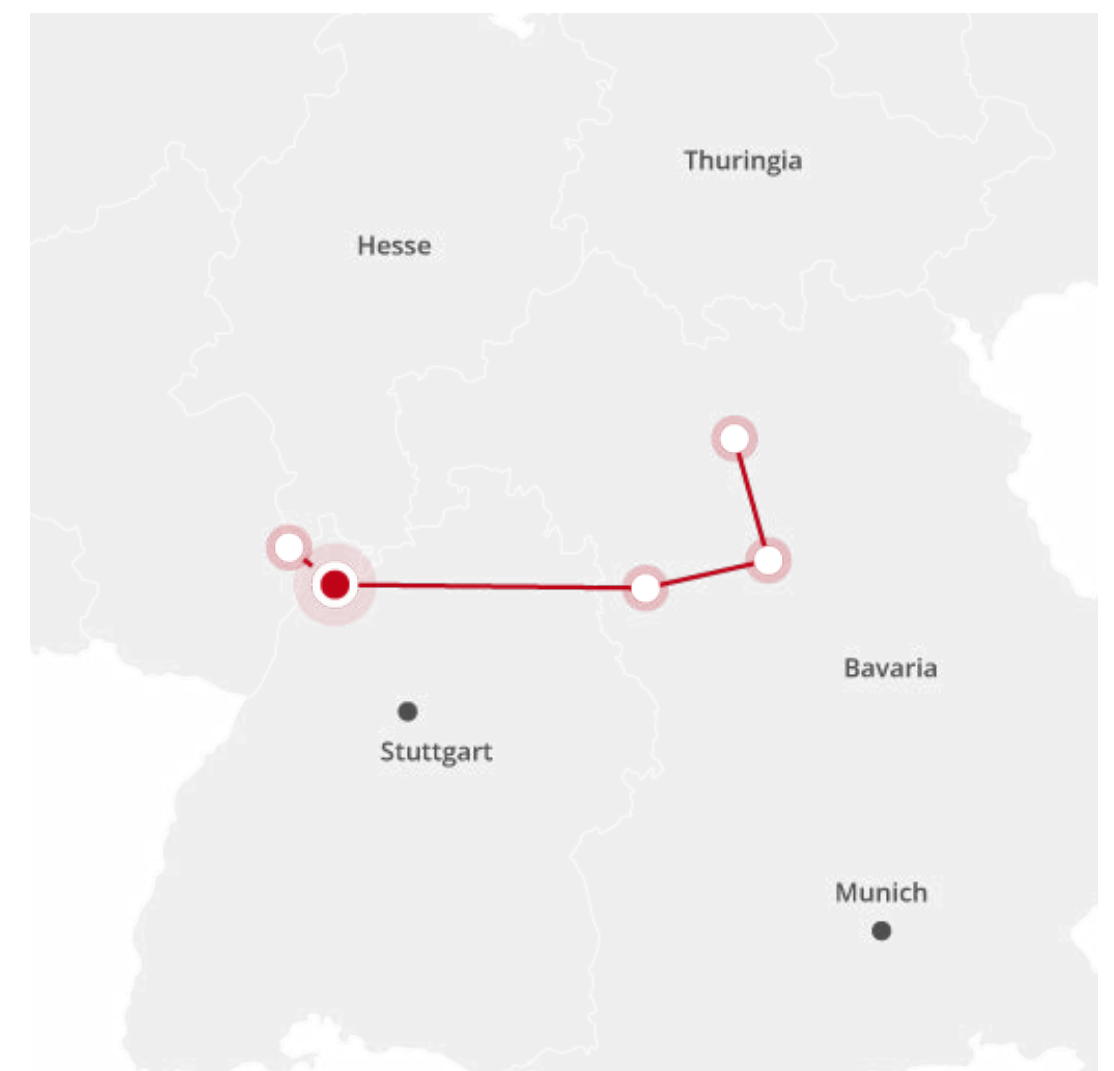
# Heidelberg

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.

[Click here for more info](#)





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.

[Click here for more info](#)





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!

[Click here for more info](#)





## 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.

[Click here for more info](#)





# German Avenues Route

## Route 2 5 Stops

From the tiptop of the country at the Baltic Sea all the way down to Lake Constance, the [German Avenues Route](#) connects tree-lined paths, bucolic scenery, glittering lakes, forested trails, stunning castles, and postcard towns. Don't take this one too fast—the Avenues Route is all about slowing down and soaking it in.



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## Stop 1 on German Avenues Route

# Rügen

Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/ricok

Germany's Baltic coastline might not be on the international visitor list, but it's hugely popular with German tourists, and for good reason. A string of pleasant seaside towns with generous beaches and a laid-back atmosphere lacking the clueless crowds? Yes, please. We'll take two.

One of the main hotspots here is Rügen, Germany's largest island, which lies on the eastern edge of the coast towards the Polish border. Spanning some 350 square miles, it has an abundance of sand, quaint fishing villages, and national parks with chalky cliffs. Major events like the Störtebeker Festival open-air theatre show, in Ralswiek, take place here as well, and the 200-year-old Putbus Theater is as regal as they come.

Note: A 100-year-old narrow-gauge railway called "Raging Roland" connects many of the island's resorts.

[Click here for more info](#)





Stop 2 on German Avenues Route

# Bauhaus at Dessau

Credit: Photo: © Staatskanzlei Sachsen-Anhalt/Michael Deutsch

Dessau is all but synonymous with the Bauhaus school of design, which really hit its stride when it operated from Dessau between 1925 and 1932. All three Bauhaus directors—Walter Gropius, Hannes Meyer, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe—left their architectural mark on the buildings here, which are now regarded as iconic 20th-century standouts.

Aside from the main building, designed by Gropius, visitors can view the Masters' Houses, the Dessau-Törten Housing Estate, the Kornhaus, House Fieger, the Steel House, and the Employment Office. The complex has enjoyed UNESCO status since 1996 and still draws architects, designers, artists, and students from the world over.

[Click here for more info](#)





Stop 3 on German Avenues Route

# Wartburg Castle

Credit: Photo: © GNTB/Francesco Carovillano

Wartburg Castle, perched some 1,300 feet above Eisenach in Thuringia, was the very first German castle to be designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site (1999). It's famous for a laundry list of things: hosting Martin Luther while he translated the New Testament into German; as the home of Saint Elisabeth; the setting of the fabled Battle of the Bards, a tale immortalized by Richard Wagner in his opera *Tannhäuser*; and the site of the 1817 Wartburg Festival, which celebrated the achievements of the Reformation and the Battle of Leipzig.

