

Rhineland-Palatinate & Saarland



The state of Rhineland-Palatinate (Rheinland-Pfalz), patched together by the French after WWII, united historically disparate bits of Bavaria, Hesse and Prussia that had only one thing in common – the Rhine (Rhein). The river meanders for 1390km from the Swiss Alps to Rotterdam, but nowhere else has it shaped the land and its people more profoundly than along the 290km stretch traversing Rhineland-Palatinate.

Some of Europe's largest corporations dominate the banks of the Rhine south of Mainz, the state capital. But along here there's also a grand legacy of the Middle Ages: the magnificent Romanesque cathedrals of Mainz, Worms and Speyer. Northwest of Mainz is the river's most picturesque stretch, the storied Romantic Rhine, whose vine-clad slopes, medieval hilltop castles and snug wine villages have drawn artists and tourists since the early 19th century.

Most of Germany's wine is grown in Rhineland-Palatinate's six wine regions: the Ahr Valley, Moselle-Saar-Ruwer, Middle Rhine, Nahe, Rheinhessen and, famed for its German Wine Road, the Rheinpfalz. The region's wines can all be sampled in a multitude of ambience-laden wine taverns. The local people's *joie de vivre* finds expression in the many wine festivals.

Tiny Saarland, in the southwest, was once a centre for heavy industry but these days it's better known for Saarbrücken's Frenchified urbane charms, and its verdant forests and fields – ideal for hiking and cycling.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Romantic Rhine** Cruise, cycle or ramble along the castle-studded Rhine (p499) between Koblenz and Bingen
- **Roman Relics** Explore the remarkable ruins of Roman Trier (p514)
- **Imperial Cathedrals** Marvel at the Romanesque cathedrals in Mainz (p484), Worms (p488) and Speyer (p490)
- **Five Rivers on Two Wheels** Cycle the Moselle, Saar, Kyll, Ruwer and Sauer Rivers from Trier (p517)
- **Floor It** Take a high-speed spin around the Nürburgring race track (p498)
- **Rusty, Not Rustic** Admire colourful art inside the Saarland's historic Völklinger Hütte ironworks (p525) in Völklingen

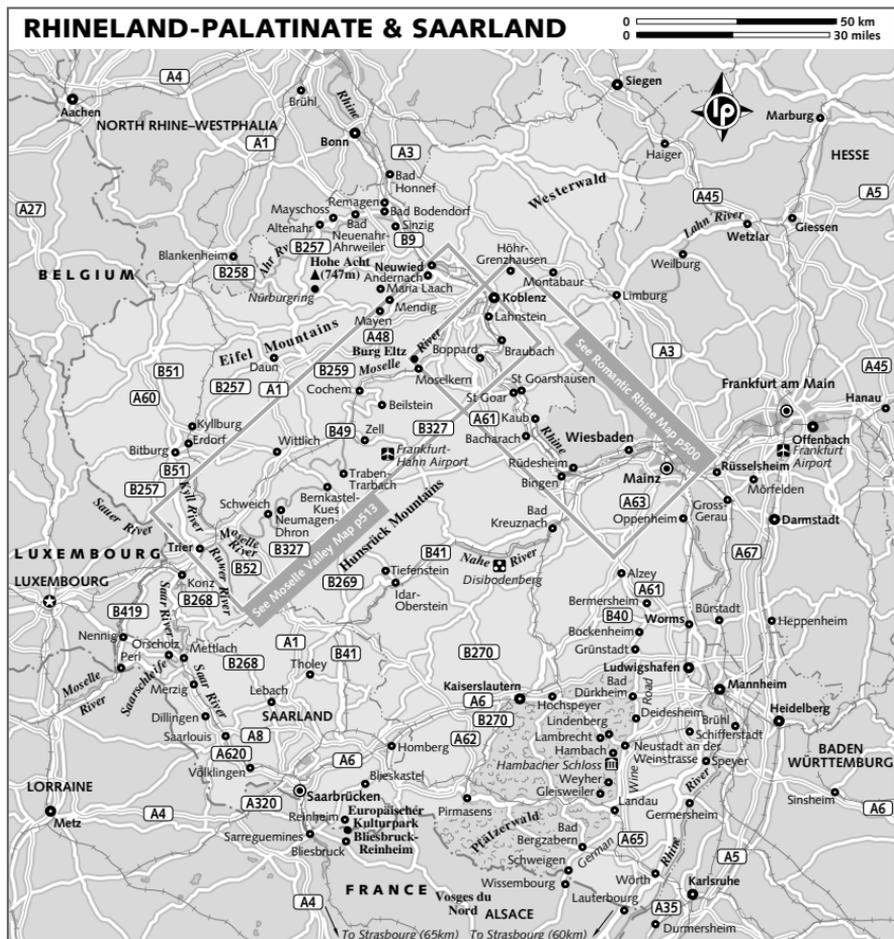


■ RHINELAND-PALATINATE POPULATION: 4 MILLION

■ RHINELAND-PALATINATE AREA: 19,853 SQ KM

■ SAARLAND POPULATION: 1.04 Million

■ SAARLAND AREA: 2569 SQ KM



Getting There & Away

People complain that **Frankfurt-Hahn Airport** (airport code HHN; ☎ 06543-509 200; www.hahn-airport.de, www.flyhahn.com), a Ryanair hub, is misleadingly named because it's nowhere near Frankfurt, and they have a point. But it *is* near many of the places covered in this chapter and is linked by bus to destinations including Bingen, Cochem, Idar-Oberstein, Koblenz (bus 610; €14, 65 minutes, six daily), Mainz (€11, 70 minutes, 14 daily), Trier (stops at Nells Park; see www.flibco.com for details; online as cheap as €5, about one hour, 20 daily), Saarbrücken (see www.scherer-reisen.de for details; €16, eight daily) and Worms. Details are available at www.hahn-airport.de – click 'Getting There' and then 'By Bus'.

The *real* Frankfurt Airport (p542) is linked by easy public transport to places such as Mainz, Worms, Speyer, the German Wine Road (be prepared to transfer a few times) and some of the Romantic Rhine villages, especially right-bank ones served by direct trains from Wiesbaden.

Getting Around

With the **Rheinland-Pfalz-Ticket** (RP-Ticket; adult/group of up to 5 €19/27), you can take any regional train (RE, IRE, RB and S-Bahn), tram, intercity bus or local bus anywhere within Rhineland-Palatinate and the Saarland for a full day – from 9am to 3am Monday to Friday and for the entire day on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. On some rail routes it