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EDITOR'S LETTER



Kat Nickola
Publishing and Media Design,
Lead Editor
Stars and Stripes Europe

“I cannot endure to waste anything so precious as autumnal sunshine by staying in the house.”

– Nathaniel Hawthorne

Europe in fall is like a temperamental toddler. One moment she is a roaring tempest, then a dreary fog until the sun comes out and you can't help but want to laugh and play along with her. Soon, though, she'll be just a little more steady and ready for all the fun that winter brings.

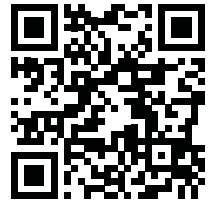
In this edition of Stripes Europe, we're taking you places to help you make the most of any weather these colder seasons throw at you. From fall hikes and city breaks to northern lights and snowy fun, there are plenty of travel ideas to keep you busy and enjoy your time in Europe.

We've included information about regional festivals and events so you can immerse yourself in local traditions, and there are stories about art, myths and food to bring you closer to the many cultures of Europe.

Lastly, in this edition we are also celebrating the upcoming publication of our newest magazine: Reveille. On stands this November, Reveille is a guide to experiencing military history in the landscape of Europe, bringing personal stories from World War I and II and honoring the heritage of those that came before us. ■



Look for the poppy to read military history stories.



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Trails & Ales: FRANCONIA'S FIVE BREWERY HIKE

Story and Photo by Gary Brown

Upper Franconia, the hilly German region straddling northern Bavaria and Thuringia, is best known for two things: its esteemed collection of natural parks (collectively known as “Franconian Switzerland”) and being a hotspot for beer lovers the world over.

With hundreds of active operations, Upper Franconia (*Oberfranken* in German) has the highest density of breweries in the world, so it should come as no surprise that there is a lot of overlap between the two attractions. There is no particular better example of this than the “Fünf-Seidla-Steig,” or “Five-Brewery Hike.”

The Fünf-Seidla-Steig®, (loosely translated as “Five Stein Trail”) is a **10-kilometer (6.2-mile)** trail connecting five traditional, family-run breweries nestled in the rolling hills of the Franconian countryside, northeast of Nuremberg. This picturesque route around the district of **Gräfenberg** is one of the most popular *Bierwegen* (beer walks) with local Germans. It is doable as a leisurely one-way trek over a few hours. The name comes from the “**Seidla**,” a stein of beer in the local German dialect. While walking it, be prepared to see everyone from families with children and dogs to elderly Bavarians in Lederhosen and wool caps, young men’s clubs towing wagons of beer crates, and the occasional *Ausländer* enjoying a bit of local culture!



KLOSTERBRAUEREI WEISSENOHE

Housed in a former Benedictine monastery, this is where monks once brewed beer but now hosts a large seasonal beer garden with occasional live music.

BEST BEER: They’re best known for their dark **Wine-Barrel Beers** or **Bio-Zwickl**, a light organic take on a popular Franconian beer type. Alternatively, have a **Weizen** (Weißbeer), a wheat beer. In Bavaria, a wheat beer and white sausage is considered a traditional breakfast!



BRAUEREI FRIEDMANN

A short distance north is Brauerei Friedmann, offering a beer garden with panoramic views over the rooftops of Gräfenberg and the countryside.

BEST BEER: They recommend their **Sigi Helles** (light Lager) or **Pils**, but after the recent hills, a **Radler** (half Helles, half lemon-lime soda), probably isn’t a bad idea.



LINDENBRÄU GRÄFENBERG

Close to the halfway point, this one makes an ideal place to stop for lunch, though all of the breweries also serve snacks at a minimum.

BEST BEER: The **Vollbier** (a Kellerbier variant) is one of the best in Franconia.



BRAUEREI HOFMANN (HOHENSCHWÄRZ)

Another cozy inn, this location has rustic decor and a wood-burning fireplace—A great spot to stop and linger on chillier days!

BEST BEER: The house **Dunkel Hofmannstropfen**, a dark medium-bodied beer.



THUISBRUNNER ELCH-BRÄU

Your final destination is the charming village of Thuisbrunn, home to Elch-bräu, a newer brewery that also doubles as a distillery specializing in whiskey and schnapps.

BEST BEER: Their recommended beer is a **Dunkel**. It is heavy, rich, and full-bodied...probably like your legs are feeling after five Seidla and six miles of hiking! Both their Dunkel and Pils won European beer awards.

At this point, you can hop on a local bus back to the starting point.



When to go

Spring & Fall: Ideal weather, fewer crowds and lush, vibrant scenery in October and November.

Summer: Great for beer gardens, but prepare for heat and weekend crowds.

Winter: The breweries may close on weekdays, so double check the official website or call before going.

What to bring

- Comfortable hiking shoes (the trails are well maintained, but steep in some areas)
- Water bottle (you'll need it beyond the beer)
- Cash (most breweries don't take cards)
- Download the trail map from fuenf-seidla-steig.de and check brewery opening hours. Not all are open daily, and some close mid-afternoon.

How to get there

Make your way to Gräfenberg. From Gräfenberg head to the hamlet of Weissenhofer (about a 15-minute walk) where the hike begins at the Klosterbrauerei Weissenhofer.

From northern Bavaria—Do it as a Day Trip. Gräfenberg is within a one-hour drive or train ride of Ansbach, Vilseck and Grafenwöhr.

From further away—Base yourself in Bamberg or Nuremberg. Both are excellent jumping-off points, with easy S-Bahn rail access to the starting town of Gräfenberg (via Nuremberg). With a two-to-three-hour drive from most locations in western Germany, this makes a great weekend trip. For those further away, add it onto a longer trip to Bavaria. ■

Start slow here, because the biggest elevation gains on the hike happen between the first and third breweries.



GET SUCKED IN TO THESE
VAMPIRE
MOVIES FILMED IN EUROPE

By Tamala Malerk

Vampires. Dark, mysterious and thirsty for blood. These fictional creatures have haunted lore for centuries, but not all vampires are the same. There are broody vampires, creepy vampires, model-statuesque vampires and more. Sometimes they are the hero, sometimes the villain, but almost always they are entertaining. No matter which type of vampire is your favorite, there was likely a movie filmed in Europe that fits your taste.

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For Those Who Love A SCARY VAMPIRE

The 1922 film, “Nosferatu,” was one of the first vampire stories to grace the silver screen. This creature was balding, had dramatically pointed, elongated facial features and long, sharp teeth and fingernails. Nothing about this vampire was conventionally attractive, and the film set the standard for the scary, creepy predator. Much of the movie was filmed at locations in the northern German towns of **Lübeck** and **Wismar**. In addition, movie makers filmed in **Slovakia** to portray the Transylvania countryside.

Since Bram Stoker created the character of Dracula for his popular novel, there have been over 200 screen adaptations with the most recent major feature film premiering in February 2026. However, one 2023 movie decided to take on a unique interpretation of the character. In “The Last Voyage of the Demeter,” the plot focuses on only one chapter from Stoker’s novel, “Captain’s Log,” documenting the travels of a cargo ship heading to London whose crew is unaware of their blood-sucking stow-away. This version of the vampire is an emaciated bat creature haunting and terrifying those aboard the ship. Filming for this movie took place in **Malta**.