Most of its current exterior dates to 19th-century reconstructions, but the Great Hall still carries traces of 12th-century Romanesque architecture. Catch a summer concert or other event here, including the popular Christmas market.

Note: The hall's art collection contains paintings by Lucas Cranach and sculptures by Tilman Riemenschneider.

[Click here for more info](#)





Stop 4 on German Avenues Route

# Rennsteig Trail, Thuringia Forest

Credit: Photo: © GNTB/Francesco Carovillano

The Avenues Route is so named for its roads lined with a dazzling variety of trees—linden, oak, maple, and chestnut, as well as slim birches and giant beeches. But, as they don't quite say, you've got to get out of the car to see the forest. The route is also chock full of natural areas perfect for hiking, with Tolkien-esque names to seal the deal.

Case in point: The 104-mile Rennsteig Trail through the Thuringia Forest is Germany's oldest (700 years!) and arguably its best. Coniferous and mixed forests, mountain meadows, emerald woodlands, narrow gorges, and surprisingly steep climbs keep hikers busy, and there's no better way to immerse yourself in the soul of the region.

[Click here for more info](#)





Stop 5 on German Avenues Route

# Freudenstadt to Reichenau

Credit: Photo: © GNTB/Francesco Carovillano

This stretch of the Avenues Route, through the scenic state of Baden-Württemberg, is particularly peppered with highlights. If you're a fan of castles and architecture, there's the mighty Hohenzollern Castle nestled in the Swabian Alb; the fairytale-worthy Lichtenstein Castle overlooking the Echaz Valley; the Romanesque Alpirsbach Monastery; and the Baroque monastery of Zwiefalten. For true history buffs, there's some fascinating reconstructed Stone Age and Bronze Age pile dwellings at Unteruhldingen, based on originals from 4,000-850 BCE.

For something livelier, the nearby university town of Tübingen has plenty of restaurants, bars, and shops, as does Konstanz, the largest town on the lake of the same name. The real finale is in the lake, of course: the striking Reichenau Island, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that, despite covering less than two square miles, features several historic spots—including the traces of a Benedictine monastery founded in 724.

[Click here for more info](#)





# German Fairytale Route

## Route 3 5 Stops

This nearly 400-mile [Fairytale road trip](#) follows the route of the Brothers Grimm—with a bit of a happier ending. You'll explore Sleeping Beauty's castle, UNESCO-worthy town squares, national parks, deep forests, and maybe even some of your favorite fictional characters. From Bremen to Hanau, this trip is one built for legends.



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Stop 1 on German Fairytale Route

# Bremen Market Square and Old Town

Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/canadastock

Bremen's main attraction is the stunning UNESCO World Heritage Marktplatz, a standing testament to 600 years of history. Place yourself here, and you'll quickly spot the Bremen Roland, a statue of a sword-drawing knight signifying the town privileges of a medieval city, erected in 1404. Turn around to face the Weser Renaissance-era town hall, the only Rathaus in Europe to survive the Middle Ages unaltered or rebuilt.

Go inside the Rathaus, if you can: The hall's interior has model ships hanging from the ceiling to mark the city's historic role in maritime trade, and—down in the cellar—you'll find the oldest cask of wine in Germany, dating to 1635. Just outside the town square but worth the steps, you can easily walk to the 11th-century Bremen Cathedral.

Tip: Near the Bremen Roland, it's hard to miss the Bremen Stadtmusikanten, a bronze statue depicting the four-legged characters of the eponymous Grimm fairytale.

[Click here for more info](#)





Stop 2 on German Fairytale Route

# Sababurg, the Sleeping Beauty Castle

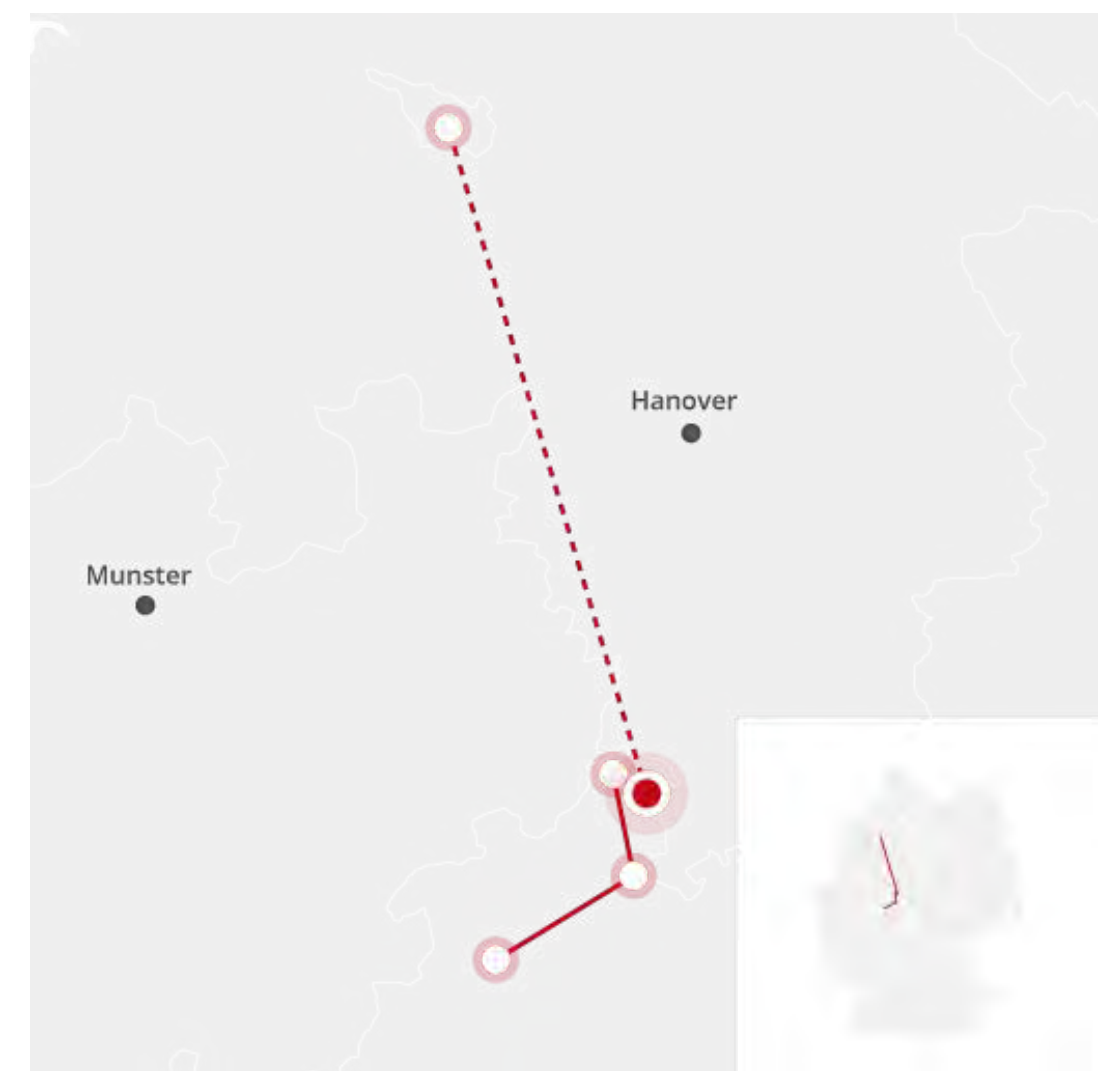
Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/IUBII BURIK

