

GERMANY, CZECH REPUBLIC & POLAND

Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, Prague & Krakow

17 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Hamburg

Arrival in Hamburg.

With several waterways running through its center, Hamburg has maritime charm -- with more bridges than Amsterdam and Venice combined. The city of Hamburg has a well-deserved reputation as Germany's 'Gateway to the World'. It is the country's biggest port and the second-busiest in Europe, despite being located astride the River Elbe, some 100 kilometers from the North Sea. Hamburg is proud of its status as a "Free and Hanseatic City" and is an independent state, one of the Germany's 16 federal states or Bundeslander.

Overnight in Hamburg.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Hamburg: City Tour

Today we will enjoy a sightseeing tour of Hamburg, including City Hall and the baroque church of St. Michaelis (called the Michel), a signature landmark of Hamburg. Built between 1648-1661, this is the most famous church in the North of Germany with its white and golden interior that seats 3,000 people. We allow time to climb the spiraled staircase (453 steps) to enjoy sweeping views of the Hamburg cityscape and harbour. Hamburg was the departure point for millions of European emigrants. Our visit to the new BallinStadt museum (possibly closed for ongoing renovations) allows us a chance to understand the role Hamburg played in the lives of those whose destination was the New World.

We will also visit the old warehouse district (Speicherstadt) and the harbour promenade (Landungsbrücken). The warehouse district is the largest warehouse complex in the world. Narrow cobblestone streets and small waterways are lined by 100-year old warehouses, which store cocoa, silk, and oriental carpets.

As Hamburg is one of the world's largest harbours, a tour here would not be complete without a harbour and canal boat tour. From 1241 on, Hamburg was member of the Hanseatic League, a medieval trade monopoly across Northern Europe. In the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, millions left Europe on their way to the new world through the Hamburg harbour.

Overnight in Hamburg.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Hamburg - Hanover - Berlin

Along our route to Berlin we will make a stop in Hanover. Founded in medieval times on the south bank of the river Leine, Hanover was a small village of ferrymen and fishermen that became a comparatively large town in the 13th century due to its position at a natural crossroads. As overland travel was relatively difficult, its position on the upper navigable reaches of the river helped it to grow by increasing trade. It was connected to the Hanseatic League city of Bremen by the Leine, and was situated near the southern edge of the wide North German Plain. Hanover was thus a gateway to the Rhine, Ruhr and Saar river valleys. Upon our arrival here we will explore the Old Town on foot. We will also visit the nearby Herrenhausen Gardens.

The Herrenhausen Gardens are made up of the Great Garden, the Berggarten, the Georgengarten and the Welfengarten. These gardens are a heritage of the Kings of Hanover, and the Great Garden has always been one of the most distinguished baroque formal gardens of Europe. After our tour of the highlights here, and a break for lunch, we then continue on to Berlin.

Berlin is both the capital and biggest city in Germany. After being separated into East and West during the Cold War, Berlin was reunited in 1990. Today this city has quickly emerged as the most cosmopolitan and exciting city in Germany for art & architecture.

Berlin is like no other city in Germany, or, indeed, the world. For over a century its political climate has either mirrored or determined what has happened in the rest of Europe. Heart of the Prussian kingdom, economic and cultural centre of the Weimar Republic, and, in the final

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days of Nazi Germany, the headquarters of Hitler's Third Reich, Berlin has always been a weather vane of European history. After the war, the world's two most powerful military systems stood face to face here, sharing the spoils of a city for years split by that most tangible object of the East-West divide, the Berlin Wall. As the Wall fell in November 1989, Berlin was once again pushed to the forefront of world events. This weight of history, the sense of living in a hothouse where all the dilemmas of contemporary Europe were nurtured, gives Berlin its excitement and troubling fascination.

Overnight in Berlin.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Berlin: City Tour

Today we will see many of the highlights of this city.

No visit to Berlin is complete without visiting the remnants of the concrete wall that separated East and West Berlin for 30 years. This section of the Berlin Wall is not only a reminder of the cold war but also the world's largest piece of art as the wall had been brightly painted with graffiti during the time of the Cold War.

Unter den Linden ("under the linden trees") is a boulevard in the Mitte district of Berlin, and is named for its linden trees that line the grassed pedestrian street. The Brandenburg Gate is a former city gate, rebuilt in the late 18th century as a neoclassical triumphal arch, and now one of the most well-known landmarks of Berlin and Germany. Located west of the city center, it is the only remaining gate of a series through which Berlin was once entered. One block to the north stands the Reichstag. This gate is the monumental entry to Unter den Linden, which formerly led directly to the city palace of the Prussian monarchs.

Jewish Museum is not only a well-made historical museum of Jewish life, Jewish history and the holocaust, it is also a masterpiece of contemporary architecture, designed by Daniel Libeskind. The dismembered facade symbolizes the disasters of Jewish history.

