

Magnificent Munich

Don't wait for the Oktoberfest to enjoy the charms of Bavaria's capital

Story and photos
by Karl Weisel
U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden
Public Affairs Office

Germany's tourist board reports the country is the third most popular tourist destination in Europe and Americans the second most overnight guests.

And while Munich's Oktoberfest may account for a large number of those annual visitors, the Bavarian capital city on the Isar River beckons those from far and wide year-round. Munich is especially hospitable during the summer and fall months when the locals head to picnic along the river, relax in one of the many beer gardens situated all over town or to sunbathe in the city's parks.

If you've never been to the Oktoberfest and have your heart set on joining the 6 million other people in the huge party tents on the Theresienwiese at the fest which runs this year from Sept. 18 to Oct. 4, you probably should consider hopping the train or letting the USO take you there to avoid any chance of drinking and driving (*Rhein Main Area USOs feature trips to the Munich Oktoberfest Sept. 18 and 25*).

But those who want to get a taste of Bavarian Gemütlichkeit and explore the city's other charms without the frenzy of the O-fest, would be better suited to visit when the annual beer fest celebrating the 1810 marriage of Prince Ludwig and Princess Therese has not yet opened for business.

Families might enjoy camping at the Thalkirchen campground which



Munich residents and tourists enjoy an afternoon in Munich's Englischer Garten. The city is famous for its many beer gardens. Photo right: Pedestrians make their way past a church on the Kaufinger Strasse — Munich's famed shopping street.

is situated near a U-bahn station, the Munich Zoo (Tierpark Hellabrunn) and the river. Offering less expensive accommodations than most Munich hotels, the campground offers a range of amenities including a small cafeteria-style eatery with a breakfast and dinner selection, hot showers (for a small, additional fee) and tree-shaded camping sites.

Just outside the campground are canals which feed off of the Isar which regularly attract surfers and

kayakers. A short walk through the adjacent woods and across the river takes one to one of Germany's best zoos. Besides featuring some 5,000 different animals in more natural settings than many other animal parks, the zoo offers younger visitors a range of attractions from a rope bridge connecting two parts of the park, petting zoos, camel rides, playgrounds and several outdoor cafeterias.

Feeding time is a highlight at the zoo — with penguins and seals clam-



oring for hand-fed fish from the zoo-keeper's bucket and other animals such as polar bears within inches through thick sheets of glass in outdoor enclosures.

One of Germany's richest museum cities, Munich is a fantastic place to get lost for hours surrounded by great works of art, inventions, historical artifacts and other display items. Art lovers can explore works from the early years of human-

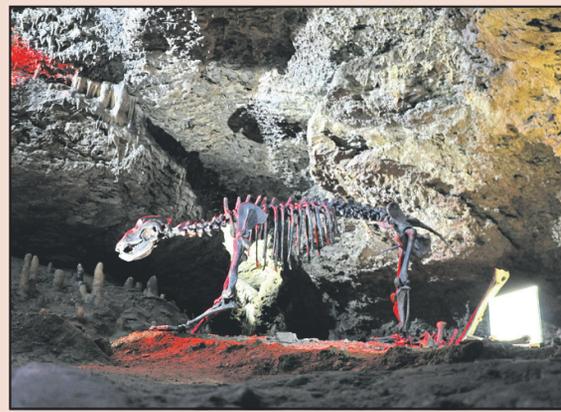
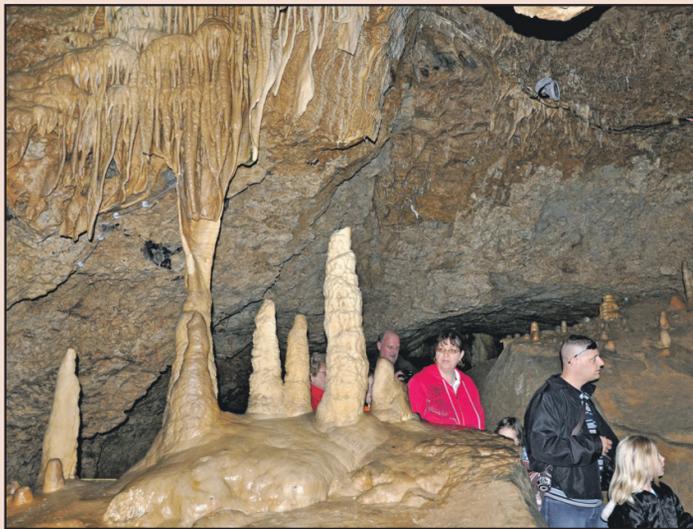
As host to the 1972 Summer Olympics, Munich's Olympic Center is still worth the U-bahn ride out to the grounds for a view of the massive steel-and-glass athletic facilities. While this year's Tollwood Festival, a massive collection of stages, eateries and emporiums from around the globe on the Olympic grounds has come and gone, the center features plenty of other attractions such as boat rides on the man-made lakes and a ride up the Olympic Tower for a view of the city.

