



Cologne & Northern Rhineland

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Why Go?

Cologne's iconic Dom has twin towers that might as well be twin exclamation points after the word 'welcome'. Flowing behind the cathedral, the Rhine River provides a vital link for some of the region's highlights: Düsseldorf, with its great nightlife and fabulous shopping, and Bonn, which has retained its air of Cold War mystery. Away from the river, Aachen still echoes with the beat of the Holy Roman Empire and Charlemagne.

Much of Germany's 20th-century economic power stemmed from the Northern Rhineland industrial region known as the Ruhrgebiet. Now cities such as Essen are transforming old steelworks and coal mines into cultural centres and more, Dortmund is embracing its amazing football record and literally scoring with it, while ancient Münster is a hive of students on bikes day and night, making it endlessly interesting and vibrant.

When to Go

Sure it's cold in December but Cologne's Christmas market will warm you up. And then just a couple of months later, the city's Carnival is one of Europe's best. Although the region has plenty of beer gardens and restaurants that delight in the warm weather, much of what's best happens indoors so you really can visit any time. The best reason to come in summer might be for walks along the Rhine, hikes in the Eifel National Park or partying in Münster's parks.

The Region's Beers

- » **Kölsch** From Cologne and unlike any other beer in Germany. It's light, clear, hoppy and slightly sweet.
- » **Altbier** Düsseldorf's special: a dark, hoppy beer that's just slightly heavy.
- » **Pinkus Müller** A fabulous microbrewery in Münster, with a splendid range of seasonal beers.

DON'T MISS

What may be most rewarding about your trip to Cologne and the surrounding region are the surprises. In the big city itself, you may be trying to get your jaw back in place for days after seeing the incredible Roman mosaics in Cologne's **Römisch-Germanisches Museum**.

Equally lavish but 1700 years newer, are the over-the-top **Brühl Palaces** in their namesake town. Just up the Rhine, Bonn has a wonderful trip down memory lane to when it was the capital of West Germany. The **Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland** recalls a time when you could expect a spy to be lurking around every corner. Also in Bonn, where better to hear the works of local-boy-made-good Beethoven than in the concert hall named after him, **Beethovenhalle**.

Vast amounts of wealth have been produced in the region and it has gone to funding such cultural heavyweights as Düsseldorf's **Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen**, which is three art museums in one.

In the once-mighty industrial Ruhr region, the Ruhrgebiet, you can easily spend a day at the Unesco-recognised **Zollverein** near Essen. A vast coal mine and coke-producing plant has been turned into an adventureland of museums, galleries and more. Just up the road, you can get a sense of the sweat that helped make the region what it is at the restored **Zollern Colliery** near Dortmund.

Regional Train Passes

There are several deals available for getting around Cologne and the surrounding state of 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 €27 for single travellers and €37.50 for groups of up to five people.

ON YOUR KNEES

If you need to repent, consider these churches:

- » Kölner Dom (Cologne)
- » Münster Basilica (Bonn)
- » Dom (Aachen)
- » Dom St Paul (Münster)
- » St Patrokli (Soest)

Fast Facts

- » Population: 17.8 million (North Rhine-Westphalia)
- » Area: 34,080 sq km (North Rhine-Westphalia)

Score!

The region is football mad, as shown with:

- » Gelsenkirchen's hugely popular club FC Schalke 04
- » Dortmund's winning club Borussia
- » The 2014 opening of the German Football Museum in Dortmund.

Resources

- » Ruhr Tourismus (www.ruhr-tourismus.de)
- » Industrial Heritage Trail (www.route-industrie.kultur.de)
- » 100 Schlösser Route (www.100-schloesser-route.de)
- » Route Charlemagne Information Centre (www.route-charlemagne.eu)