The Reichstag which was burnt in 1933 and was left as a ruin during the times of the Cold War. After German reunification, the building was repaired, received a glass dome and became again the seat of the parliament.

Holocaust Memorial - In May 2005, on the 60th anniversary of the fall of the Nazi regime and the end of World War II, the city of Berlin dedicated their Holocaust Memorial, designed to commemorate the murder of six million Jews at the hands of Hitler and his forces. Officially named the Monument to the Murdered Jews in Europe, Occupying about 205,000 square feet (19,000 square meters) of space near the Brandernberg Gate and just a short distance from where the ruins of Hitler's bunker is buried, the memorial is made up of 2,711 gray stone slabs that bear no markings.

Overnight in Berlin.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Berlin Touring

The world famous Museum Island offers a unique collection of buildings housing archaeological finds and 19th century art. Concentrated in an area of less than one square kilometer, over a period of 100 years -- from 1830 to 1930 -- the island in the middle of the River Spree evolved into a temple to the arts, presenting six thousand years of cultural history in five museums. Museum Island is a UNESCO World Heritage site, and each museum here was designed so as to establish an organic connection with the art it houses. The importance of the museum's collections -- which trace the development of civilizations throughout the ages -- is enhanced by the urban and architectural quality of the buildings.

The three-winged Pergamon Museum was built to exhibit the greatly expanded collections of antiquities resulting from excavations at Pergamon and other Greek sites in Asia Minor as well as those from Mesopotamia. This is one of the world's most impressive museums, together with the Louvre and the British Museum. And it is the world's only one where full-sized masterpieces of ancient architecture are displayed: the altar of ancient Greek Pergamon with its famous story-telling frieze, the complete Ishtar gate and procession street which was the entrance to Babylon, a full-size facade of a Roman marketplace, a whole Arabian desert palace etc.

The afternoon is yours for independent exploration.

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Overnight in Berlin.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Berlin - Potsdam - Leipzig

This morning we will say farewell to Berlin and head towards Leipzig. Our route today will take us via the historic city of Potsdam, where we will see the famous palaces and gardens. Our visit to Potsdam will provide us with a journey through culture, art and architecture. We will walk through the marvelous gardens of Sanssouci and see famous sights like Sanssouci Palace, the New Palace, Charlottenhof Palace, the Roman Baths, the Orangery Palace and more. We will also see the historic sections of the city, the Russian Colony "Alexandrowka" and the Dutch Quarter (Holländisches Viertel).

After a break for lunch we will continue to Leipzig. Leipzig has been home to some of Germany's best-known artists for a long time; Goethe was a student in Leipzig, Bach worked here as a cantor, and today, the New Leipzig school brings fresh wind into the art world. Besides being a center for German art and culture, the city also became famous in Germany's recent history, when Leipzig demonstrators initiated the peaceful revolution which led to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Overnight in Leipzig.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Leipzig - Dresden

This morning we will enjoy a tour of Leipzig. Much of the city centre is now traffic-free, with fine old squares, gardens, courtyards and shopping arcades opening out of the central pedestrianized areas. Our guided walk will include a visit to the Nikolai Church whose Monday evening prayer meetings were the catalyst for the demonstrations of 1989. Leipzig has a wonderful collection of Art Nouveau buildings, including the 18th century church where Bach worked (and is buried). We will also see fine civic buildings, and what is reputed to be the largest station in Europe, now an excellent shopping mall.

We will visit the new Museum of Contemporary German History focusing on the story of East Germany. We also see the Stasi Museum in the former Leipzig area HQ building.

In the afternoon we continue on to Dresden. Spread out on both banks of the river Elbe in Saxony, Dresden is also called "Florence at the Elbe", due to its idyllic location, excellent examples of baroque architecture, and world-renowned art treasures. Although 80% of Dresden's historic center was destroyed in World War II, all landmarks have been rebuilt to their former splendor.

Overnight in Dresden.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Dresden: City Tour

Dresden began as two Slavic settlements on both sides of the Elbe River in the 12th century, although there is evidence of settlements during the Stone Age. Its name is derived from the Old Sorbian word for "river-forest dweller." Under Augustus I (1526-1586, Elector of Saxony, King of Poland) Dresden took on a more baroque character and emerged as a leading center of art and technology.

This morning we have a walking tour of Dresden. We see the Semper Opera House modelled after the late Renaissance style. This opulently decorated structure is one of the most important theatre buildings of the 19th Century. Adjacent to the opera house is the carefully restored 18th century Zwinger Palace. This courtyard complex was originally built as the forecourt of a castle. Today it is a pleasant place to wander about and enjoy the architecture that surrounds it.

We will visit the most famous museum in town, the Green Vault, one of Europe's greatest jewelry treasure houses with a wealth of masterpieces from the Renaissance and the Baroque.

