

welcome to Munich, Bavaria & the Black Forest



Southern Comfort

The Germans have a word, *Gemütlichkeit*, that untranslatable blend of cosiness, well-being and a laid-back attitude. Nowhere does this mood permeate deeper than in the prosperous south where fairy-lit beer gardens, Alpine views, medieval towns, rousing hilltop castles and many a red-faced village brass band awaits you. But there's another facet to *Gemütlichkeit*: it's also a marble-smooth autobahn of luxury cars speeding to gourmet restaurants and chic Alpine spas, Munich's high-brow cultural scene robed in black, and cappuccinos at dawn on intercity expresses. The two southern Germanys coexist, an incongruous mix packed with the unexpected.

Alpine Air & Munich Flair

Bavaria is definitely a place for those who prefer their air fresh rather than freshened. Though the Alps only tickle Germany's underbelly, locals know how to get the most out of their peaks, stringing cable cars up the vertical reality of the Alps; marking out entire atlases of cycling, hiking and cross-country skiing trails; even running a train up the inside of the Zugspitze, Germany's highest mountain. Yet all this is just a short ride from the urban *joie de vivre* of Munich, a sexy, sophisticated and self-confident city with a nonchalant, almost Mediterranean feel.



DOUG MCNORNAY/GETTY IMAGES

Hilltop castles and green energy, beer halls and luxury cars, Alpine peaks and cutting edge art – southern Germany blends thigh-slapping tradition with clear-headed modernity like nowhere else on earth.

(left) Traditional Bavarian house
(below) Munich fairground



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Of Cuckoo Clocks & Lederhosen

If you're coming here in search of strapping Alpine types in lederhosen, big-bosomed wenches juggling platters of roast pork, tipsy oompah bands and Hänsel-and-Gretel cottages, you'll be pleased to hear that Germany's south keeps all its clichéd promises. Nowhere is this truer than on the Romantic Road, a 350km-long route from Würzburg to the Alps stringing centuries' worth of quaint walled towns on a ribbon of history and tweeness. And if you think all the folksy fuss is just for the tourists you'd be wrong – many Bavarians turn out en masse for traditional festivals and celebrations in their lederhosen or dirndl.

King of the Castle

Southern Germany is also famed for its castles, from medieval fortresses to the 19th-century follies commissioned by Bavaria's most celebrated king, Ludwig II. Mad about Versailles (and some claim just plain mad) he 'single-handedly' launched Bavaria's tourist industry and even stirred Walt Disney with his story-book Neuschwanstein Castle. You could spend a month zig-zagging between sugary palaces, stuccoed baroque residences, wind-cracked Gothic ruins and vista-rich chateaux. Palace fatigue? Then there's nothing simpler in these parts than retreating to a cosy tavern and raising a tankard to this marvellous corner of Europe.