What is scarier than a child in a horror film? A child vampire. 2008’s “Let the Right One In” is a great example. This film explores the life of a child-vampire, Eli, who befriends a local boy in town named Oskar. The two proceed to seek revenge on those who have hurt Oskar. Filming primarily took place in the Swedish town of **Luleå**; however, a few scenes were also shot in the actual setting of the film, **Blackeberg**, Sweden.



For Those Who Love AN EMO PRETTY VAMPIRE

The vampire film genre shifted from making vampires purely creepy and scary with the addition of the seductive vampire, which dates back to at least Bela Lugosi's 1931 portrayal of Dracula, if not sooner.

"The Invitation" (2022) is a modern re-telling of the Dracula story set in the U.K., where class, gender and race play a huge role in the storytelling. Replacing Count Dracula is Lord Walter De Ville, played by Thomas Doherty, whose portrayal of the character had me thinking toxic thoughts about my ability to fix him despite maids mysteriously disappearing from his large manor. Filming primarily took place in **Budapest**, at locations including the **Párisi Udvar Hotel** and **Nádasy Kastély**. And, yes, you can stay at the hotel.

Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise were *the* pretty boys of the 1990s, and their portrayals of Lestat and Louis, the vampires in 1994's "Interview with a Vampire," embodied the pretty and emo vampire persona well, especially Louis, who traded human blood for rat blood out of guilt. While the story is primarily set in New Orleans, the plot takes the vampires to Europe, where some on-location filming took place in **Paris**, at the **Palais-Royal**, **Opéra National de Paris Palais Garnier** and **Rue de Rivoli**. In England, **St Paul's Church** in **London** stood in as a church in New Orleans, and **Pinewood Studios** was the home of the Théâtre des Vampires.

Edward Cullen, the prettiest and most emo vampire from "Twilight" is featured in an entire article dedicated to the series' Italian filming locations.



For Those Who Love A HEROIC VAMPIRE

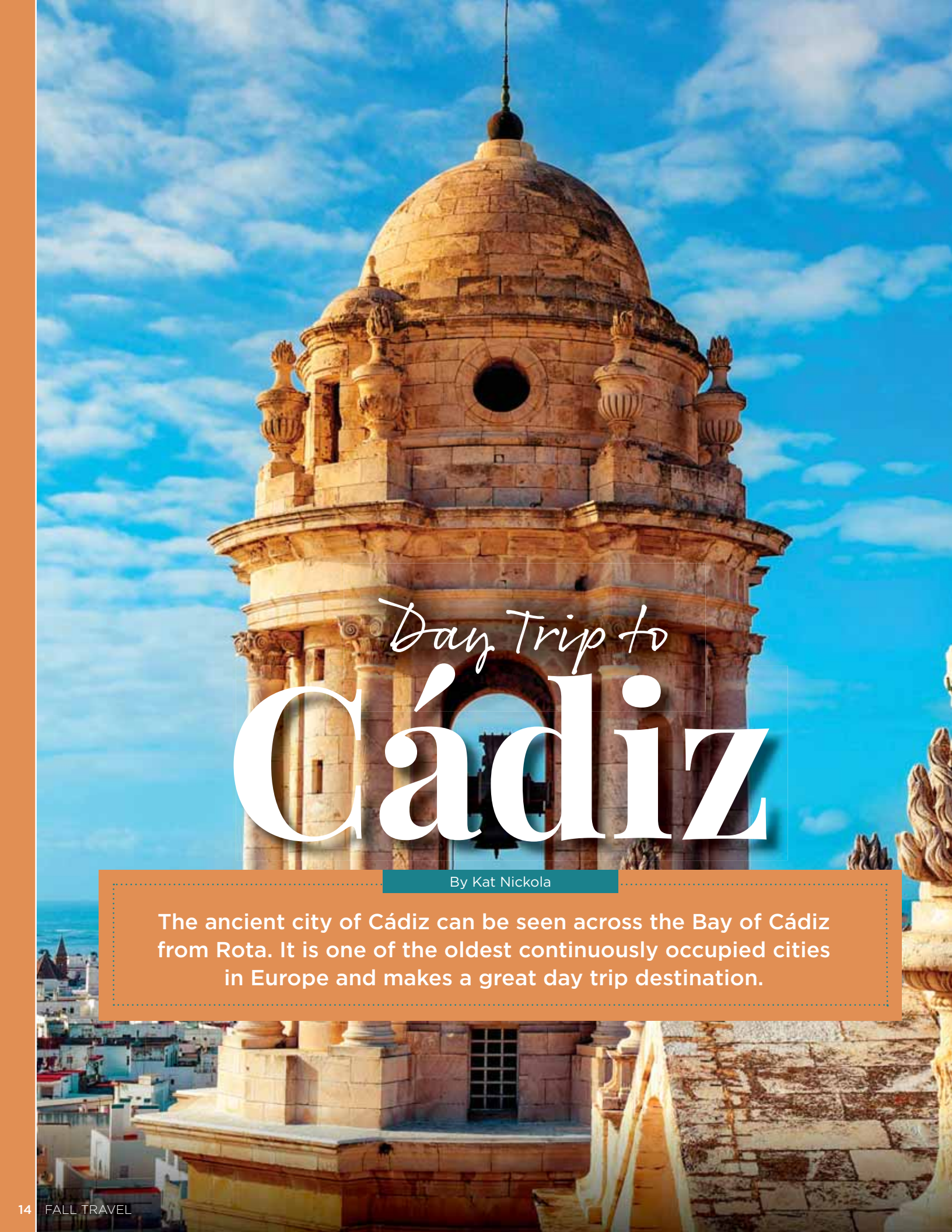
Vampires are not always the villains of the story; sometimes they are the heroes, or at least morally speaking, the protagonists.

One of the longest cinematic vampiric franchises is the *Underworld* series (2003-2016). It follows Selene, a centuries-old vampire caught in the middle of an even older war between vampires, Lycans and humans. Throughout the five-film series, Selene learns hard truths about her life, as well as who the real villains are in the world. **Budapest** is a popular location for vampire films, and the first two *Underworld* movies were filmed there at locations such as the **Budapest Subway** and **Gozsdu Udvar**. The fifth film, "Underworld: Blood Wars," changed things up by moving filming to Czechia with locations in **Prague** and three different castles: **Hluboká**, **Lipnice** and **Kačina**.

Prague was also the filming location for another popular vampire franchise film, "Blade II" (2002). Blade is half-human and half-vampire and hunts the evil vampires of the world in this series. In the second movie, he hunts a new breed of super vampires. Filming locations in Prague include **Charles Bridge**, **Strahov**, **Karlin**, **Liben**, **Barrandov Studios** and **Letnany**.

"Dracula Untold" (2014) explores the historical figure who inspired the story of Dracula, Vlad the Impaler. Rather than portraying Vlad as an evil overlord, Luke Evans treats the character as a tragic hero forced to choose vampirism to save his people and land. While the story takes place in Transylvania, filming took place primarily in Northern Ireland. The **Giant's Causeway** stood in for the mountains of Transylvania. Battle scenes were filmed in the **Belfast Hills**, and **Mount Stewart's Italian Garden** acted as the grounds of Dracula's castle. ■





Day Trip to Cádiz

By Kat Nickola

The ancient city of Cádiz can be seen across the Bay of Cádiz from Rota. It is one of the oldest continuously occupied cities in Europe and makes a great day trip destination.



IGLESIA DE SANTIAGO



CASTILLO DE SANTA CATALINA



ARCO DE LA ROSA



PINXTOS

Cádiz was founded as early as 1100 BC by Phoenician traders who called it Gadir. At the time, the bustling trading port was made up of two islands. Nowadays, Cádiz is connected to the mainland by a sliver of sand. You can visit the ancient city at the free **Yacimiento Arqueológico Gadir**, an archaeological site of Phoenician houses that now lies below the town.

Over time, Cádiz was absorbed into the Roman Empire and the city's name evolved into Gades. It became a thriving, wealthy port and naval base. Today, you can visit the **Teatro Romano de Cádiz** for free to wander under the amphitheater stands and learn about life in Roman Gades. Later, under Muslim rule, the city was called *Qādīs* which translated into Cádiz following the *Reconquista*.

A short walk through the cobbled alleyways will lead you to the **Arco de la Rosa**. It is one of the few vestiges of the medieval city wall. Just beyond the arch, the tiny alley opens onto a palm-tree-lined plaza with the **Catedral de la Santa Cruz de Cádiz** and the **Iglesia de Santiago**. The small *Iglesia*, or Church of Saint James, marks the starting point for the Camino de Santiago's Via Augusta route. Across the plaza, the huge baroque cathedral took over 100 years to build in the 1700s and has an ornately decorated interior with numerous chapels and relics, a display of religious trappings and a massive crypt. A cathedral ticket includes a visit to the tower, which is accessed from a separate door outside. After a winding climb up the ramp (not stairs), the view from the top is incredible and the bells will chime right over your head.

For food, you cannot beat lunchtime in the **Mercado Central**. In the morning, the central aisle of this market is busy with produce and fish vendors. Around 1 p.m., however, the outer aisles begin to set up and open for lunch. It is a great place to taste new *tapas* and *pinxtos* (tapas on a baguette) since you can buy them individually from display cases.

Christopher Columbus sailed to the Americas from the port of Cádiz on two of his voyages. It became a target for pirates and raids since it was made the home port for the Spanish treasure fleet. To protect these assets, a series of fortifications and sea walls were built along the western waterfront over the centuries. The **Castillo de Santa Catalina** was built in the 1600s and reflects the style Spanish conquistadors would carry to their forts in the southwestern United States. Across the small **Caleta Beach** is access to a long causeway out to the **Castillo de San Sebastian**, built in the 1700s. The castle has been used in James Bond and Die Hard films. The walk out along the causeway is windy, even in nice weather, but the castle is often closed. At low tide, it is fun to explore the tide pools and coastline below the fortifications.

You can get to Cadiz via the ferry from Rota's port or you can drive. Paid parking at the train station is straightforward and within easy walking distance from the old town. ■



TEATRO ROMANO DE CÁDIZ



CASTILLO DE SAN SEBASTIAN



CATEDRAL DE LA SANTA CRUZ DE CÁDIZ



CALETA BEACH



“Punch-you-in-the-face Coffee. Please.” My father-in-law, Billy, replied to the waitress when she asked for his order.

She chuckled as we bit into our knotted cinnamon rolls, ready to go over our plan to visit Mont-Saint-Michel.

The waitress returned with a mug, smiling. “One punch-you-in-the-face.”

“Thank you!” he beamed.

It felt strange to be in that cozy pastry shop in Bayeux, France, when just over 80 years ago it was a base camp for one of history’s largest military operations. I watched my father-in-law take a satisfied sip of his very black coffee while my husband went over plans to see all the historically significant D-Day landing sites.

Billy Wells wasn’t just another tourist. A retired Army Sergeant First Class, military police paratrooper and veteran of Desert Shield and Desert Storm, he spent his military career training for the kind of operations rooted in the legacy of Normandy. His father was a World War II medic, his two brothers served, plus his son and son-in-law currently serve. Billy is no stranger to war nor sacrifice and experienced Normandy through tactical eyes, seeing not just a battlefield but a place where history still lives in the landscape and lingers in hearts.





NORMANDY THROUGH A PARATROOPER'S EYES

By Katie Wells



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©PHOTOBEST/STOCK.ADOBE.COM | PHOTO OF BILLY WELLS BY KATIE WELLS

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A couple of years later, reminiscing about the trip, I ask what it felt like to visit Normandy as a veteran.

"Just the overwhelming sense of awe of what happened... it was a bucket list item for me." He pauses. "You can still feel it in the air, the immenseness, everything that happened in that place. Focusing on bits and pieces like Point du Hoc, La Fièvre Bridge, Omaha Beach...really pulls in everything that you may have read, and it demonstrates that words do not convey what was accomplished on the 6th of June."

At Omaha Beach, we had looked out at the calm sea and empty beach while listening to our tour guide. Billy had stared at the cliffs envisioning the courage it took to scale them and cross the beach under relentless fire. It took unwavering determination to accomplish the mission, and one simple truth still resonated with him years after the trip. "I don't necessarily fight so much for the mission, but I fight for the guy next to me," he says with pride.

As Billy shares his perspective, I can visualize boats bobbing in the waves, soldiers trudging to shore with heavy, wet gear, dodging anti-tank barriers. I can almost hear the roar of artillery and shouting.

We also visited Sainte-Mère-Église to see the parachute that still hangs from the steeple. It is a tribute to the American paratrooper, John Steele, who was stuck suspended above the brutal battle below him. Inside the church, a colorful stained-glass window depicts the airborne unit dropping down from the sky.

Seeing paratroopers in the stained glass was significant for Billy:

Another missed drop. They weren't supposed to come down in town, but they did. Either the winds blew them in, or the aircraft dropped them in the wrong spot. They came right down into town, and the Germans were basically waiting for them, and a lot of those paratroopers were killed in their chutes. They never even had the chance to get out of their harnesses.

For him it isn't just about a famous landmark. "Again, the homage of the French people," he says. There is a local respect for preserving the history of World War II that comes across many times, especially at Normandy American Cemetery. "[It was] so touching being there in April, in just a nonsignificant month, where





it really...touches your heart, your soul, to see French children, school children, coming and laying wreaths and studying and walking to the graveyards. And just talking with just regular French people, you can feel the love...they have not forgotten."

We had taken a slow pace across the cemetery with its pretty hedges, flowers and perfectly aligned white crosses and Stars of David, not really putting faces with the markers. Billy had lingered in front of the dioramas. "It's hallowed ground," he recalls, "With those guys just, you know, resting just within sight of where they lost their lives... awe is the best word I've got."

We had taken a guided tour to visit key battle sites in an old Willy's jeep and made an unplanned stop at a military surplus store with our guide. The owner was thrilled to meet an American veteran and his son. Billy remembers that "He was really excited. And it was touching to experience that firsthand."

He continues to talk about how the experience of visiting Normandy "will remain with me for the rest of my life. The most poignant place that we had visited that will always stay in my memory is La Fièvre Bridge."