Be sure to stop off in Schwabing while heading out to the Olympic grounds (get off at Gisela Strasse or the Universität stations) to stroll up Leopold Strasse where a host of cafes, restaurants and shops line the broad boulevard. From the Universität U-bahn station wander into the nearby Englischer Garten to discover miles of trails inviting bikers, inline skaters, carriage riders and pedestrians into this city oasis.

Completed after the Thirty Years War in the 18th century, the Englischer Garten offers a great place to unwind after sightseeing. Enjoy a Frisbee toss on the grass or lunch at one of the park's beer gardens, among the most well-known of which is the Chinese Pagoda area where a traditional oompah band can be found entertaining tourists and the locals munching on traditional eats such as Obazta (a paprika-spiced soft cheese dish), ribs, giant pretzels, white sausages and radishes washed down with a liter mug of Bavarian brew.

Shopping is plentiful in Munich — particularly on the Kaufinger Strasse — where one shop after another entices visitors from this pedestrians-only zone. And nearby are historical sights such as Munich's famed Marienplatz, dual-onion-domed Frauenkirche and the popular outdoor market — the Viktualien Markt.

If you decide to combine a trip to Munich with a visit to destinations farther south such as the Edelweiss Hotel and Resort in Garmisch-Partenkirchen or simply want a few days away from life in central Germany, you're sure to discover your own favorite attraction in this diverse cosmopolitan population center.



Visitors tour the Devil's Cave (Teufelshöhle) south of Bayreuth near Pottenstein. Above: The skeleton of a bear discovered in the cave network. Tours of the three-kilometer-long cave system are offered in German and English.

Beer, bats and bobsleds

Region around Bayreuth famous for caves, classical music, dark beer

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U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden
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There are bigger caverns, cooler rides and more picturesque towns, but a trip into the Fränkische Schweiz is guaranteed to provide a memorable journey none the less.

Soldiers and families who have ever called the Grafenwöhr or Vilseck military communities home are most likely familiar with this region around the town of Bayreuth. Renowned among classical music lovers for its annual Wagner Festival, Bayreuth is a sleepy northern Bavarian town that comes alive several times a year with celebrations ranging from beer to jazz festivals, holiday markets to African arts showcases.

As a university town and one that has served as a hospitable host to several noted German authors and composers, Bayreuth continues to offer visitors a look back at German culture and history.

Although composer Richard Wagner first sought a suitably grandiose venue in Wiesbaden for the annual showcase of his operatic works (the current home of the Henkell sparkling wine headquarters near Wiesbaden-Biebrich) he eventually settled on the baroque town of Bayreuth where he had a brand-new concert hall — the Festspielhaus — erected on a hill overlooking the town.

