

Hesse



About two-thirds of Hesse's population lives in the Rhine-Main region, a sprawling urban conglomeration, with excellent integrated public transport, that stretches from Frankfurt am Main in the north to Darmstadt in the south and Mainz (in Rhineland-Palatinate) and Wiesbaden in the west. The attractive spa-city of Wiesbaden is Hesse's political capital, but Frankfurt, home of the European Central Bank, wields the financial clout.

Contrary to Hesse's rather staid image, Wiesbaden's parliament was where Green Party former foreign minister Joschka Fischer raised eyebrows by taking his ministerial oath wearing tennis shoes; and, in the 1960s and '70s, Frankfurt was a hotbed of student politics.

International Frankfurt, although a banking powerhouse, is also known for its excellent quality of life, leafy parkland, lively nightlife and streets lined with laid-back cafes and beer gardens. Although perhaps Germany's most un-German city, it is ironically the first contact many will have with the country thanks to the presence of Europe's third-busiest airport.

The northern part of Hesse has some splendid green areas to explore on foot and by bicycle, including the picturesque Lahn River valley, the forested Nationalpark Kellerwald-Edersee and the gentle countryside around the baroque town of Fulda. Two university cities are of special interest: Marburg, famed for its hilltop old town; and Kassel, site of a baroque hillside park, innovative museums and the five-yearly documenta contemporary art exhibition.

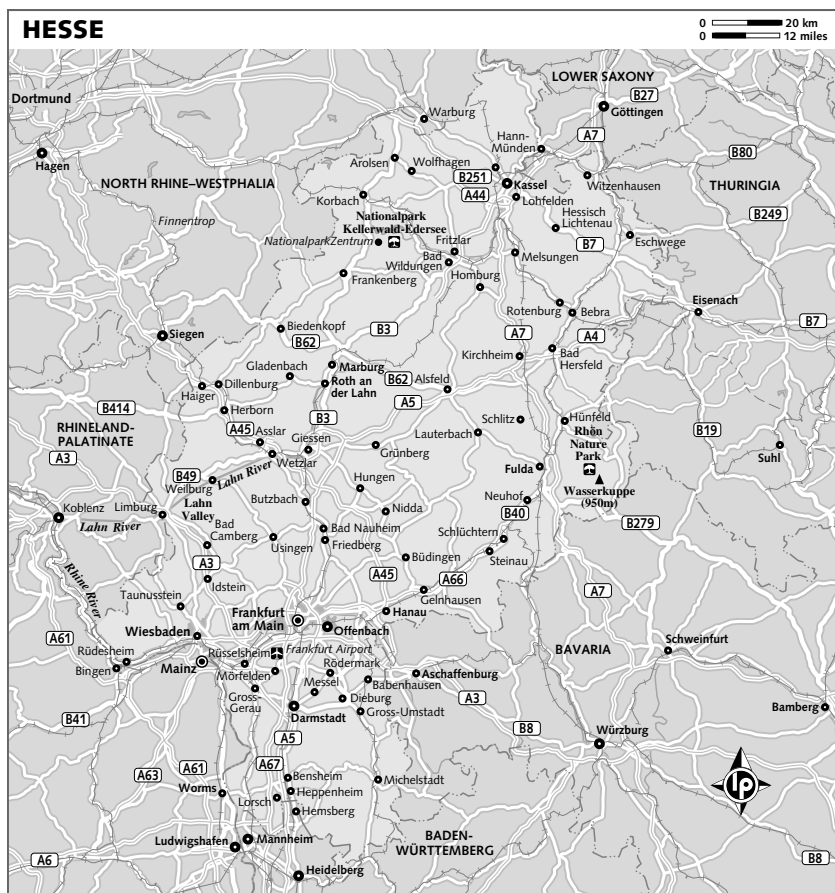
HIGHLIGHTS

- **Urban Traditions** Check out Frankfurt am Main's trademarks: apple wine, smelly cheese, first-class museums and a big-city skyline (p528)
- **Architecture & Art** Explore Darmstadt's artists colony, surrounded by gardens and a gold-domed Russian chapel (p544)
- **Jugendstil Baths** Wander towel-clad between the saunas and pools of Wiesbaden's historic Kaiser-Friedrich-Therme (p547)
- **Cafe Culture** Wander from cafe to wine bar to beer garden in Frankfurt's Nordend and Bornheim neighbourhoods (p539)
- **Canoeing** Paddle along the Lahn River in Weilburg (p549)
- **Baroque Town** Take in the ornate baroque splendour of old Fulda (p553)
- **Water Show** Spend an hour chasing the water as it cascades down the slope from Kassel's towering Herkules statue (p556)



■ POPULATION: 6 MILLION

■ AREA: 21,115 SQ KM



Getting Around

Deutsche Bahn's **Hessticket** (€30) lets a group of up to five people take regional trains (ie any trains except D, IC, EC or ICE) anywhere within Hesse (plus Mainz and Worms) for a full day (except before 9am from Monday to Friday) – an incredible deal! The weekend version, known as a *Schönes-Wochenende-Ticket*, costs €37 and is valid on Saturday and Sunday. For one person the price is €13, making it a lot cheaper than many one-way train trips within Hesse (eg from Frankfurt north to Fulda, Kassel or Marburg).

Hesse bills itself as a 'Radwanderparadies' (cycling paradise). For help with planning an outing on two wheels, see www.radroutenplaner.hessen.de (in German).

FRANKFURT AM MAIN

☎ 069 / pop 659,000

Unashamedly high-rise, Frankfurt-on-the-Main (pronounced 'mine') is unlike any other German city. Bristling with jagged skyscrapers, 'Mainhattan' – the focal point of an urban area with over 5 million inhabitants – is a true capital of finance and business, home base for one of the world's largest stock exchanges as well as the European Central Bank (www.ecb.int). It also hosts some of Europe's most important trade fairs, including the largest book and motorcar fairs anywhere.

Yet Frankfurt consistently ranks as one of the world's most liveable cities, with a rich collection of museums (second only to Berlin's), lots of parks and greenery, a lively student scene, ex-