

Understand Munich, Bavaria & the Black Forest

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Recent years have been pretty turbulent for most of Europe.
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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There's more to southern Germany than sausages and beer.
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Munich, Bavaria & the Black Forest Today

A high-voltage economy and thigh-slapping traditions, green energy and the world's greatest luxury car industry, supermarkets of organic food, and sausages and beer for breakfast – southern Germany's contradictions continue to baffle outsiders. But what is clear is that the whole caboodle is based on three sound principles – a Bavarian electorate that has returned the same conservative-minded party to power every time since 1958, a focus on manufacturing and respect for the traditions of yesteryear.

Best in Print

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.

Best on Film

Sophie Scholl – The Final Days (Marc Rothmund, 2005) Extremely moving account of the capture, trial and execution of members of the White Rose anti-Nazi group.

Ludwig (Luchino Visconti, 1973) The reign of Ludwig II.

Hierankl (Hans Steinbichler, 2003) Family drama set against the backdrop of the Alps.

The Nasty Girl (Michael Verhoeven, 1990) A woman digging up her town's Nazi past gets more than she bargains for.

Normality Resumed

In September 2013 it was back to political business as usual following the *Landtagswahl* (regional election) which saw the Bavarian Christlich-Soziale Union (CSU) receive over 60% of the vote for the first time since 1998. This decade and a half represented the greatest period of political 'turmoil' experienced by the state since the early 1950s. The CSU was even forced to enter a coalition between 2008 and 2013 with the Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP), something it hadn't done since the early 1960s. But as the whole of Europe lurches to the right, the CSU is back with Bavarian prime minister Horst Seehofer at the helm.

It's the Economy, Stupid!

Even the most militant anti-capitalist might, just for a moment, agree that Bavaria is a rampant success story of postwar 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 powerhouse is cooking with gas, and probably on an ecofriendly stove of sturdy design, proudly stamped with 'Hergestellt in Bayern' (Made in Bavaria). Even after the slump in the euro and the Greek debt crisis, Germany's south still looks like one of the best investments in the world.

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