Today fans of the German composer's lengthy works for the stage sometimes vie for years through a lottery system to gain tickets to the Richard Wagner (or Bayreuth) Festival, coming from all over the

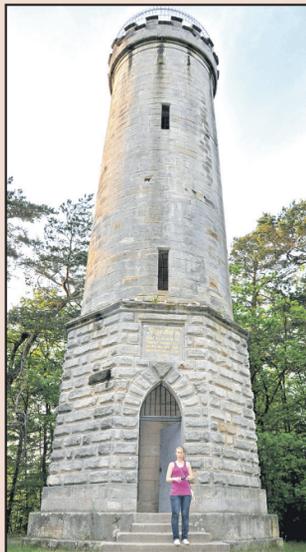


A youngster zooms down one of the summer bobsled tracks — this one on rails — near the town of Pottenstein. Photo right: The Victory Tower sits high over the town of Bayreuth in a forest above the famed Richard Wagner Festspielhaus.

globe to enjoy the latest interpretation of such operas as "The Flying Dutchman," "Siegfried" and "Tristan and Isolde."

After wandering through the town, stopping to sample one of the famed dark-brown beers for which the region is famous and visiting the sights, those with younger folks in tow might want to visit the free animal park situated in a wooded area near town or head to the Lohengrin Therme for an afternoon of swimming, steaming and relaxing in both indoor and outdoor bubble pools.

About halfway between Bayreuth and Nürnberg takes one into the countryside famous among hikers and bikers for its huge rock forma-



tions serving as the foundations for villages, castles, caves and hiking trails. In the heart of the Fränkische Schweiz, near the town of Pottenstein, are several attractions situated very close to one another. The Devil's

Cave (Teufelshöhle), Pottenstein swimming pool (Felsenbad) and summer bobsled run are all located on the B470 near Pottenstein.

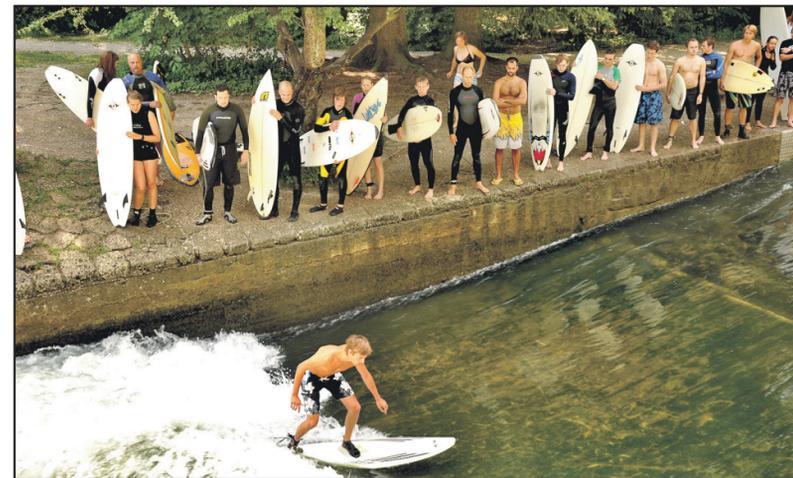
The Pottenstein Teufelshöhle, first explored by geologist Prof. Dr. Hans Brand in the 1920s, features a three-kilometer cave system offering visitors a 45-minute tour through various tunnels and rooms with a variety of uniquely shaped stalactites and stalagmites. Children may especially enjoy the skeletons of bears unearthed in the cave when it was first cleared of rock and earth debris last century.

Admission to the Teufelshöhle costs €3.80 for adults and €2 for youths age 4-15.

A restaurant is situated on a rock shelf just outside the cave entrance and another eatery is located below it on a series of trout ponds where visitors can enjoy a glass of the local grape and smoked trout — fresh from the ponds.

Not far down the road from the cave is the Felsenbad and the Rodelmekka Pottenstein (summer bobsleds). These offer a fast-paced ride down the mountain on one of two sleds — on rails and in a metal slide shoot — both of which are more than a kilometer long. Tickets can be purchased for a single ride (€2 for adults, €1.50 for children) or in groups of six (€9 and €7). Several bungee trampolines are also available for a small fee.

Whether you're a biker, hiker, spelunker or just want to zoom down a mountain on a summer bobsled — you won't be disappointed by a side trip to this northern Bavarian landscape.



Land-locked Munich may be a ways from ocean waves, but surfers still manage to get some practice in on a canal off the Isar River.