Today, the “ruin” of the hill castle of Sababurg—aka the Sleeping Beauty Castle—combines a forested, ivy-covered, bucolic charm with absolute opulence and fairytale flair. Deep in the forested uplands of Reinhardswald, the structure protected traveling pilgrims as far back as the 1300s, and still does, in a way: It’s a hotel, about a 40-minute drive from Kassel.

Abandoned for centuries—the thorny overgrowth serving as inspiration for its Sleeping Beauty status—it was reimaged in the 1950s, with 16 rooms (all in the turrets) providing guests a chance to live out this Brothers Grimm favorite. Just try not to sleep in for 100 years.

Note: The castle is currently undergoing renovation; free tours of the exterior and the terrace are available on weekends.

[Click here for more info](#)





Stop 3 on German Fairytale Route

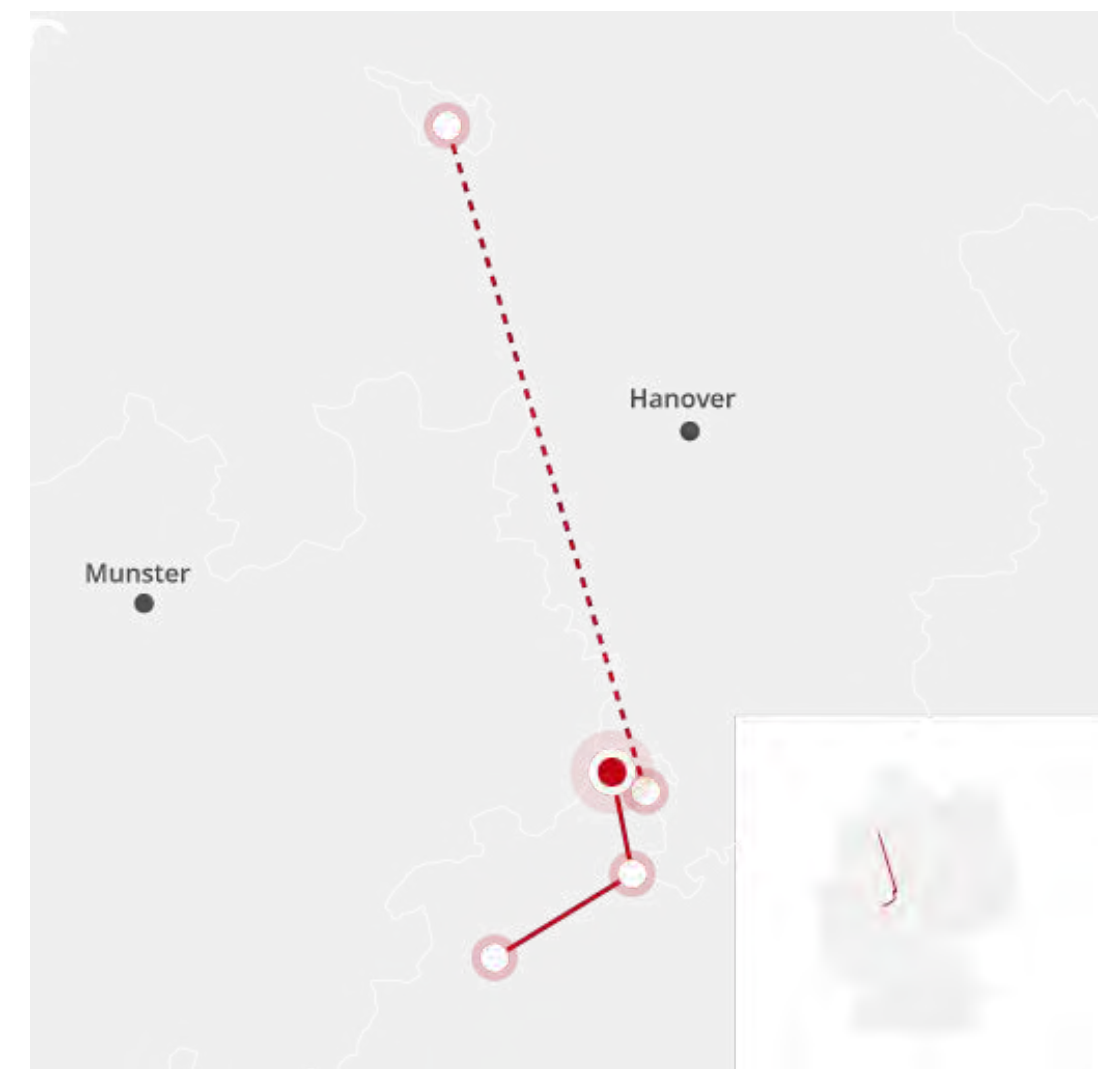
# Trendelburg Castle

Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/IURII BURIK

The small-but-attractive town of Trendelburg seems dwarfed by its fairytale castle, perched high up on a lonely sandstone precipice. The fortress-style building—with a 125-foot tower, a pentagonal ring wall, a quartet of smaller circular towers, and the remains of a late Gothic chapel with a ribbed vault—was originally built in the 13th century, restored in the 15th century, and adapted again in the 17th century. It's one of the few remaining medieval structures in the region, located about 25 miles north of Kassel in Hesse.

Lucky for us, Trendelburg Castle now lives on as a hotel. It offers historically themed rooms, a wellness area with a sauna and massage room (located in the Rapunzel-esque tower), and serves as a convenient base for hiking and cycling tours across the Weser Highlands or on a day trip to Kassel.