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We also visit the newly reconstructed Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady). Standing proudly on Neumarkt Square, Dresden's Church of Our Lady is an architectural icon. Designed by architect George Bahr, Germany's grandest baroque Protestant church was erected between 1726 and 1743. Its unique bell-shaped dome, known as the "stone bell," collapsed days after being damaged in Allied bombing raids in 1945. The ruins were a moving anti-war monument until the early 1990s, when reconstruction began (thanks in part to donations from all over the world), using the original stones in their original locations as much as possible. The church reopened in October 2005.

Overnight in Dresden.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Dresden, Germany - Litomerice, Czech Republic - Prague

Today we travel from Dresden to Prague. En-route we will stop in the Czech town of Litomerice. One of the oldest Czech towns, Litomerice was established in the 10th century on the site of an early medieval Slavic fort. The Litomerice region, characteristic of riverside lowlands and with its volcanic outcrops offers a rich variety of natural features. The fertility of the landscape earned it the name Garden of Bohemia back in the 17th century.

Out of the 256 buildings in the town, 104 of them are listed as cultural monuments. The majority are found within the historic core of the town, which is surrounded in large part by the preserved Gothic fortifications. From here we continue to Prague.

Prague lies on the seven hills flanking the banks of the Vltava River with the most outstanding views being from Prague Castle. Sometimes it is called Prague the Golden, sometimes Prague the City of 100 Spires. It is compared with Florence and Rome in its beauty. Thomas Mann said it was one of the world's most magical cities; Goethe called it the prettiest gem in the stone crown of the world. Virtually untouched by war, its architecture is Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, Neoclassical, Empire and Art Nouveau.

Overnight in Prague.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Prague: Prague Castle & Old Town Tour

Our morning sightseeing tour of Prague travels through the city centre to Prague Castle. We begin our WALKING tour near Pohorelec Square before the Cernin Palace. As we head towards the castle we will pass the following: Strahov Monastery, the Loreta, the Cappucin Monastery, and the Archbishop's Palace. Before entering the castle, we will pause by the wall for a city panorama and orientation before our 2-hour visit of the castle.

We enter into first courtyard with its famous fountain and walk over to the Chapel of the Holy Cross. We continue to the St. Vitus Cathedral and visit the choir and crypt before heading to the third courtyard. Here we enter the Old Palace from St. George Square and then continue toward the Golden Lane (Kafka's House) where we pause for a break and refreshment, and then carry on the Old Castle Steps with photo stops along the way.

We will stop at Nikolas Church before crossing the ancient Charles Bridge (Karlův Most), an artistic masterpiece famous for its vendors and artists. For over four hundred years, this work of art, built by King Charles IV in 1357, was the only link between the two halves of Prague. We admire the many sculptures as we walk across. We finish the formal part of our tour in the Old Town, an excellent spot for lunch. The afternoon is free to further explore this amazing city.

Overnight in Prague.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Prague: Old Jewish Quarter & Wenceslas Square

Our WALKING tour today takes us to the Old Jewish Quarter and the old Town Square with its famous town bell and astronomical clock.

The Old Jewish Cemetery is an incredible sight. The second oldest in Europe, it was established in the 15th century. Burials took place from 1439 to 1787. Today there are 12,000 tombstones jammed together, leaning one on another, every one at a different angle and size, the whole creating a graphic and surreal image. We also visit the museum/memorial and the Klaus Synagogue with a permanent exhibition called "Jewish Customs and Traditions" highlighting the significance of the synagogue and Jewish festivals.

We continue to the Old Town Square. The 15th century designer of the astronomical clock located here was master clockmaker Hanus of Ruze. According to legend, he was blinded by Prague's town councilors for fear that he would make another like it for another town; so magnificent and applauded was his creation. One day toward the end of his life, he asked a friend to lead him to his great creation. As the figure of Death tolled the hour, Hanus thrust his hand into the clock's apparatus; the clock stopped, and it was centuries before a craftsman could be found who was skilled enough to make it work. In World War II, the clock is said to have stopped again after the Nazi murder of hundreds of citizens of Prague.

We finish our walking tour at Wenceslas Square in time for lunch (your own account). The balance of the day is at leisure. Prague is famous for its concert halls: The Municipal House, Rudolfinium, Mozart Theatre, National Theatre, The State Theatre -- all of them close to the center of the city with performances almost every night. Your Tour Leader can help organize optional evening activities.

Overnight in Prague.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Prague - Cesky Krumlov

Today we depart from Prague and head towards Southern Bohemia, where many towns have a Bavarian or Austrian flavour. We arrive in the town of Cesky Krumlov in time for lunch and some afternoon touring.