PHOTO BY KATIE WELLS

La Fièvre Bridge is where the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division dropped in the dark of the night to capture and hold the bridge. It was one of the only routes inland and was also essential for German counterattacks. Securing the bridge was one of the most brutal small unit battles in Normandy.

Billy reflects that "being a paratrooper, that's exactly what every person who exits an aircraft loaded for combat or training for combat should understand...this is the gold standard of what we do. Deploy anywhere in the world. In 18 hours upon arrival, inflict death or grievous bodily harm upon the enemy. If we...if you went through, it [was] by God's grace. If not, it's God's will. But...you can't shirk the mission."

He pauses.

"It was an honor for me to be able to visit those places that are so storied, so written about in such a huge point in world history... lest we forget, right?"

He talks about the sacrifices of the "boys on the beach," the tough conditions and the collective effort to fight to live. Then he mentions another spot that was surprisingly memorable. "And I really did love going to Mont-Saint-Michel...what a treat that was."

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We had walked out to the island village at low tide. My husband and I both had shoes sucked off in the quicksand and got stuck, but my father-in-law, safe in his laced-up boots, pulled us out.

I tell him about how I was thinking about the mud and how we all got stuck in it. How it was a very comedic moment for us, but it's just another example of how conditions probably were for all of the soldiers who landed on the beaches of Normandy. It was just surprise muck and getting stuck and an inconvenience and extra toll on their body and something they didn't expect.

He agrees and talks about the conditions of the D-Day landings, the mines in the water and on the shores, the choppy water making the troops seasick, the rough terrain, how it was the first time many of these youth were seeing combat. "It's a weird thing when, as an 18-year-old, you're writing your will. How many 18-year-olds outside the military do that? Probably none."

For my father-in-law, being in Normandy created connection between himself, the World War II soldiers and his own son who is now in the military: "It affirms that the idea, this great experience and experiment that is America, is alive and well... we're not looking to rule the world. But we will not stand by and see people who are oppressed under tyranny because that's where we came from. So, it is humbling. I am oh so proud of my son. That he decided that this is what he wanted to do with his life. This is that something bigger than you...this country is worth something more..."

When we had visited the Longues-sur-Mer battery, a German cliff-top fortification between Gold and Omaha Beaches, I stood in the field of long grass to snap photos of my husband and his father poking their heads into the concrete bunkers. They mimicked one another's mannerisms, peered through the gun ports and compared notes on what they could see. It was like two soldiers collaborating despite the decades between them.

One of the last stops on our tour had been the church in Angoville-au-Plain. We listened to the story of the heroic 101st Airborne medics Robert Wright and Kenneth Moore, who landed near the tiny church and treated over 80 wounded American, German and French soldiers, as well as a French child. Inside the church, there are blood-stained pews that contrast with a stained-glass window of a single paratrooper. As I recall the trip, I can't help but place my father-in-law in the image of that paratrooper drifting down from the blue sky—an independent soldier part of something much larger.

I ask Billy what younger generations can learn from visiting Normandy. His answer is about gratitude and the hope that they understand the value and cost of those willing to lay down their lives to free others. "We should strive to be worthy of the sacrifice," he said, adding that "these people (the French) who aren't American, they don't all speak English, but they know what happened. And they honor it. So, you should too." ■

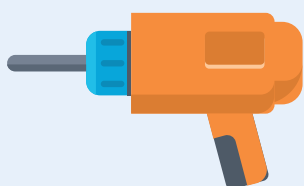


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One Bookshop at a Time



By Kat Nickola

It was the moody, dark look of The Haunted Bookshop in Cambridge that got me hooked. On a ghost tour with Terrible Tours (highly recommended), my group stood just beyond the overgrown shrubs and gravestones of St. Edwards' churchyard listening to stories of mysterious spirits in the tiny bookstore.

I returned the next day to find a note in the window that read, "I am here. Please knock using the knocker. Only knock if you really want to be admitted. Knocking on the door and scuttling off is VERY BAD MANNERS. Give me a minute or so."

I knocked, and so began my tour of Cambridge Book Shops. There are eight in the old town, many of which are independent sellers and used book dealers. Each has their own energy and ambiance; from dusty and creepy to modern and fresh. Taking a day to visit them all is a fun way to experience the intellectual atmosphere of this university town.

1. HEFFERS BOOKSHOP

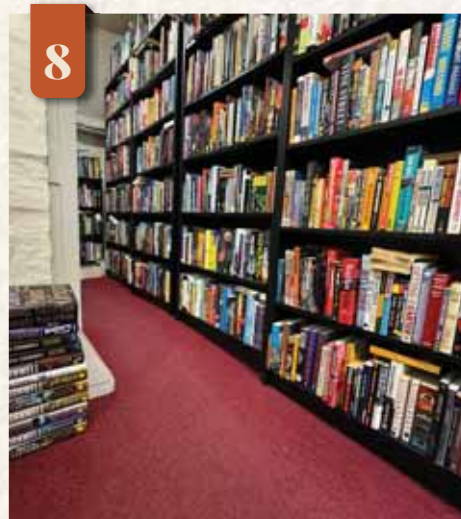
Across from the famous Trinity College gate and Newton's tree, this shop was founded in 1876 and run as an independent book and stationery store until 1999. It is now owned by a larger company, but retains an individual and local vibe, especially with its unique children's wing down an alley at the back.

2. WATERSTONES

A U.K. chain bookstore staple, the Waterstones in Cambridge is a big, modern shop with new books displayed across multiple floors.

3. OXFAM BOOKSHOP

Quite near the Waterstones, and in stark contrast, the Oxfam charity bookshop is small and stocked with gently used books of all kinds. I found a great old paperback on hidden sights to see in the region.



PHOTOS BY KAT NICKOLA

4. MARKET BOOK STALL

The name says it all. With a unique selection of used books, it's absolutely worthwhile to visit this stall at the Cambridge market which is open daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. My finds included two gifts: a Jules Verne hardcover for my daughter and an early 1900s collection of Robert Burns' poetry for my dad.

5. CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS BOOKSHOP

This is the oldest publishing house in the world. Founded with its first press across the street in 1534, Cambridge University Press (CUP) primarily prints books for the academic community. The current shop location was an independent bookseller beginning in 1581 and was taken over by CUP in the 1990s. Though the store primarily sells academic books, it is worth a visit to see the nearly 500-year-old exposed wooden beam architecture.

6. G. DAVID BOOKSELLER

My favorite shop of the bunch, this is where I (gently) dug through piles of antique books, prints and maps. With its musty smell and floor-to-ceiling shelves, and potential for finding a treasure, it took a lot of self-control for me to only leave with a few sketches from an 1800s travelogue.

7. THE HAUNTED BOOKSHOP

Tiny, and across the churchyard from G. David, this place is pleasantly tatty, and the two cramped floors are overflowing with precariously stacked primarily secondhand children's and illustrated books. It had been a pub in the 1800s, so maybe the ghosts are looking for a drink.

8. BODIES IN THE BOOKSHOP

After the cave-like feel of the Cambridge passages, it was a reprieve to walk along the expansive main drag past photogenic spires at King's College on the way down to this final shop. With a focus on crime fiction, this bookstore stocks both used and new volumes on shelves in tiny rooms and up creaky stairs. The shop also carries a sizeable selection of titles from Cambridge, so I left with a murder mystery novel set in a medieval version of Trinity College.