[Click here for more info](#)





Stop 4 on German Fairytale Route

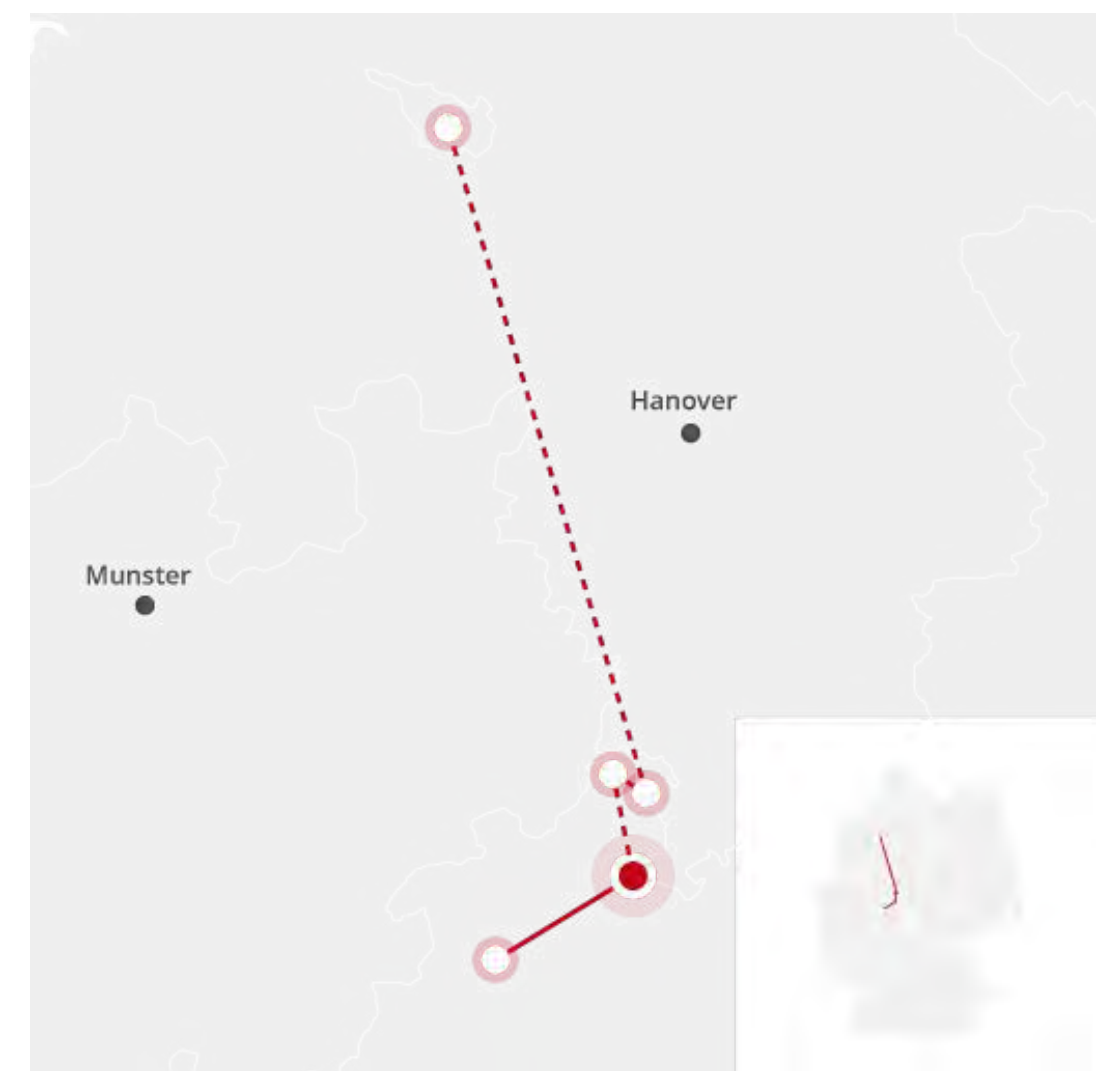
# Grimmwelt Kassel

Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/Marc Venema

By far the best spot along the Fairytale Route for Brothers Grimm aficionados, this ultra-modern and imaginative museum explores their famous stories, of course, but also hosts exhibitions that go much deeper into their life and work—including their groundbreaking linguistic and cultural research and their involvement in German politics.

The museum's layout and design are totally innovative, constantly surprising, and highly interactive. Keep your eyes peeled, as art installations by renowned creators like Ai Weiwei, Alexej Tchernyi, and Ecke Bonk pop up without fanfare. To wrap up the afternoon, explore the museum's picturesque park and admire the views from the roof terrace.

[Click here for more info](#)