Cesky Krumlov is undoubtedly one of the most exquisite towns in the Czech Republic, and always a favorite among travellers. Medieval arcades and etched Renaissance facades in apricot, beige, and pea-green shades; rust-red, pink, and golden Baroque buildings surround the cobble stoned square with a Plague Monument in its centre. Here we will explore the square, the side streets, and the winding River Vltava that separates the Old Town from the towering castle. This is undoubtedly one of the most exquisite towns in the Czech Republic.

Ovenight in Cesky Krumlov.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Cesky Kromlov - Trebon - Telc - Olomouc

This morning before departure we will visit the mighty Renaissance castle of Cesky Krumlov, once the seat of the powerful Lords of the Rozmberks and the Schwarzenbergs. The castle houses a rich collection of period furniture, tapestries and historical weapons. The present castle complex is one of the largest in Central Europe and was recorded on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1992. The great castle complex dominates the town of Cesky Krumlov. Under the Castle Complex lies the old town with its winding alleys and venerable Gothic and Renaissance houses. The historical centre of the town is on the UNESCO Heritage list.

From Cesky Krumlov we travel through the spectacular countryside of carp ponds to the medieval town of Trebon. The houses lining the thin main square are as romantic as they come, and the three gateways of the town wall have survived from the 16th century. After our visit in Trebon, we continue on to the historic town of Telc. The town of Telc dates from the 16th century and the historic houses which surround the central square are all linked by continuous arcades. In 1992 UNESCO added the historic centre of Telc to the World Heritage List.

We continue to travel through the rolling hills of Southern Moravia, a region famous for its orchards and vineyards. Picturesque villages, towns and chateaux punctuate the landscape. Our journey takes us past the city of Brno and on to Olomouc where we spend the night. Olomouc is located on the Morava River and is the ecclesiastical metropolis and historical capital city of Moravia. With its convenient location, ancient university and spiritual, cultural and craft traditions Olomouc has been for centuries a natural centre of Moravia, attractive to artists, intellectuals and businessmen.

Overnight in Olomouc.

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Day 14 Olomouc, Czech Republic - Czestochowa, Poland - Oswiecim (Auschwitz) - Krakow

This morning we will start with a walking tour of the center of Olomouc before departing for the border with Poland.

After crossing into Poland our first stop in the afternoon will be at Czestochowa, the "spiritual home" of Poland, where pilgrims from every corner of the country come to Jasna Gora (Luminous Mountain) Monastery to revere the image of the Black Madonna, Poland's most important icon. Legend says that the icon was painted by St Luke the Evangelist on a piece of cypress wood from the table used by Mary in Nazareth. The icon was brought from Jerusalem and installed in the monastery around 1384.

We then continue to the Oswiecim (Auschwitz) and Brzezinka (Birkenau) Nazi concentration camps preserved as memorials to the 1.5 million people of 28 nationalities who perished here, the overwhelming majority of whom were Jewish.

We finish our day in Krakow, one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. It was originally the home of the Polish royalty (between 1038 and 1596), before the capital was moved to Warsaw. The cobblestone streets, majestic churches (almost 100!), and old world charm make Krakow an unforgettable destination.

Overnight in Krakow.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Krakow: Walking Tour

Krakow is very compact, and the whole central region with its cobblestone streets is full of well-preserved architecture, Gothic churches and splendid museums. On our sightseeing tour (largely on foot at a leisurely pace) we visit Wawel Hill with the Royal Castle, Market Square, and the 16th century Renaissance Cloth Hall. We continue onward to Jagiellonian University and St Mary's Church with the Wit Stwosz altar. This was designed in 1489 by Wit Stwosz of Nuremburg and is the finest sculptural work in Poland.

We then stroll down the hill from the castle complex and enter the Old Town, one of the most famous old districts in Poland and the center of Poland's political life from 1038 until King Sigismund III Vasa relocated his court to Warsaw in 1596. The entire medieval old town is among the first sites chosen for the UNESCO's World Heritage List. The district features the centrally located Rynek Glowny, or Main Square, the largest medieval town square of any European city. There is a number of historic landmarks in its vicinity, such as St. Mary's Basilica (Kosciol Mariacki), Church of St. Wojciech (St. Adalbert's), Church of St. Barbara, as well as other national treasures.

Overnight in Krakow.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Krakow - Wieliczka Salt Mines - Krakow

This morning we will visit the Wieliczka Salt Mines. On our 5km (3 mile) journey below the earth's surface we will see the salt-formed caves and grottoes, a subterranean lake and a chapel with statues carved from salt. The mines' 11 levels of galleries stretch 300km (186 miles), and some 20,000,000 tonnes (22,000,000 tons) of rock salt were extracted over 700 years. According to local legend, the deposits were discovered in the 13th century by a Hungarian princess named Kinga, whose lost ring was found in a block of salt extracted here.

Free afternoon.

Overnight in Krakow.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Departure

Departure from Krakow.

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BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast