

# Lower Saxony



The second largest state after Bavaria in terms of physical size, Lower Saxony (Niedersachsen) is characterised by broad, sweeping landscapes and its strong historical ties with Great Britain and Russia. Although it lacks spectacular 'must sees', this part of Germany offers the traveller a rich potpourri of experiences and, especially in the far north around the coast, an opportunity to slow down and engage with the landscape and people.

The capital, Hanover, hosts the enormous communications show, CeBit, and has a handful of museums and historic gardens that offer a window to the past and present. Wolfsburg, east of Hanover, is the home of one of the world's most successful automobile models (the Volkswagen Beetle), has an unusually relaxed character, and also has Phaeno, a cutting-edge science centre. A visit to the archaeological site of a Roman defeat at Osnabrück's Varusschlacht, graphically illustrating a spectacular collision of Roman and Germanic cultures during classical times, will appeal to young and old.

Lower Saxony also serves up some very unexpected cultural attractions, like Osnabrück's Felix-Nussbaum-Haus, an early example of the striking architecture of the American Daniel Libeskind, or historic towns like Celle or 'rat-ridden' Hamelin (of 'Pied Piper' fame). Meanwhile, its coast, river plains, moor and heath lend themselves perfectly to cycling, in a landscape that, like its inhabitants, tends towards understatement. In how many places, however, can you say that you've walked to an island? Head north to where Deutschland meets the North Sea, and Lower Saxony offers that opportunity, too.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Open Stage** Carve your niche in Lower Saxony's entertainment scene at Göttingen's Nörgelbuff 'open stage' sessions (p647)
- **Quirky Old Town** Fall head over heels for the wobbly city of Lüneburg (p630)
- **Cycling Back in Time** Bicycle 15km from the Pied Piper's town of Hamelin to the Renaissance Schloss Hämelschenburg (p623)
- **Pilgrimage** Pay your respects to Anne Frank at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp (p629)
- **Green Haven** Admire the Niki de Saint Phalle Grotto at Hanover's Herrenhäuser Gärten (p613)
- **Slow Travel** Grab a bicycle or kayak and ride or paddle through East Frisia (p653), or walk to the East Frisian Islands (p656)



■ POPULATION: 8 MILLION

■ AREA: 47,613 SQ KM

## HANOVER

☎ 0511 / pop 518,000

Fairly or not, Hanover tends to get a bad rap in Germany. Local comedians dismiss it as 'the Autobahn exit between Göttingen and Walsrode', it is reputed to have Germany's most boring parties, and when an Expo was held here about a decade back, even its spokesperson mused aloud about whether anyone would travel here if they had the choice.

To most of the world, Hanover is known for its huge CeBit information and communications technology fair, but the city also boasts acres of greenery and its spectacularly baroque Herrenhäuser Gärten (gardens) are a mini-Versailles, featuring a sparkly Niki de Saint Phalle Grotto. The compact centre, only partially reconstructed in a medieval style after WWII bombing, is adjoined to the east by the Eilenreide forest, and you can enjoy some good museums en route to the southern lake Maschsee.

## History

Hanover was established around 1100 and became the residence of Heinrich der Löwe (p33) later that century. An early Hanseatic city, by the Reformation it had developed into a prosperous seat of royalty and a power unto itself.

Notably, it has links with Britain through a series of marriages. In 1714 the eldest son of Electress Sophie of Hanover, a granddaughter of James I of England (James VI of Scotland), ascended the British throne as George I while simultaneously ruling Hanover. This British-German union lasted until 1837.

In 1943, up to 80% of the centre and 50% of the entire city was destroyed by Allied bombing. The rebuilding plan included creating sections of reconstructed half-timbered houses and painstakingly rebuilding the city's prewar gems, such as the Opernhaus (Opera House), the Marktkirche and the Neues Rathaus (New Town Hall).

A little known fact is that the excuse given by the Nazis to launch their nationwide pogrom against Germany's Jews on 9 November 1938 (see the boxed text, p42) had a Hanover connection. When Jews of Polish origin were deported from Hanover in October that year, Herschel Grünspan, a relative of one deported family, assassinated a German diplomat in Paris, which was seized by Nazis as a pretence to begin a pogrom.

## Orientation

The Hauptbahnhof (central train station) is located on the northeastern edge of the city centre. The centre contains one of the largest pedestrianised areas in Germany, focusing on Georgstrasse and Bahnhofstrasse. Bahnhofstrasse heads southwest from the Hauptbahnhof, and Georgstrasse runs west-east from Steintor via the Kröpcke square to Georgplatz. There's a subterranean shopping strip running below Bahnhofstrasse, from the Hauptbahnhof to just south of Kröpcke, called the Niki de Saint Phalle Promenade.

The Herrenhäuser Gärten are situated about 4km northwest of the city centre. The Messegelände, the main trade fairgrounds, are in the city's southeast (see the boxed text, p618).

## Information

### DISCOUNT CARDS

**HannoverCard** (1/3 days €9.60/16) Available from the tourist office, this card offers unlimited public transport and discounted admission to museums etc. Group tickets for five are available, too.

### EMERGENCY

**Medical emergency service** (☎ 314 044)

**Police** (☎ 110; Raschplatz) Beneath the overpass on the north side of the Hauptbahnhof.

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Teleclick Hannover** (☎ 763 5201; Kurt-Schumacher-Strasse 11; per hr €1.80; ☎ 9am-11pm) Comfortable place with Skype and telephones, plus muffins and coffee.

### LAUNDRY

**Wasch-Treff** (cnr Friesenstrasse & Eichstrasse; per wash €3.50; ☎ 6am-11pm) Conveniently opposite this laundry is an organic bakery-cafe.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Hospital** (☎ 304 31; Marienstrasse 37)

### MONEY

**Reisebank** (☎ 322 704; Hauptbahnhof; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-10pm Sun) ATMs plus currency exchange services, inside the station.

### POST

**Post office** (Ernst-August-Platz 2; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat) Inside the Ernst-August-Galerie.