

Welcome to Munich, Bavaria & the Black Forest

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

Southern Comfort

The Germans have a word for it – *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 it awaits you in a region of fairy-lit beer gardens, Alpine views, medieval towns and rousing hilltop castles. 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 side-by-side, 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 sassy, sophisticated and self-confident city with a nonchalant, almost Mediterranean feel.

Cuckoo Clocks & Lederhosen

If you're in search of strapping Alpine types in Lederhosen, big-bosomed wenches juggling platters of pork, tipsy oompah bands and lanes of 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 along a ribbon of history and tweeness. And if you think the folksy fuss is just for the tourists you'd be wrong – many Bavarians keep a pair of Lederhosen or a Dirndl in their closets for special occasions.

King of the Castle

Southern Germany is 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 retreat to a cosy tavern and raise a tankard to this marvellous corner of Europe.



Why I Love Southern Germany

By Marc Di Duca, Writer

Is it the sap-scented hills and trails in forests Black and Bavarian, the Franconian beer and dark tourism of Nuremberg or the emotions stirred by the tragic Ludwig II story? Or is it a mildly envious admiration for southern Germany's knack of producing cars that work, the galleries packed with modern art or the awe I feel for the German intellect as I face yet another devilishly complex Deutsche Bahn ticket machine (perhaps not)? I suppose it's all the above and heaps more that have me returning time and again to this quirky yet level-headed chunk of Europe.

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Above: Geroldsee and Mt Karwendel (p102)