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Recent years have been pretty turbulent for most of the world. How was it for Germany's south?

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Cavorting consorts in royal chambers, a cuckoo king in his fairy-tale follies and a ranting Hitler in the beer hall – the south's history has been colourful to say the least.

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From cinema to religious art, from baroque architecture to Mozart, these parts pack a cultural punch to rival any place on earth.

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population per sq km



Munich, Bavaria & the Black Forest Today

It's the Economy, Stupid!

Even the most militant anti-capitalist might shut down Facebook and blow out the Molotov, just for a moment, to agree that Bavaria is a rampant success story of post-war free enterprise. Just one stat says it all – if Bavaria was an independent country (and not a small number of locals secretly wish it were), its economy would be the world's 19th largest (equally affluent Baden-Württemberg would rank around 22nd), bigger than Sweden or Austria and more than twice the size of neighbouring Czech Republic. Germany's economic California is cooking with gas, and probably on an eco-friendly stove of sturdy design, proudly stamped with *'Hergestellt in Bayern'* (Made in Bavaria). Even as it looked as though Germany's economy was losing momentum in late 2012, Bavaria and the rest of southern Germany still seemed like a pretty good investment.

So what underpins the south's economic triumph? Good 'ole manufacturing seems to be the 'secret', with a motor industry second to none leading the way. The most desirable names of the Teutonic luxury car world – BMW, Audi, Porsche and Mercedes – are all based in the south, pumping billions of euros into the economy and employing hundreds of thousands. Other local corporate behemoths include Siemens, Allianz, Grundig and Adidas.

Tourism also generates a solid chunk of the south's wealth. In 2010 Munich alone saw well over five million foreign guests crumple hotel bed sheets, and blockbuster sights such as Schloss Neuschwanstein and Regensburg's Unesco-listed city centre attract millions. Visitor numbers continue to swell with arrivals from the so-called BRIC countries responsible for a good share of the increases.

Fast Facts: Munich & Bavaria

- » Area: 70,549 sq km
- » Population: 12.6 million
- » GDP: €446 billion
- » Per capita income: €2650 per month (blue-collar), €3600 per month (white-collar)
- » Unemployment rate: 3.8%
- » Annual per capita beer consumption: 170L
- » Kilometres of autobahn: 2506
- » Museums: 1150

Top Books

Massacre in Munich: Manhunt for the Killers Behind the 1972 Olympics Massacre (Michael Bar Bar-Zohar and Eitan Haber, 2005) The title says it all really.

Lola Montez: A Life (Bruce Seymour, 1998) A superbly written account of the life of Bavaria's

most outrageous courtesan who brought down a king.

Ludwig II of Bavaria (Martha Schad, 2001) One of the most readable and compact biographies of Bavaria's most flamboyant monarch and available throughout the state.

Dos & Don'ts

- » In pubs and beer halls never sit at the *Stammtisch* (usually clearly marked) as this is permanently reserved for regular local drinkers.
- » Do emit a cheery *'Gruss Gott'* or *'Guten Morgen'* when entering