



Lower Saxony & Bremen

POP 8.46 MILLION / AREA 47,960 SQ KM

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Why Go?

In terms of size, the two German states of Lower Saxony and Bremen could not be more of a contrast. Lower Saxony is the largest German state after Bavaria and, outside its capital Hanover (Hannover), a patchwork of interesting regional centres each of a few hundred thousand inhabitants or less. Museums even in these smaller places are excellent, encouraging a stopover of a day or two for exploration. Outside the cities, the coast, river plains, tidal flats, moors and heath of Lower Saxony lend themselves perfectly to cycling or walking.

Bremen, the smallest of the German states, brings together culture and nightlife in a compact but lively format. Within minutes, you can explore an unusual expressionist street, move on to a quaint district of winding medieval lanes and continue to an alternative student quarter via a small but interesting 'museum mile'. Meanwhile, the port of Bremerhaven offers extraordinary insight into the region's seafaring tradition.

When to Go

Because Lower Saxony and Bremen are located in a lowlands region without mountains for winter sports, there are few outdoor advantages to travelling the region in winter. Expect some grey weather or even double-digit subzero temperatures in a cold year. Winter, however, is a good time to visit the museums, galleries and theatres of this region. From April to September, life moves outdoors and temperatures are high enough to cycle and hike comfortably, walk the Wadden Sea (tidal flats), visit the East Frisian Islands or enjoy picnics and outdoor eating.

HANOVER & THE EAST

The state capital of Hanover forms the urban hub of this region, which reaches out into towns such as Braunschweig and Wolfenbüttel, and to Wolfsburg – the headquarters of Volkswagen vehicle manufacturing. Towns like Celle and Hildesheim can easily be visited on day trips from Hanover. This region dissolves in the east into Brandenburg, and beyond that into Berlin, which is only two hours by train from Hanover and can be reached within an hour from Wolfsburg.

Hanover

0511 / POP 522,700

Lacking the high profile of the Hanse city states Hamburg and Bremen to its north, Hanover (Hannover in German) is perhaps best known for its CeBit information and communications technology fair. Less well-known but buried deep within its identity is a British connection – for over 100 years from the early 18th century, monarchs from the house of Hanover also ruled Great Britain and everything that belonged to the British Empire. Perhaps it's this paradox – of being an incredibly influential part of something much larger than itself – that makes Hanover's character so difficult to pin down. Perhaps it belongs to the character of the Hanoverians and this lowlands region (the so-called *Tiefebene*) to be so low-key about such a powerful history.

As well as having its huge CeBit and providing monarchs that ruled half the world for some time, Hanover has acres of greenery and its spectacularly baroque Herrenhäuser Gärten (gardens), which is a mini Versailles. The compact centre, partially reconstructed in a medieval style after WWII bombing, is complemented in the east by the Eilenreide forest, and you can enjoy some good museums – and some football culture at Hanover's stadium – en route to the southern lake Maschsee.

History

Hanover was established around 1100 and became the residence of Heinrich der Löwe (p720) later that century. An early Hanseatic city, by the Reformation it had developed into a prosperous seat of royalty and a power unto itself.

A link was created with the monarchy of Britain in 1714, when 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).

Sights & Activities

The city has painted a *Roter Faden* (red line) on pavements around the centre. Follow it with the help of the multilingual *Red Thread Guide* (€2.50), available from the tourist office, for a quick 4.2km, do-it-yourself tour of the city's 36 highlights.

CENTRE

 **Sprengel Museum** MUSEUM
(www.sprengel-museum.de; Kurt-Schwitters-Platz; adult/concession €7/4, Fri free; ☺10am-6pm Wed-Sun, to 8pm Tue) The Sprengel Museum is held in extremely high esteem, both for the design of the building as well as for the art housed inside. Its huge interior spaces are perfectly suited to displaying its modern figurative, abstract and conceptual art, including a few works by Nolde, Chagall and Picasso. At the core of the collection are 300 works by the artist Niki de Saint Phalle, a selection of which is usually on show. Take bus 100 from Kröpcke to the Maschsee/Sprengel Museum stop.

Neues Rathaus HISTORIC BUILDING
(Map p602; Trammplatz 2; elevator adult/concession €3/2; ☺9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6.30pm Sat & Sun, elevator closed mid-Nov–Mar) An excellent way to get your bearings in Hanover is to visit the Neues Rathaus (built in 1901–13) and travel 98m to the top in the **curved lift** inside its green dome. There are four viewing platforms here. The cabin can take only five people at a time, so queues are inevitable in summer.

In the downstairs lobby are four **city models** showing Hanover from the Middle Ages to today.

Maschsee LAKE
(www.uestra-reisen.de; Rudolf-von-Bennigsen-Ufer; adult/child full tour €6/3, half-tour €3/1.50) This artificial lake, built by the unemployed in one of the earliest Nazi-led public-works