Stop 5 on German Fairytale Route

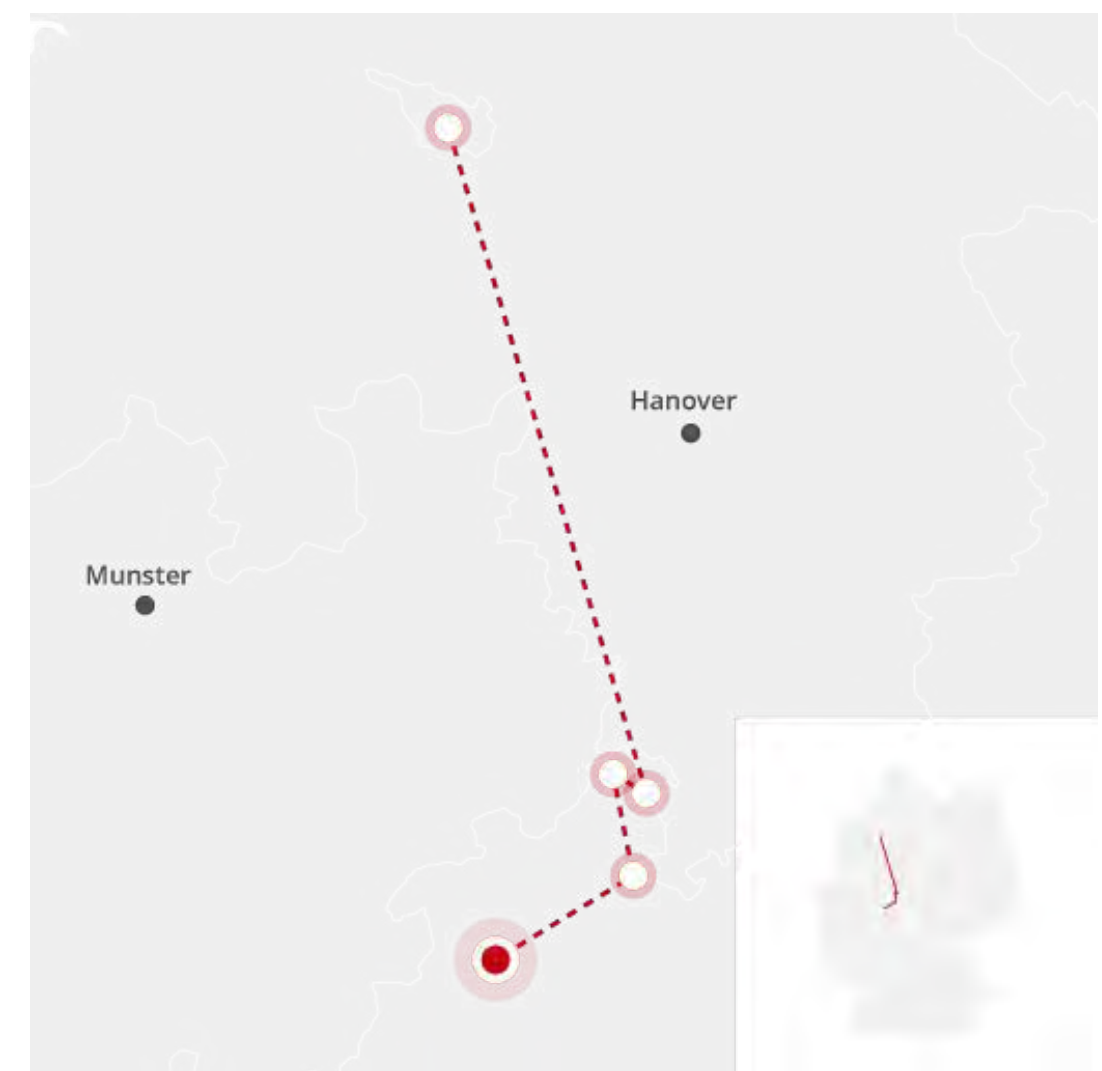
# Kellerwald-Edersee National Park

Credit: Photo: © GNTB/Francesco Carovillano

Hessen's Kellerwald-Edersee National Park, found to the south of the shimmering Edersee Lake, is set deep in the low-lying Kellerwald Mountains. It's the verdant wonderland that inspired many Grimm tales, and today offers excellent hiking amidst UNESCO-protected beech forest—the last of its kind in Central Europe—picturesque valleys, bubbling streams, and scenic open meadows.

The park is best explored via any of the 20 official circular hiking trails, most of which can be completed in half a day. Regional hiking trails pass through as well—look to Kellerwaldsteig, Urwaldsteig Edersee, and Ederhöhenweg if you're up for a longer trek.

[Click here for more info](#)





# German Half-Timbered Houses Route

## Route 4 5 Stops

Some 2.5 million half-timbered houses still stand in Germany, but the [Half-Timbered Houses Route](#) unites the country's oldest, best-preserved towns with the finest examples of this timeworn German craftsmanship. Stretching from Stade on the River Elbe all the way down to Meersburg by Lake Constance, it's a country-spanning road trip for the ages.



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Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/Jon Chica



Stop 1 on German Half-Timbered Houses Route

# Stade

Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/Oliver Hoffmann

If it's a postcard-perfect Hanseatic town you're looking for, Stade is up there with the best of them. Situated around 30 miles west of Hamburg, it's sitting pretty near the River Elbe, offering not only a seemingly endless array of cute and colorful timber-framed medieval buildings in Altes Land but also scenic canals, photogenic churches (St. Wilhadi and St. Cosmae in particular), and an Old Town now full of charming boutiques, cafes, and restaurants.

Be sure to scope out the old granary on the harbor—with a can't-miss reconstructed wooden crane from the Thirty Years War—as well as several interesting city museums.

[Click here for more info](#)





Stop 2 on German Half-Timbered Houses Route

# Hoppener Haus, Celle

Credit: Photo: © GNTB/Jörg A. Fischer

The beautiful town of Celle, in Lower Saxony, was founded by the fabulously titled Duke Otto the Strict in the late 13th century. For around 300 years, it served as the permanent residence of the dukes of Brunswick and Lüneburg, granting it a grandeur most small towns never achieve.

While here, check out the renowned Hoppener Haus, which features dramatic reliefs of mythological beasts on its half-timbered, circa-1530 facade; the Palace Theatre, the oldest Baroque theater in Germany that's still performing, built in 1675; and the Bomann Museum, a folkloric collection exploring regional history dating back to 1892.

Note: Just beyond the old town lies the Baroque Synagogue, the only one left in all of northern Germany.

[Click here for more info](#)





Stop 3 on German Half-Timbered Houses Route

# Harz Region

Credit: Photo: © GNTB/François Thierens

The Harz Mountains might be known for their steep terrain and abundance of wildlife, but the region is also peppered with fairytale castles, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and medieval constructions. The town of Wernigerode, for example, contains an iconic town hall, an impressive 12th-century castle, and a cluster of timber-framed buildings that includes the so-called “wonky house”—with a seven-degree tilt—and a tiny house not quite ten feet wide and 13 feet tall.

Goslar, a town moonlighting as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a former administrative outpost of the Holy Roman Empire. Of particular note are its Romanesque church, the elaborately decorated Rathaus, and the immense Imperial Palace of Goslar, with a foundation dating back a thousand years.

Just north of the mountains lies Quedlinburg, which has Germany’s largest collection of half-timbered houses—over 1,300 in a dazzling variety of colors—and the Collegiate Church of St. Servatius.

[Click here for more info](#)





## Stop 4 on German Half-Timbered Houses Route

# Esslingen

Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/Borisb17

The handsome medieval city of Esslingen am Neckar, surrounded by vineyards, has almost too much to offer visitors. Besides claiming over 200 half-timbered houses—including some of the oldest in Germany—its winding streets and narrow alleyways lead to the Renaissance Altes Rathaus and Baroque Neues Rathaus, medieval churches (Frauenkirche, Church of St. Paul), and the 14th-century Innere Brücke bridge.

The town produces the renowned Kessler Sekt, Germany's oldest sparkling wine, and is well known for its lively festivals. The Esslingen Bürgerfest (meaning Citizen's Festival, not an ode to hamburgers), the open-air film festival Karibische Nächte (Caribbean Nights) at the castle, and the beloved Zwiebelfest, or Onion Festival, are a few of the best.

Note: Esslingen's medieval-themed Christmas Market is also particularly vibrant, and that's saying something in Germany.

[Click here for more info](#)







Stop 5 on German Half-Timbered Houses Route

# Meersburg

Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/Vaflyu

Although Konstanz and Lindau usually grab the headlines when it comes to the Lake Constance region, smaller Meersburg has oodles of charm, idyllic lakeside views, and a winding network of cobbled alleys lined with historic townhouses, boutiques, cafes, and restaurants.

The hilltop castle, Alte Burg, is the oldest inhabited fortress in Germany. From up here, you'll get views as far as the Swiss Alps. The interior, though—most notably the Knight's Hall, castle kitchen, and the torture chamber—is equally eye-popping. Just across the way, the Neues Schloss, or “new castle,” couldn't offer a starker contrast: It has a bubblegum-pink-and-white facade and Baroque and Rococo architectural elements.