*Your next great read
awaits in Cambridge.
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NUTS WEEKEND

in Bastogne, Belgium

Story and Photos by Kat Nickola



A soldier suddenly appears out of the thick fog.

As he passes me on the sidewalk, he nods and I shiver at the seemingly ghostly apparition. He wears a Belgian Army uniform from World War II—a dark green wool coat that ended at his leather knee-high boots and a beret. When I turn around to snag a photo, he has nearly disappeared back into the fog as he walks toward the old battlefield.

I'm in Bastogne, Belgium. Night sets in and the fog produces more spirits from the past. A clutch of American World War II soldiers gather on a street corner, talking and laughing. An old Army-green Jeep parks along the sidewalk, the words "Military Police" stamped in white across the front. On any other weekend, I would have been scared out of my mind, sure that I was really seeing 81-year-old ghosts. However, it is a Friday in early December and the first day of a celebration affectionately called Nuts Weekend. Reenactors mingle easily with the rest of us modern folks, all here to take part in the festivities.

Every year, in mid-December, the town of Bastogne celebrates the fact that U.S. Brigadier General McAuliffe refused to surrender to German forces who had lay siege around them. It was part of the greater Battle of the Bulge campaign.

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A man with short brown hair and a serious expression, wearing a dark blue t-shirt, stands with his arms crossed. The background is dark blue with faint white stars and stripes, reminiscent of the American flag.

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On Dec. 22, 1944, McAuliffe, commander of the 101st Airborne Division, received an official written correspondence from the German commander. It was an ultimatum requesting his honorable surrender within two hours, claiming that a refusal would mean “total annihilation” of Bastogne. McAuliffe wasn’t about to give in and replied with:

“To the German Commander:

N U T S !

The American Commander”

After some verbal translations, the German couriers understood the true meaning and returned across enemy lines to deliver the message that the Americans were not going to surrender. Fierce fighting continued as the weather impeded Allied resupply aircraft. Finally, on Dec. 26, 1944, General Patton’s Third Army broke through siege lines. The Battle of the Bulge continued in Bastogne and across the Ardennes for weeks until Jan. 25, 1945, when the German army was pushed back to its pre-offensive posture. It was the largest World War II battle for U.S. forces, with immense casualties on both sides. The failed German offensive marked a turning point with catastrophic losses that prevented their army from being able to defend against Allied advances and leading to the end of the war in Europe four months later.

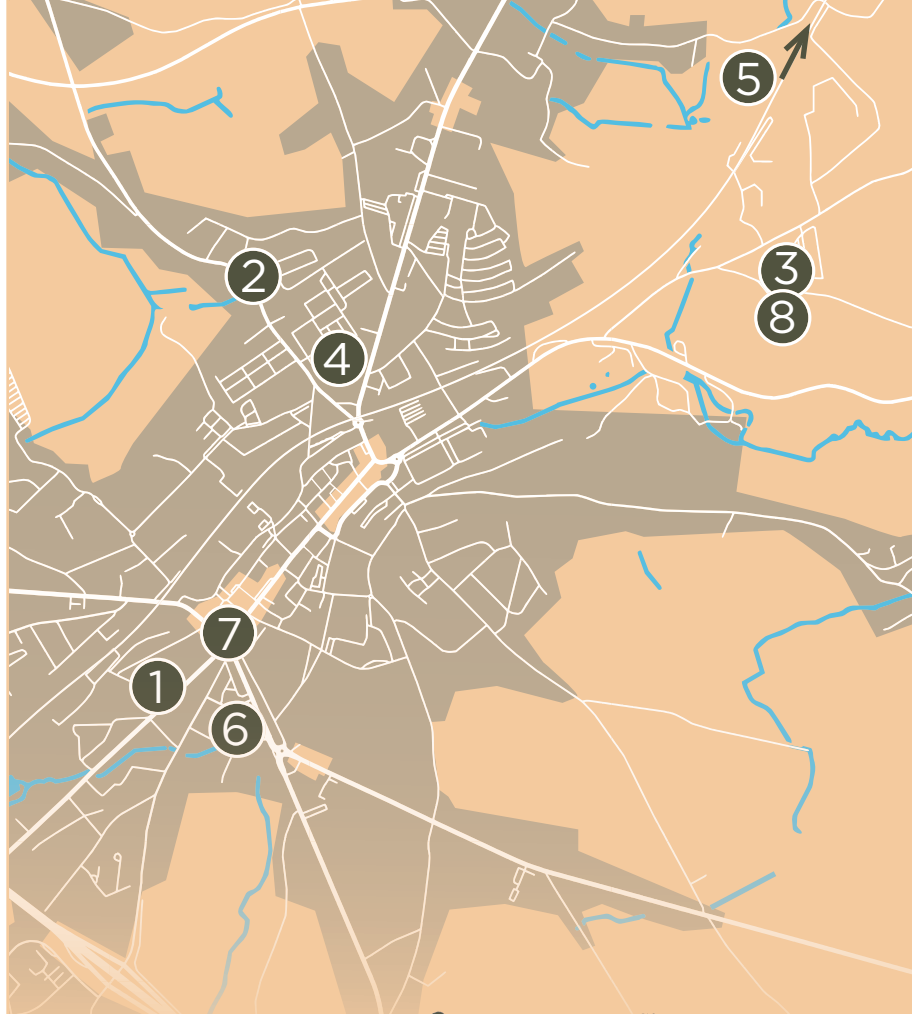


A visit to Bastogne on any day can provide an in-depth look back at this memorable event. There are three organizations with unique museums dedicated to World War II heritage, the 101st Airborne Museum, the Bastogne Barracks and the Bastogne War Museum. This last organization has three individual locations—one is adjacent to the Battle of Bulge Monument on Mardasson Hill just two kilometers outside of town. It was from here that I found myself encountering ghosts of the past as I walked through the fog on Nuts Weekend.

During the three days of Nuts Weekend, each of the museums in town has special events. There are book signings, veteran visits and markets with vendors. Reenactors fill the streets as they build camps at both the Barracks in town and out at the War Museum. Camps include Allied forces and German forces, giving visitors the unique opportunity to compare the two.

On Saturday of Nuts Weekend, the highlight of the city-wide celebration is a recognition of veterans in the town square





World War II Sites in Bastogne

1. 101st Airborne Museum
2. Bastogne Barracks
3. Bastogne War Museum
4. Bastogne War Rooms*
5. Bois Jacques Battlefield*
6. General George S. Patton Memorial
7. General McAuliffe Memorial
8. Mardasson Hill Battle of the Bulge Monument

*part of Bastogne War Museum



Scan the QR to read this article online and to access an interactive map.

The next Nuts Weekend will take place Dec. 11-13, 2026.

For Nuts Weekend, I recommend booking a hotel in downtown Bastogne from Friday to Sunday. The weekend is well attended, but not overly crowded. However, Bastogne is a small town and parking is an issue. I parked out at the Bastogne War Museum and walked along the well-marked, paved multi-use trail through the fog into town. It was a pleasant two-kilometer jaunt past monuments, the city gate and through the local Christmas market to my hotel on main street. ■

followed by a parade that includes a band, veteran group representatives, youth groups and current active-duty members of the 101st Airborne. The parade ends at the memorial to General McAuliffe, but most folks return to the main street to wait out front of City Hall until local dignitaries and veterans begin tossing walnuts to the crowd.

