

Escape to...



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COLOGNE

Arriving in Cologne by train is nothing short of spectacular. With the city's imposing cathedral – the world's third tallest – right next to the station, the view from the carriage is breathtaking. From Brussels, Germany's fourth largest city on the banks of the Rhine, known for its annual carnival and general joie de vivre, is less than two hours away – the perfect destination for a no-fly holiday that will seduce you with its vibrant culinary and cultural life as well as its rich history.

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SIGHTSEEING

The 157m cathedral is undoubtedly Cologne's number one landmark. Make sure you're well-rested to climb its 509 steps and don't miss the stunning multi-coloured window added in 2007 by celebrated German artist Gerhard Richter. It's in the city's old town, whose picturesque alleys are flanked by traditional half-timber houses that invite strolling. Nearly all the major sights are within walking distance; alternatively you can rent a bicycle at Radstation, which also offers daily guided tours. The Hohenzollern bridge with its thousands of love padlocks is an architectural marvel, which is best viewed – as is the entire skyline – from the gondola lift that connects the Rhine river banks. On a sunny day, the cruises along the waterway are another great way to discover the city. And those drawn to the hipper parts of town should make a stop in the Belgian Quarter, home to numerous stylish cafes and local designer shops.

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CULTURE

Cologne is not only home to the world's oldest art fair but also hosts an impressive number of galleries, art spaces and museums. An absolute must is the massive Museum Ludwig, nestled between the Rhine and the cathedral, which boasts the third largest Picasso collection in the world, the most extensive collection of Pop Art in Europe, and lots more. The Romano Germanic Museum just next door, housing the original site of a Roman town villa, is undergoing renovation, so its major archeological artifacts are on view at the Belgian House a short walk away. An architectural eye-catcher is the Kolumba Museum, a geothermally heated building integrating the remains of several churches into its sleek, contemporary fabric. Designed by Pritzker-winning architect Peter Zumthor, it presents both ancient religious and modern secular artworks. And if you're curious what the carnival buzz is all about, there's a museum for that, too.

EAT & SLEEP

The famous Rheinische Fröhlichkeit (Rheinish joyousness) that characterises the locals is best experienced in one of the many traditional brewery halls while sipping the iconic native beer, Kölsch, served in a tall, thin glass. Päßfgen (below), largely frequented by real Cologners, is one of its oldest and finest. Its quaint dark-wooded interior can host more than 200 people. Try its own Kölsch, brewed on site, or one of the delicious, hearty local dishes such as Sauerbraten (sour roast), beef marinated for up to 10 days in vinegar and seasonings. For accommodation focusing on sustainability, check out Urban Loft and the newly opened Ruby, a designer hotel that catches the eye with almost 100 trees and shrubs planted on the outside.



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