Tip: A boat trip around the harbor is a must.

[Click here for more info](#)





# Romanesque Route

## Route 5 5 Stops

Here, we track the footsteps of emperors. We witness traces of Roman power and cultural glory. We watch art and architecture swiftly change from era to era. A loop of some 750 miles, the [Romanesque Route](#)—one of the oldest in Germany—holds a lamp to the country's past.



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Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/S-E



Stop 1 on Romanesque Route

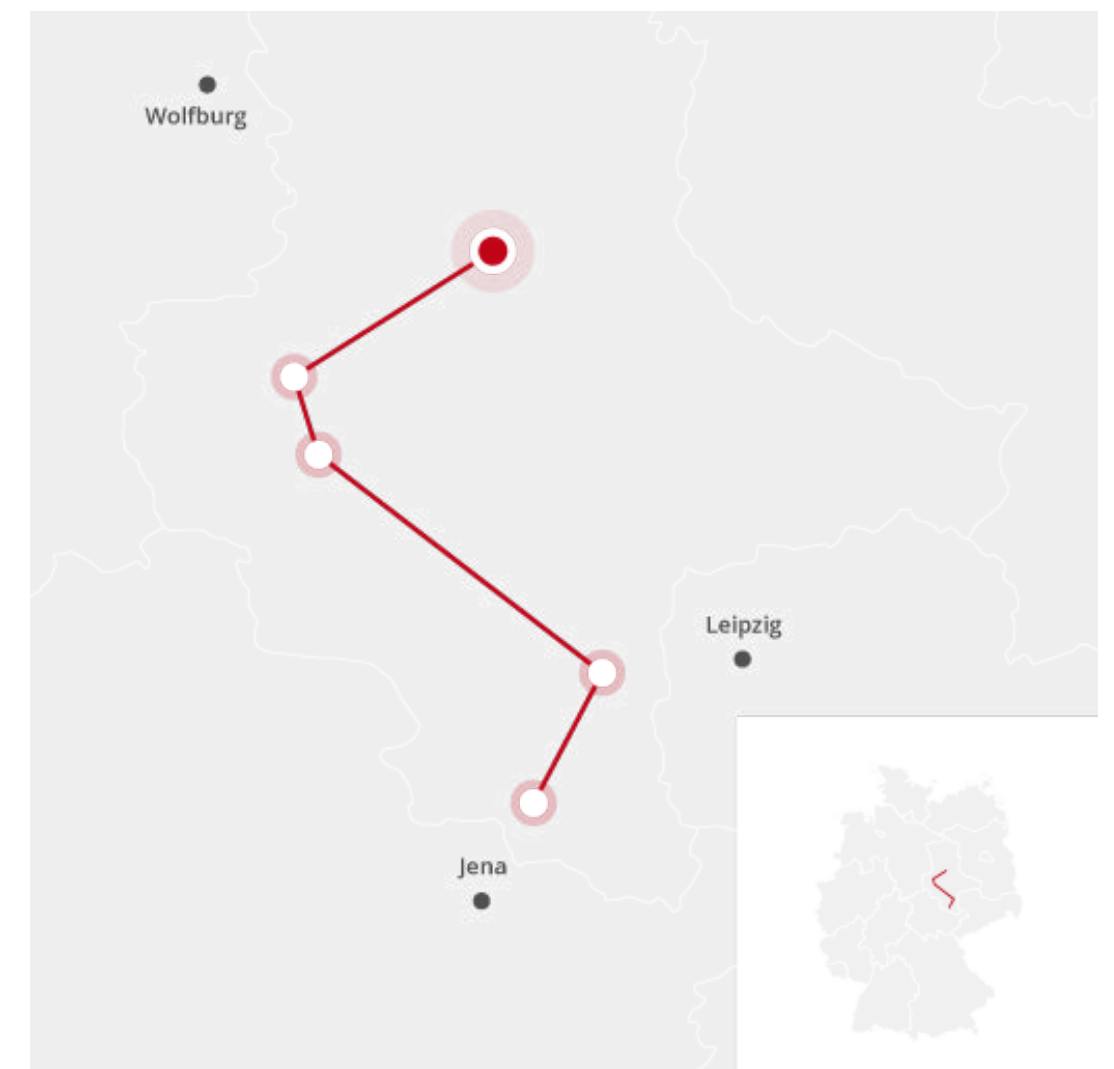
# Art Museum in the Monastery of Our Lady, Magdeburg

Credit: Photo: © GNTB/Francesco Carovillano

Regarded as one of the most important examples of Romanesque architecture in Germany, Magdeburg's Art Museum in the Monastery of Our Lady actually blends contemporary art and medieval architecture, thanks to a permanent, five-floor exhibition showcasing postwar international art.

The sculpture park surrounding the building is home to historical sculptures from antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the modern era—there's also a library that dates to 1638 and holds a collection of 22,000 books from the 15th to 20th centuries. The Georg Philipp Telemann concert hall, named after the famous Magdeburg-born Baroque composer, is also worth a peek.

[Click here for more info](#)





Stop 2 on Romanesque Route

# Cathedral of St. Stephen and St. Sixtus, Halberstadt

Built over a span of roughly 200 years—between 1236 and 1486—this soaring, monumental church was inspired by French cathedral architecture. The nave is an impressive 88 feet high, there are 290 stained-glass decorations to admire, and a few items have survived from the Romanesque era. (Look out for a baptismal marble font and a triumphal cross from around 1220.)

The cathedral also houses one of the most valuable church treasures in the world, with over 1,250 individual items of medieval art. Not just pottery here, either: The list includes a chip from the cross of Christ brought from Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade, immense tapestries that illustrate biblical stories, and a Byzantine bread bowl from the 11th century. (Well, some pottery.)

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Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/Bernd Meissner





Stop 3 on Romanesque Route

# St. Servatius Church, Quedlinburg

Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/photolike

The Collegiate Church of St. Servatius is one of the most important Romanesque buildings in Germany. Located in the UNESCO World Heritage City of Quedlinburg, it was founded in the early 10th century by the first German King, Henry I. And yet, despite its age, the monumental sandstone construction has a richly ornamental interior that's worth a moment's meditation.

The church is famous for its collection of medieval treasures, which range from sculptures, panel paintings, and jewelry to oriental crystal art. Note the biblical words of King Solomon in the ceiling frescoes in the crypt, which also has the oldest relief tomb slabs found in Germany.

