



Cologne & Northern Rhineland

POP 17.8 MILLION (NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA)

Includes ➔

Cologne	463
Bonn	479
Aachen	486
Düsseldorf	492
Essen	506
Münster	512
Osnabrück	518

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Salon Schmitz (p474)
- ➔ Altes Gasthaus Leve (p517)
- ➔ Bistrot B (p474)
- ➔ Münstermann Kontor (p499)
- ➔ Holstein's Bistro (p517)

Best Museums

- ➔ Römisch-Germanisches Museum (p471)
- ➔ Beethoven-Haus Bonn (p479)
- ➔ Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (p493)
- ➔ Museum Folkwang (p507)
- ➔ Felix-Nussbaum-Haus (p519)

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 hums to Beethoven. Away from the river, Aachen still echoes to the beat of the Holy Roman Empire and Charlemagne.

Much of Germany's 20th-century economic might 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. 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 with warm-weather tables, much of what's best happens indoors so you really can visit at 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.

COLOGNE

📍 0221 / POP 1 MILLION

Cologne (Köln) offers seemingly endless attractions, led by its famous cathedral whose filigree twin spires dominate the skyline. It's regularly voted the country's single most popular tourist attraction. The city's museum landscape is especially strong when it comes to art, but also has something in store for fans of chocolate, sports and even Roman history. Its people are well known for their liberalism and *joie de vivre*, and it's easy to have a good time right along with them year-round in the beer halls of the Altstadt (old town) or during the springtime Carnival.

Cologne is like a 3D textbook on history and architecture. Drifting about town you'll stumble upon an ancient Roman wall, medieval churches galore, nondescript postwar buildings, avant-garde structures and even a new postmodern quarter right on the Rhine. Germany's fourth-largest city was founded by the Romans in 38 BC and given the lofty name *Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium*. It grew into a major trading centre, a tradition it solidified in the Middle Ages and continues to uphold today.

👁 Sights

Plan on at least a couple days to explore Cologne's wealth of sights. The city maintains an excellent website (www.museenkoeln.de) with info on most of Cologne's museums. The **MuseumsCard** (per person/family €18/30) includes most of the museums and is good for two consecutive days.

👁 Altstadt

The Altstadt hugs the river bank between two bridges, Hohenzollernbrücke and Deutzer Brücke. You can spend half a day or more just strolling and soaking it in. Cologne's medieval heyday is reflected in its wealth of Romanesque churches, which were constructed between 1150 and 1250, and survived largely intact until WWII. About a dozen have been rebuilt since and offer many unique architectural and artistic features. Even if you're pushed for time, try seeing at least a couple of the ones mentioned here.

See www.romanische-kirchen-koeln.de for good info on all the churches.

★ Kölner Dom

(Cologne Cathedral; 📍 0211-1794 0200; www.koelner-dom.de; tower adult/concession €4/2; 🕒 6am-

9pm May-Oct, to 7.30pm Nov-Apr, tower 9am-6pm May-Sep, to 5pm Mar-Apr & Oct, to 4pm Nov-Feb) Cologne's geographical and spiritual heart – and its single-biggest tourist draw – is the magnificent Kölner Dom. With its soaring twin spires, this is the Mt Everest of cathedrals, jam-packed with art and treasures. For an exercise fix, climb the 533 steps up the Dom's south tower to the base of the steeple that dwarfed all buildings in Europe until Gustave Eiffel built a certain tower in Paris. The underground Domforum visitor centre is a good source of info and tickets.

The Dom is Germany's largest cathedral and must be circled to truly appreciate its dimensions. Note how its lacy spires and flying buttresses create a sensation of lightness and fragility despite its mass and height.

This sensation continues inside, where a phalanx of pillars and arches supports the lofty nave. Soft light filters through the medieval stained-glass windows as well a much-lauded recent window by contemporary artist Gerhard Richter in the transept. A kaleidoscope of 11,500 squares in 72 colours, Richter's abstract design has been called a 'symphony of light'. In the afternoon especially, when the sun hits it just so, it's easy to understand why.

The *pièce de résistance* among the cathedral's bevy of treasures is the Shrine of the Three Kings behind the main altar; a richly bejewelled and gilded sarcophagus said to hold the remains of the kings who followed the star to the stable in Bethlehem where Jesus was born. The bones were spirited out of Milan in 1164 as spoils of war by Emperor Barbarossa's chancellor and instantly turned Cologne into a major pilgrimage site.

Other highlights include the Gero Crucifix (970), notable for its monumental size and an emotional intensity rarely achieved in those early medieval days; the choir stalls from 1310, richly carved from oak; and the altar painting (c 1450) by Cologne artist Stephan Lochner.

During your climb up to the 95m-high viewing platform, take a breather and admire the 24-tonne Peter Bell (1923), the largest free-swinging working bell in the world.

To get more out of your visit, invest €1 in the information pamphlet or join a **guided tour** (adult/concession €8/6; 🕒 tours in English 10.30am & 2.30pm Mon-Sat, 2.30pm Sun Apr-Oct, less often other times).

Construction began in 1248 in the French Gothic style but proceeded slowly and was