Most attendees and participants in Nuts Weekend are local and speak French. Though English is spoken widely by museum staff, few of the reenactors (including the American forces) speak the language. The experience leaves me with a renewed appreciation for the impact that the U.S. forces of World War II had on the people of Europe—so much so that those soldiers are remembered and memorialized as the subject of reenactment 81 years later.

McAuliffe's "NUTS" reply and refusal to surrender not only saved Bastogne from German occupation but gave the town a new identity. Claiming the title of "Nuts City," the citizens of Bastogne continue to honor the sacrifices made during World War II.

THE UPS *and* DOWNS *of* SCOUTING OVERSEAS

By Kat Nickola



PHOTO BY ELISABETH WEBBER



PHOTO BY DAVID KALEY



PHOTO BY ELISABETH WEBBER

“They get to meet World War II veterans—a disappearing generation—which is so formative for young adults.”



PHOTO BY ELISABETH WEBBER

“For V-E Day, we participated in the ceremony, it lasted some two hours... and I was on flag duty,” says Isaiah Webber, describing the hot day in Herrlisheim, France, when he held an American flag for the duration. Webber is a Scout from Venturing Crew 44 in Stuttgart, Germany. While he jokes about remembering to not lock his knees at the anniversary of the town’s liberation, he is also quite aware that this experience was unique, even among Scouts. “We are on the spot where it happened... being able to visit places just has an entirely different meaning.”

It’s a common thread that I hear from Scouting America troop leaders across Europe. Being overseas offers their Scouts incredible experiences, including many impactful ways to give back to their local military communities and the veterans of Europe.

Sometimes Scouts come to represent the United States in unexpected ways. Troop 107 from Wiesbaden, Germany, donated and presented new country flags at the Peace Museum Bridge in Remagen, joining German Scouts and representing America at the monument’s rededication. At the event in Herrlisheim, Webber’s crew was one of the biggest groups of Americans, which made their presence feel especially symbolic. Likewise, Scouts from other troops across Germany have felt like they represent America at Bastogne’s NUTS weekend each year in November as there are few military units or English speakers in attendance.

Being in Europe means Scouts can earn merit badges in unique places, walk through historical battlefield landscapes and visit sites those in the U.S. can only research. Scouts from troops in Spain

and Italy placed flags and read names of the deceased for a Memorial Day ceremony at Florence American Cemetery in Italy. Troop 324 from Stuttgart, Germany, cleaned headstones at Lorraine American Cemetery in France.

Every year, Webber’s crew travels to Normandy to help with the 82nd Airborne commemorative ceremony and D-Day memorial events. They stay at La Fièvre Manor, arriving a week ahead to help with landscaping, preparations, and the arrival of soldiers and veterans. They staff events, clean up afterward and even assist with the cooking. It is an act of service, but they do get a bit of time to “just hang out with heroes,” according to Webber’s mom Elisabeth. She is the Crew 44 advisor and says, “They get to meet World War II veterans—a disappearing generation—which is so formative for young adults.”

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A Scoutmaster in a tan uniform and black cap is working with two Scouts in blue shirts. They are standing in a cemetery with many white headstones. The Scoutmaster is holding a yellow cardboard box, and the Scouts are looking at it. One Scout is holding a small American flag. There are some red and white striped items in a black bucket in the foreground.

Scouts across Europe are up for the challenges, and many find that their time overseas is extremely rewarding with unique opportunities.

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There are challenges though. One of the biggest hurdles for troops stationed overseas are limited chartered organizations. These are the groups that sponsor a troop; they help with leadership, goals and meeting space. In the U.S., roughly 71% of troops are chartered by religious organizations, while the rest are chartered by civic or educational clubs. In Europe, however, federally-run organizations like the chapels, youth centers and on-base schools cannot hold charters.

The solution is complex. Most overseas Scouting America troops are for military-affiliated children and concentrated near bases. Installation commanders grant Scouts access to their own "Scout Huts" on bases. Scouts then look to the local VFW or American Legion to hold their charter.

Being in a military community is another unique aspect to Scouting overseas. Troop leaders I've spoken with said it provides a noticeable increase in willing parent participation compared to in the U.S. However, TDYs and work recalls can be a challenge.

One unintended upshot to living overseas is an increase in completed Eagle Scout projects. Many young people begin working toward the rank of Eagle Scout while stationed in Europe. Wanting to finish among their peers, and before PCSing elsewhere, brings focus and motivation to a project. Some Scouts are driven by their military family heritage and see the rank of Eagle Scout as another step toward entry into a military academy.

Again, there is a level of complexity to an overseas Eagle Project that Scouts in America won't experience. Finding a project can be tough as there can be limited options available on installations. Some Eagle Scouts have been successful off base such as Jacob Berck from Troop 12 at Ramstein, Germany, who designed a historical trail field guide for the Battle of the Somme.

Funding is another difficulty. In the U.S., Scouts approach businesses like Home Depot to finance or donate items to their Eagle Project. Getting off-base support in Europe, however, is nearly impossible, as host nation businesses are unfamiliar with Scouting. Instead, Scouts are often reliant and appreciative of grants from on-installation, non-profit spouse organizations.

Scouts across Europe are up for the challenges, though, and many find that their time overseas is extremely rewarding with unique opportunities.

As I finish my chat with Webber, he tells me about his plans for the summer. "I'm going to be staffing in Croatia at Camp Avantura to [teach] wilderness survival and pioneering, or outdoor survival skills." The camp is one of a handful of Scouting America summer camps located in Europe, and another perk to Scouting overseas. ■

PHOTO BY MARCELA ARTEAGA

Friendships turned into **sisterhood.**



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“High Flight”

A YOUNG PILOT’S WORDS THAT SOARED
TO EMBODY THE SPIRIT OF AVIATION

By Katherine Torres

Quote the first two lines of the poem “High Flight” by John Gillespie Magee Jr. to any United States Air Force Academy graduate and they will dig into their memories for the lines they memorized during their Fourth Degree (freshman) year. The poem is inscribed at numerous U.S. and U.K. military aviation sites and aviator monuments, including at the Space Shuttle Challenger memorial.

It is the official poem for both the Royal Canadian Air Force and the United Kingdom’s Royal Air Force. The words famously express the awe and feelings of freedom evoked through flight. But how did the poem come into existence and earn a place in the heart of many military aviators?

John Gillespie Magee Jr., the poem’s author, was born in Shanghai, China, on June 9, 1922, to an American father and British mother who met in China while on religious missions. Magee and his three younger brothers moved to England with their mother in 1931 so the boys could begin their formal education. While at school in England, Magee won his school’s poetry prize and he continued to write throughout his life, being significantly inspired by aviation and World War II events. His last published poem, “Per Ardua,” is an homage to the individuals who lost their lives in the Battle of Britain.

With his father’s return from mission work in China, the Magee family visited his American relatives in 1939, splitting their time between Martha’s Vineyard and Pittsburgh. As World War II slowly gained traction, the family could not safely return to England. Magee finished his schooling in the U.S. and became set on pursuing a career in aviation. He was offered a scholarship to Yale University, but, instead, joined the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). Magee left for training in October 1940.