[Click here for more info](#)





Stop 4 on Romanesque Route

# Merseburg Cathedral

Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/Bildagentur Zoonar GmbH

Merseburg's Cathedral St. Johannes and St. Laurentius—as it's officially known—is set on the River Saale, nine miles south of Halle in Saxony-Anhalt. The first stones for its construction were laid by Henry II and Cunigunde (his wife) around 1,000 years ago; renovations between 1510 and 1517 transformed the cathedral into a late Gothic structure and, soon afterward in 1545, Martin Luther preached here.

The interior contains remarkable Gothic and Renaissance features, including a 12th-century monolithic baptismal font made of red sandstone and a 500-year-old royal crypt, as well as several original altars. The chapter buildings house a library that includes a copy of the Merseburg Bible from around 1200, and there's a three-wing Renaissance castle next door to explore.

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Stop 5 on Romanesque Route

# Naumburg Cathedral

Credit: Photo: © Saale-Unstrut-Tourismus e.V./Transmedial

Naumburg Cathedral, located about an hour west of Leipzig, became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2018—a long wait for a building that dates back to 1029. And while a part of the cathedral crypt, constructed around 1170, is the only room to have survived that earlier era intact, it's still absolutely worth a stop on this route.

Among the highlights of the interior are life-size sculptures of the founders of the cathedral, including a statue of Uta von Ballenstedt—the “most beautiful woman in medieval Europe.” The cathedral treasury is housed in a large Romanesque vaulted cellar off the cloister and features Middle Age and Renaissance objects, like paintings and liturgical books. The pleasant, pond-dotted garden behind the cathedral is good for a stroll, too.

[Click here for more info](#)





# Romantic Road

## Route 6 5 Stops

The [Romantic Road](#) is less about getting cozy with a special someone and more about the finer indulgences of life: art, festivals, good food, fine wine, palaces, castles, cobbled streets, and well-preserved beauty. On this 250-mile trip from Würzburg to Füssen, your job is simply to enjoy.



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Stop 1 on Romantic Road

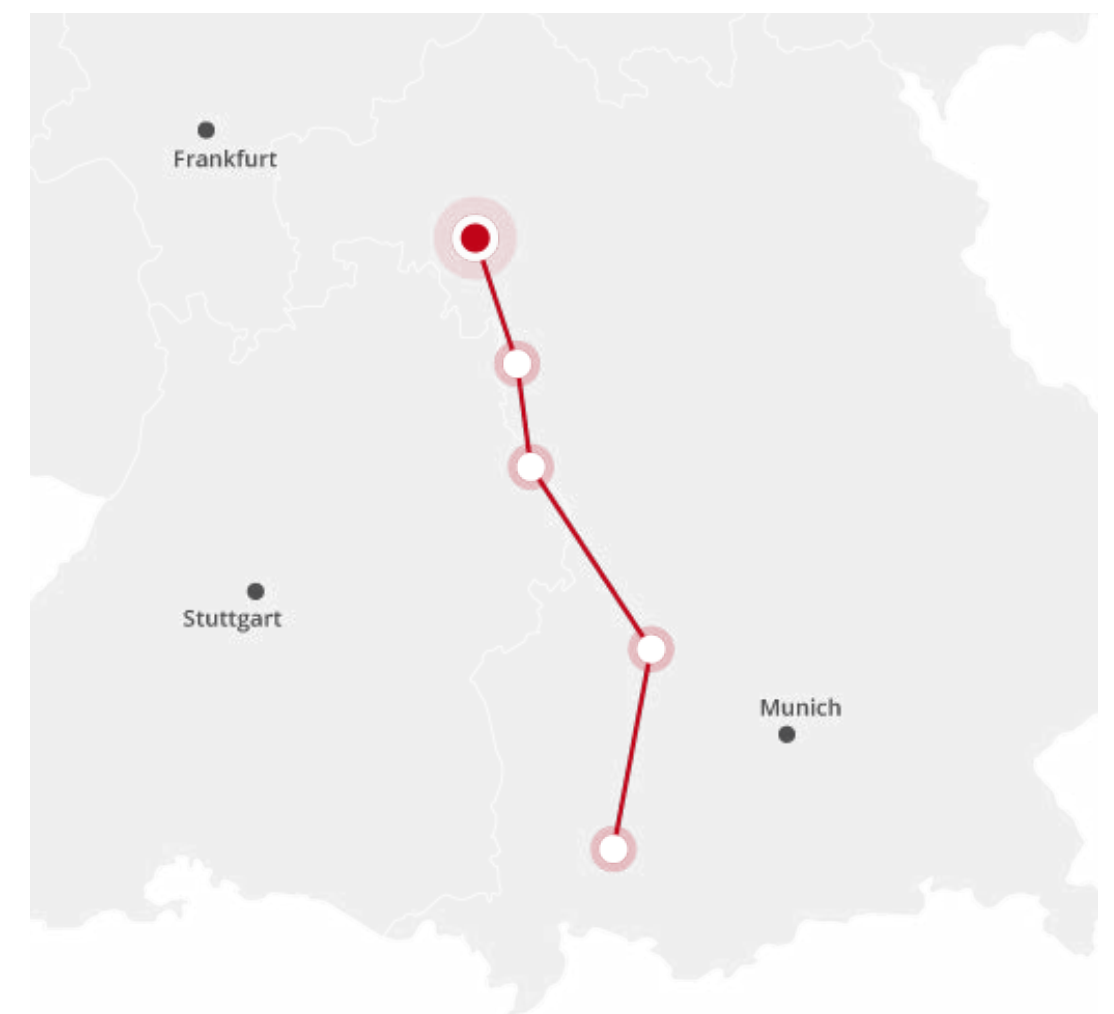
# Würzburg Residenz

Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/Scirocco340

Würzburg Residenz is one of the most important Baroque palaces in Europe. Built for Prince-Bishop Johann Philipp Franz von Schönborn by the (subsequently) renowned architect Balthasar Neumann, its exterior—created by leading architects from Germany and France but also artists, sculptors, and woodcarvers from Italy—was constructed between 1720 and 1744, with the interior completed in 1780.

Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981, its many highlights include the White, Imperial, and Garden Halls; the Mirror Cabinet; and the grand staircase and frescoed ceiling by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, the most-touted fresco painter of the 18th century.

