



Bavaria

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Why Go?

From the cloud-shredding Alps to the fertile Danube plain, the Free State of Bavaria is a place that keeps its clichéd promises. Story-book castles bequeathed by an oddball king poke through dark forest, cowbells tinkle in flower-filled meadows, the thwack of palm on lederhosen accompanies the clump of frothy stein on timber bench, and medieval walled towns go about their time-warped business.

But diverse Bavaria offers much more than the chocolate-box idyll. Learn about Bavaria's state-of-the-art motor industry in Ingolstadt, discover its Nazi past in Nuremberg and Berchtesgaden, sip world-class wines in Würzburg, get on the Wagner trail in Bayreuth or seek out countless kiddy attractions across the state. Destinations are often described as possessing 'something for everyone', but in Bavaria's case this is no exaggeration.

And, whatever you do in Germany's southeast, every occasion is infused with that untranslatable feel-good air of *Gemütlichkeit* (cosiness) that makes exploring the region such an easygoing experience.

When to Go

A winter journey along an off-season, tourist-free Romantic Road really sees the snow-bound route live up to its name. Come the spring, tuck into some seasonal fare as Bavaria goes crazy for asparagus during *Spargelzeit* (from late March). The summer months are all about the beer garden, and this is obviously the best time to savour the region's unsurpassed brews in the balmy, fairy-lit air. Autumn is the time to experience the dreamy haze of the Bavarian Forest and the bustle of Bavaria's cities, revived after the summer's time-out.

Fairy-Tale Castles

So just why do all those millions of visitors flock to Bavaria? If it's not for the beer then it's probably for the state's block-buster castles and palaces. King Ludwig II's Neuschwanstein is the one everyone wants to tick off their list of '1000 things to see before I die', but did you know that Bavaria's most flamboyant monarch built two other country piles – Linderhof and Herrenchiemsee? And he was planning more when he drowned in Lake Starnberg. Away from Ludwig's marvels, others hot properties not to miss are Würzburg's Residenz, Veste Coburg and Landshut's Burg Trausnitz.

BODY & SOUL

Whether it's snowboarding in the Alps, striking a trail through the Bavarian Forest, pedalling your way through a city-centre sightseeing tour, wild swimming in Lake Starnberg, canoeing in the Altmühltal Nature Park or trying your hand at river surfing, Bavaria is definitely a place to get carbed up and kitted out for. Bavaria certainly provides ample opportunities to work off those dumplings, but if fresh-air antics seem like too much hard work, you can always retreat to a spa, water park or swimming pool.

Essential Food & Drink

» **Beer** From the proud breweries of Bamberg to tiny one-man producers in rural Franconia, from a quick summer beer-garden thirst-quencher to the millions of litres consumed at Oktoberfest, beer plays a bigger cultural role in Bavaria than almost anywhere else on earth.

» **Sausages** Almost every town in Bavaria has its own take on the banger, from the famous digit-sized bratwurst of Nuremberg to the 30cm-long Coburg whopper. Add a bun and a squirt of mustard, and a couple of these makes a respectable meal on the hop.

» **Snowballs** Unless you end up surviving in the mountains, eating snowballs is an experience you'd want to avoid, but not in Rothenburg ob der Tauber. The local sweet – strips of dough ravelled into a ball then deep fried and sprinkled with something sweet – are best eaten smashed up in their bag.

» **Wine** German wine sometimes gets bad press, but you'll forget the sceptics when you sip a glass of Franconian red or white. The main vine-cultivating areas can be found around Würzburg, with the vineyards visible from the city centre.

DISCOUNT PASSES

Staying in the Alps? Make sure your hotel or guesthouse gives you a free *Gästekarte* (guest card), which often gives you free access to public transport and discounts on sights and attractions.

Need to Know

- » Many museums close on Mondays
- » Travelling by train? Get yourself a Bayern-Ticket for huge savings
- » Nuremberg is Bavaria's most engaging city for young children

Fast Facts

- » Population: 12.6 million
- » Area: 70,549 sq km

Resources

- » Bavarian Tourism Association (www.bayern.by)
- » Castles in Bavaria (www.schloesser.bayern.de)
- » State of Bavaria (www.bayern.de)
- » Train and bus timetables (www.bahn.de)