North Rhine–Westphalia

With a population greater than that of Austria and Switzerland combined, North Rhine–Westphalia feels almost like a country unto itself. Cobbled together in 1946 by the Allies from two Prussian provinces and a little fiefdom called Lippe-Detmold, it harbours within its boundaries flat, windswept expanses and forested hills high enough to hold onto snow during winter. Villages sweetly lost in time contrast with frenzied metropolises habitually on fast forward. There are places whose looks have remained largely unchanged since the Middle Ages and others fashioned completely from scratch in the wake of WWII. And through it all carves the muscular Rhine, fed by tributaries such as the Ruhr that gave an entire region its name.

The industrial age shaped North Rhine–Westphalia more than any other German region. For a hundred years, coal and steel fuelled the growth of Germany into one of Europe’s most powerful nations. But starting in the mid-1960s, lower demand forced the region to focus its energies elsewhere. And so it did, banking instead on high-tech, media, retail and culture.

Must-sees include Cologne with its lofty Dom (cathedral), Bonn with its Beethoven legacy and fabulous museums, the Unesco-listed baroque palaces in Brühl, and Charlemagne’s imperial capital of Aachen. The lively Ruhrgebiet and placid Lower Rhine are best for off-beat experiences. There are historical cities such as Münster, where the treaty that ended the Thirty Years’ War was signed, and elegant ones such as Düsseldorf, the state capital. Paderborn and Soest are treasured for their churches and the Sauerland is the place to get your nature fix.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Sucker for Soccer** Find out why football is a religion in the Ruhrgebiet when attending a Schalke 04 match in Gelsenkirchen (p599) or Borussia Dortmund game in Dortmund (p596)
- **Heavenly Heights** Feel your spirit soar when faced with the majestic loftiness of Cologne’s Dom (cathedral; p569)
- **Regal Reception** Go behind the scenes of life at court on a tour of Schloss Augustusburg (p579) in Brühl
- **Miraculous Metamorphosis** See urban planning in the making at Cologne’s Rheinauhafen (p572)
- **Mine Madness** Experience a 21st-century spin on the industrial age at the Zeche Zollverein coal mine in Essen (p591)
- **Avant-Garde Art** Have your mind blown by cutting-edge exhibits in an old gas storage tower in Oberhausen (p597)

POPULATION: 18 MILLION | AREA: 34,080 SQ KM
Getting Around
There are several deals available for getting around North Rhine–Westphalia by public transport. The SchönerTagTicket buys one day of unlimited travel within the state from 9am to 3am the following day (midnight to 3am the next day on weekends). You can only use RE, RB and S-Bahn trains as well as buses, U-Bahn and trams. The ticket costs €25 for single travellers and €34 for groups of up to five people. There’s also the SchöneFahrtTicket (€16), which gives you two hours to make a one-way trip to anywhere within North Rhine–Westphalia. Tickets are available at vending machines; if purchased from the ticket office, a €2 surcharge applies.

DÜSSELDORF
☎ 0211 / pop 585,000
Düsseldorf, the state capital, dazzles with boundary-pushing architecture, zinging nightlife and an art scene to rival many larger cities. It’s a posh and modern city that seems all buttoned-up business at first glance: banking, advertising, fashion and telecommunications are among the fields that have made Düsseldorf one of Germany’s wealthiest cities. Yet all it takes is a few hours of bar-hopping around the Altstadt (old town), the historical quarter along the Rhine, to realise that locals have no problem letting their hair down once they shed those Armani jackets.