



Munich

📍 089 / POP 1.38 MILLION

Includes ➔

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Why Go?

The natural habitat of well-heeled power dressers and Lederhosen-clad thigh-slappers, Mediterranean-style street cafes and Mitteleuropa beer halls, highbrow art and high-tech industry, Germany's unofficial southern capital is a flourishing success story that revels in its own contradictions. If you're looking for Alpine clichés, they're all here, but the Bavarian metropolis has many an unexpected card down its Dirndl.

But whatever else this city is, it's popular. Statistics show Munich is enticing more visitors than ever, especially in summer and during Oktoberfest, when the entire planet seems to arrive to toast the town.

Munich's walkable centre retains a small-town air but holds some world-class sights, especially art galleries and museums. Throw in royal Bavarian heritage, an entire suburb of Olympic legacy and a kitbag of dark tourism, and it's clear why southern Germany's metropolis is such a favourite among those who seek out the past but like to hit the town once they're done.

When to Go

Lovers of German beer will find true happiness in Munich's beer halls during Stark Bier Zeit (strong beer season). This popular festival takes place for three weeks in February or March and is the time to sup the strong ale monks once brewed to sustain themselves through the Lenten fast.

September to October is the best time to amble in the Englischer Garten (English Garden) as its trees fire off an autumnal salute.

In December, pretty Marienplatz at the city's heart fills with Christmassy stalls, lights and enough yuletide cheer to share among its international gaggle of shoppers.

History

It was Benedictine monks, drawn by fertile farmland and the closeness to Catholic Italy, who settled in what is now Munich. The city derives its name from the medieval *Munichen* (monks). In 1158 the Imperial Diet in Augsburg sanctioned the rule of Heinrich der Löwe, and Munich the city was born.

In 1240 the city passed to the House of Wittelsbach, which would govern Munich (and Bavaria) until the 20th century. Munich prospered as a salt-trading centre but was hit hard by plague in 1349. The epidemic subsided only after 150 years, whereupon the relieved *Schäffler* (coopers) initiated a ritualistic dance to remind burghers of their good fortune. The *Schäfflertanz* is performed every seven years but is re-enacted daily by the little figures on the city's *Glockenspiel* (carillon) on Marienplatz.

By the 19th century an explosion of monument building gave Munich its spectacular architecture and wide Italianate avenues. Things got out of hand after King Ludwig II ascended the throne in 1864, as spending for his grandiose projects (such as Schloss Neuschwanstein south of Munich) bankrupted the royal house and threatened the government's coffers. Ironically, today they are the biggest money-spinners of Bavaria's tourism industry.

Munich has seen many turbulent times, but the 20th century was particularly bumpy. WWI practically starved the city to death, while the Nazis first rose to prominence here and WWII nearly wiped Munich off the map.

The 1972 Olympic Games began as a celebration of a new democratic Germany but ended in tragedy when 17 people were killed in a terrorist hostage-taking incident. In 2006 the city won a brighter place in sporting history when it hosted the opening game of the FIFA World Cup.

Today Munich's claim to being the 'secret capital' of Germany is well founded. The city is recognised for its high living standards – with more millionaires per capita than any other German city except Hamburg – and for haute couture that rivals that of Paris and Milan. Having celebrated its 850th birthday just short of a decade ago, this great metropolis is striding affluently forward into the 21st century.

Sights

Munich's major sights cluster around the Altstadt, with the main museum district just north of the Residenz. However, it will take another day or two to explore bohemian Schwabing, the sprawling Englischer Garten, and trendy Haidhausen to the east. Northwest of the Altstadt you'll find cosmopolitan Neuhausen, the Olympiapark and another of Munich's royal highlights – Schloss Nymphenburg.

Altstadt

Marienplatz

SQUARE

(Map p48; Marienplatz, Marienplatz) The epicentral heart and soul of the Altstadt, Marienplatz is a popular gathering spot and packs a lot of personality into a compact frame. It's anchored by the **Mariensäule** (Mary's Column; Map p48), built in 1638 to celebrate victory over Swedish forces during the Thirty Years' War. This is the busiest spot in all Munich, with throngs of tourists swarming across its expanse from early morning till late at night.

Neues Rathaus

HISTORIC BUILDING

(New Town Hall; Map p48; Marienplatz; Marienplatz) The soot-blackened façade of the neo-Gothic Neues Rathaus is festooned with gargoyles, statues and a dragon scaling the turrets; the tourist office is on the ground floor. For pinpointing Munich's landmarks without losing your breath, catch the lift up the 85m-tall **tower** (adult/concession €2.50/1; ☺ 10am–7pm daily).

The **Glockenspiel** (☺ 11am, noon, 5pm & 9pm) has 43 bells and 32 figures that perform two historical events. The top half tells the story of a tournament held in 1568 to celebrate the marriage of Duke Wilhelm V to Renata of Lothringen, while the bottom half portrays the *Schäfflertanz* (cooper's dance).

Frauenkirche

CHURCH

(Church of Our Lady; Map p48; www.muenchener-dom.de; Frauenplatz 1; ☺ 7am–7pm Sat–Wed, to 8.30pm Thu, to 6pm Fri; Marienplatz) The landmark Frauenkirche, built between 1468 and 1488, is Munich's spiritual heart and the Mt Everest among its churches. No other building in the central city may stand taller than its onion-domed twin towers, which reach a skyscraping 99m. The south tower can be