After initial flight school in Ottawa, Canada, as a newly promoted pilot officer, Magee reported to the No. 53 Operational Training Unit at RAF Llandow near Cardiff, Wales. He flew a Supermarine Spitfire for the first time on August 7, 1941. During his second flight 11 days later, Magee soared to 33,000 feet, his highest altitude. The experience inspired him to write the poem “High Flight.”

Magee enclosed the sonnet with a letter to his parents in the U.S. on September 3, 1941. His father, serving as an Episcopalian priest, printed the poem in church publications for Saint John’s Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C.

Once he completed his training in September 1941, Magee was reassigned to the No. 412 (Fighter) Squadron, RCAF, located at RAF Digby, Lincolnshire.



ABOVE Original "High Flight" poem

"High Flight"

OH! I HAVE SLIPPED THE SURLY
BONDS OF EARTH
AND DANCED THE SKIES ON
LAUGHTER-SILVERED WINGS;
SUNWARD I'VE CLIMBED, AND
JOINED THE TUMBLING MIRTH
OF SUN-SPLIT CLOUDS,—AND
DONE A HUNDRED THINGS
YOU HAVE NOT DREAMED OF—
WHEELED AND SOARED AND
SWUNG
HIGH IN THE SUNLIT SILENCE.
HOV'RING THERE,
I'VE CHASED THE SHOUTING
WIND ALONG, AND FLUNG
MY EAGER CRAFT THROUGH
FOOTLESS HALLS OF AIR. . . .

UP, UP THE LONG, DELIRIOUS,
BURNING BLUE
I'VE TOPPED THE WIND-SWEPT
HEIGHTS WITH EASY GRACE
WHERE NEVER LARK NOR EVER
EAGLE FLEW—
AND, WHILE WITH SILENT
LIFTING MIND I'VE TROD
THE HIGH UNTRESPASSED
SANCTITY OF SPACE,
PUT OUT MY HAND, AND
TOUCHED THE FACE OF GOD.

— JOHN GILLESPIE MAGEE JR.



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OPPOSITE PAGE Supermarine Spitfire

FROM THE TOP John Gillespie Magee Jr., 1941; Magee's Grave; "High Flight" at the Challenger Memorial



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On November 8, 1941, Magee flew a sortie escorting bombers to attack railway workshops at Lille, France. His group flew over the English Channel and passed over Dunkirk where they encountered flak, targeted shots from the ground. Then the group met Luftwaffe fighters. Magee was the lone survivor of his four-ship, the rest were shot down by the leading German ace Joachim Müncheberg.

Ten weeks into his active-duty service, on Dec. 11, 1941, Magee and his squadron were practicing air fighting tactics in the air space between RAF Cranwell and RAF Digby. Magee piloted a Supermarine Spitfire VZ-H, the same aircraft he flew when encountering the Luftwaffe just a month prior. Descending at high speed and in formation with three other Spitfires, he collided with an Airspeed Oxford training aircraft 1,400 feet above the ground. The Oxford pilot, 19-year-old Leading Aircraftman/Pilot Under-Training Ernest Aubrey Griffin died in the crash. A local farmer who witnessed the impact testified that Magee struggled to open his canopy during the incident, but was able to bail out. Sadly, the craft was too low for his parachute to open and he did not survive.

A couple of months after Magee's passing, in February 1942, Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish included "High Flight" in an exhibition called "Faith and Freedom" at the Library of Congress. The poem gained popularity as it was shared among aviators based in England. The original manuscript of the poem, the one Magee Jr. sent to his parents with fading ink written on airmail paper, is currently held at the Library of Congress. ■

EUROPEAN ART MOVEMENTS

WHERE TO SEE THE MASTERPIECES

By Katie Wells

Baroque | 1600s–1750s

Emerging from Rome, Italy, during the Catholic Counter-Reformation, Baroque artists used dramatic lighting, realism and dynamic movement to capture emotional intensity. Architecture, sculptures and painting inspired awe and grandeur. A famous technique emerged from the Baroque period: Caravaggio's chiaroscuro. Painters used theatrical lighting to contrast light and dark, drawing a viewer's eye to the subject of a painting.

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: **Artemisia Gentileschi** (*Rome, Italy*)

Artemisia Gentileschi made history as the first woman accepted into the Academy of Fine Arts Florence. She was influenced heavily by the chiaroscuro technique and learned to paint in her father's workshop. Rather than sticking to traditional themes, she painted women in their strength and in spite of their suffering, which flipped the male gaze. Her works gave agency to female figures pulled from mythological or biblical stories by centering them in the foreground.



▼ SEE THE MASTERPIECE ▼

Uffizi Galleries in Florence, Italy, is home to a few of Gentileschi's paintings, including the iconic "**Judith Slaying Holofernes**." In this painting, you can see the focus on Judith emphasized by dramatic chiaroscuro lighting.

continued on page 36





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Dutch Golden Age | 1600s–1680s

While the rest of Europe was focused on the Baroque art movement, Dutch artists were developing “Dutch Realism.” The church had recently been reformed, and because there was no longer an absolute monarch, painters were free to paint subjects that celebrated and captured everyday moments of life. This included landscapes, still lifes and portraits. Art reflected pride in national identity and was collected by the middle class for their homes.

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: **Judith Leyster** (*Haarlem, Netherlands*)

The first woman admitted as a master painter to the elite Haarlem Guild of St. Luke, Judith Leyster was a significant Dutch Golden Age Master. She even had her own workshop and trained apprentices. Her work famously relied on open, energetic brushstrokes to portray lively, realistic portraits. Her subjects included merrymakers, laughter and music. Unfortunately, many of Leyster’s paintings were attributed to her peer, Frans Hals, for over two centuries. In 1893, the Louvre discovered her monogram hidden beneath a fake signature on “The Happy Couple.”



▲ SEE THE MASTERPIECE ▲

“The Boy Playing the Flute” is considered a top Dutch Golden Age masterpiece and depicts the allegory of hearing. You can find it at the **Nationalmuseum** in Stockholm, Sweden. At the Gallery of Honor at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, NL, you can see “The Merry Drinker.”