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Stop 2 on Romantic Road

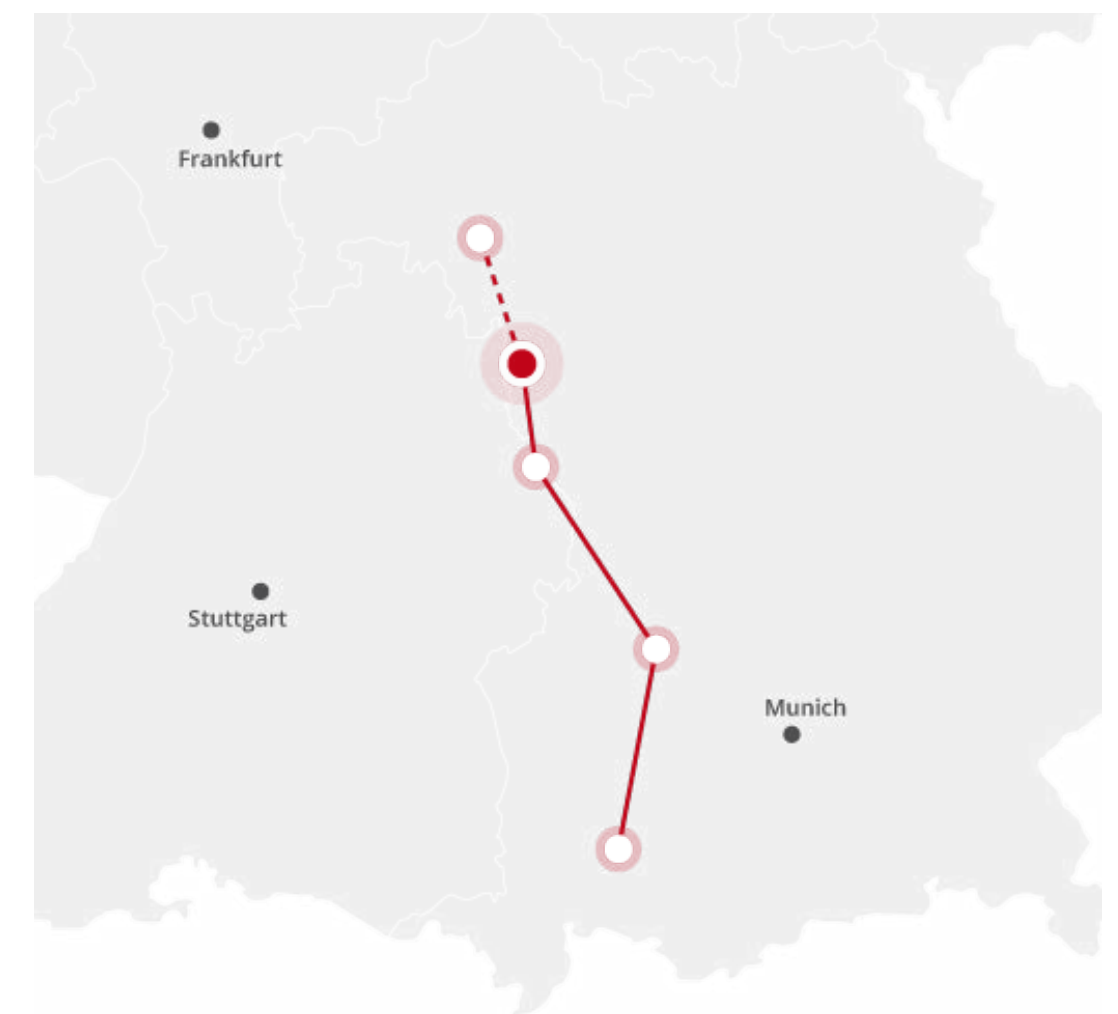
# Rothenburg ob der Tauber

Credit: Photo: Shutterstock/Boris Stroujko

One of the distinctive highlights of the Romantic Road in terms of towns—along with Dinkelsbühl and Nördlingen to the south—is Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Its medieval walls, dating from the 1100s, contain a slew of beautiful half-timbered buildings and cobbled alleyways. Well-preserved gatehouses and towers, like the medieval Town Hall, turn historic views into memorable panoramas.

St. Jakobskirche, which rises dramatically over the city, is home to numerous invaluable treasures, like the Holy Blood Altar by Tilman Riemenschneider. The Imperial City Museum, located in a former Dominican monastery, hosts the impressive Baumann Foundation, which tells the history of weapons in Europe from the Stone Age up to the 19th century.

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Stop 3 on Romantic Road

# Dinkelsbühl

Credit: Photo: © GNTB/Thomas Linkel

This former imperial town has an idyllic setting in the lovely Wörnitz Valley, about an hour west of Nuremberg. A little less touristy than some of the other Romantic Road towns, it has some major draws—including the Weinmarkt, with its cobbled streets, quaint gabled houses, and 15th-century Deutsches Haus. Book a room there if you can: Once the residence of the Counts of Drechsel-Deufstetten, the Deutsches Haus is now a hotel and restaurant. Its intricately carved facade of the planets and gods is still stunning, hundreds of years later.

Don't miss the gothic St. George's Church, constructed in the 15th century. It has a treasure trove of artwork and interior stylings, including six altars and a tabernacle each some 600 years old.

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Stop 4 on Romantic Road

# Fuggerei, Augsburg

Credit: Photo: © GNTB/Francesco Carovillano

One of Bavaria's oldest cities, Augsburg is also one of its most charming, thanks largely to its UNESCO-listed town center and its network of waterways. With over 500 bridges of differing shapes and sizes, it puts even Venice to shame.

While you should definitely wander the waterways, you might be here to see the "Fuggerei," the oldest social housing complex in the world, built between 1514 and 1523. Located near the Rathausplatz, the handsome array of vine-clad houses, with their colorful tiles and window shutters, still accommodate around 150 people who can't afford normal rented accommodation. Even today, they pay less than a euro per month.

Note: The Fugger and Welser Museum offers more details about the origins and development of the Fugger family, once the world's richest.

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Stop 5 on Romantic Road

# Neuschwanstein Castle

Credit: Photo: © GNTB/Francesco Carovillano

If there's one German castle that takes the tourist cake, it's this one. Inspired by the flamboyant-for-the-times Wartburg Castle and his former palace at Hohenschwangau, Ludwig II demanded Neuschwanstein be built to his dramatic tastes. But the king of Bavaria wouldn't get the chance to enjoy his fairytale: Construction began in 1867 and finished abruptly in 1886 when Ludwig died in mysterious circumstances on Lake Starnberg. Only 14 of the proposed 200+ rooms were completed, and many remain unfinished to this day.

The castle—in Füssen, on the border with Austria—is now one of Germany's most-visited sites, thanks to its spectacular construction, well-maintained and elaborately decorated rooms, and famously scenic bridge. The Disney logo doesn't hurt, either.

Tip: Linderhof Palace, another dazzling Ludwig residence, is less than 10 miles away; Chiemsee—one of Germany's most scenic lakes, about two hours distant—is home to yet another unfinished Ludwig showpiece, Herrenchiemsee Palace.

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