

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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Stop 1 on German Half-Timbered Houses Route

Stade

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.

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Stop 2 on German Half-Timbered Houses Route

Hoppener Haus, Celle

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.

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Stop 3 on German Half-Timbered Houses Route

Harz Region

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.

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Stop 4 on German Half-Timbered Houses Route

Esslingen

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.

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Stop 5 on German Half-Timbered Houses Route

Meersburg

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.

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