▼ SEE THE MASTERPIECE ▼

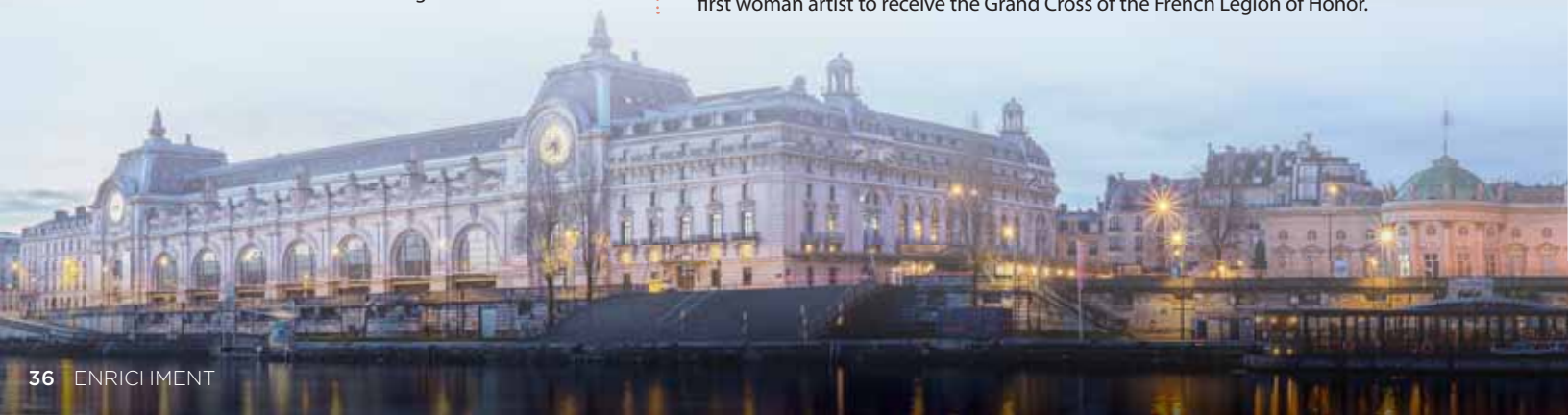
To see one of Bonheur’s most monumental paintings, “Ploughing in the Nivernais,” visit **Musée D’Orsay** in Paris, France. The Musée des Beaux-Arts in her home city Bordeaux is also home to paintings such as “Threshing Wheat in the Camargue.”

Romanticism | 1780s–1850s

Romanticism focused on the sublime power of nature and instinct. It began in Germany and England in response to the Age of Enlightenment, which emphasized reason and science, then spread to France and the rest of Europe. The Romantics believed emotions, feelings and imagination were what really mattered. Painting subjects were primarily landscapes charged with symbolism. Natural elements like forests, storms and mountains were used to create dramatic and realistic, feeling-evoking atmospheres. There is often a sense of longing and escapism in Romantic-era artworks.

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: **Rosa Bonheur** (*Bordeaux, France*)

Bonheur was a trouser-wearing rebel from Bordeaux, France. She is celebrated for her highly realistic depictions of animals. Contrary to what was “proper” for women of the time, she passionately studied animal anatomy. She visited slaughterhouses and dissection rooms to better understand how to paint muscle movement on horses, cattle and lions. Because of the nature of this work, she defied gender norms to avoid unwanted attention—she cut her hair short and received special police permission to dress in trousers. Bonheur loved animals so much that she kept a menagerie, including lions, on her estate, Château de By, where she lived with her partner, Nathalie Micas. She was the first woman artist to receive the Grand Cross of the French Legion of Honor.





Impressionism | 1860s–1880s

A leap from Realism painting, Impressionism began in France in the 19th century to rebel against strict painting standards enforced by the French Academy. Started by a small group of Paris-based painters, it is now recognized as the first modern art movement. Impressionists favored atmospheric, emotive representations of modern life in their work. They used expressive, visible brushstrokes, played with natural light and *en plein air* (open air) painting.

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: Berthe Morisot (*Bourges, France*)

Berthe Morisot was the only woman in the First Impressionist Exhibition in 1874, and was part of the founding group of Impressionist painters alongside Monet and Renoir. At the exhibition, critic Paul Mantz called Morisot “the only impressionist in the group.” Her paintings and prints depicted intimate moments of the bourgeois lifestyle which centered around women with their children and families. Her painting technique was dreamy and personal. Art critics described her work as *effleurer*, meaning to touch lightly, to brush against. You might recognize Morisot in other impressionist paintings of the time as she was one of Edouard Manet’s favorite models.



◀ SEE THE MASTERPIECE ▶

The **Musée D’Orsay** in Paris, France, is home to one of Morisot’s most groundbreaking works, “**The Cradle**.” It depicts a tender moment of her sister Edma gazing at her newborn daughter sleeping peacefully. The largest collection of Morisot’s paintings is at Musée Marmottan Monet, also in Paris.



© ESTATE OF LEONORA CARRINGTON

▲ SEE THE MASTERPIECE ▲

View “**The Poms of the Subsoil**” at the **Sainsbury Centre Collection** at the University of East Anglia in the U.K. It showcases Carrington’s unique use of mysticism and the occult, combined with strong female figures. Her “**Portrait of Max Ernst**” is at the National Galleries of Scotland. It was painted just before he was interned in a Nazi concentration camp.

Surrealism | 1920s–1950s

Surrealism arose in Paris as a response to the devastation of World War I. It was deeply influenced by Sigmund Freud’s theories on dreams and psychoanalysis. Artists sought to delve into the imagination and break free of rationalism. They commonly used dreamscapes to allow the unconscious mind to express itself. Often, the painting subjects had unexpected juxtaposition, like placing a rocking chair in the middle of a desert. Metamorphosis and transformations were another common theme. Layering and distortion techniques were used to make it appear as if figures or objects were shifting into other forms.

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: Leonora Carrington (*Chorley, Great Britain*)

Carrington rejected the British wealth she was born into to pursue art. She was a visionary British-Mexican artist. In her 20s, she fell in love with fellow surrealist painter Max Ernst and they fled to the south of France, where they created an artistic haven. During World War II, Ernst was suddenly interned, and Carrington was forcibly institutionalized by her family after an alleged psychotic break. Eventually, she found sanctuary in Mexico. There, she joined an artist group that included Remedios Varo and Kati Horna. The women studied sorcery, tarot, alchemy and witchcraft, along with Mayan lore which heavily influenced Carrington’s work. She focused on spiritual, literary and matriarchal themes. ■

SCOTTISH BEASTIES

and Where to Find Them

Story by Katie Wells, Map by Mandy Mills

Scotland is known for hundreds of magical and ghoulish creatures. Some of the myths and legends surrounding them explain strange landscapes, tragic fates and surprisingly good fortune. Go on a Scottish beastie hunt with this map and guide. Perhaps along the way you will spot many more.

SELKIES

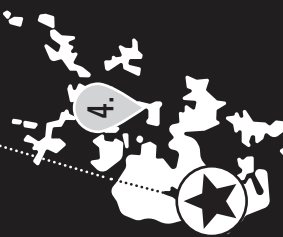
Said to be found around the island of Eilean Donan, selkies are sea folk of the north. On moonlit nights, they shed their seal skins to dance on the shores in their human forms. Many legends tell of a man falling in love with a selkie's beautiful human form and thus stealing her seal skin, barring her from returning to sea. But these men are cursed, for even after a selkie bears his children, when she finds her seal skin, she returns to the sea, leaving them forever alone.



SHETLAND

TROLLID, THE DWARF

Dwarfie Stane in Hoy, Orkney, is thought to be the only prehistoric rock-cut chambered tomb in the U.K. Located in desolate peatland, the megalithic chambered tomb is carved out of Devonian Old Red Sandstone. One legend says that a golden-haired dwarf, Trollid, used the stane as his home. Locals remember him combing the beaches for fossils. Now, occasionally, he appears by the entrance of Dwarfie Stane, admiring his fossils. His treasure, rumored to be buried nearby, is yet to be discovered.



ORKNEY



BEAN NIGHE

If you wish to hear a prophecy about your fate, approach her without being seen. But if she sees you first, it may cost you the use of your limbs, face or life. The Bean Nighe is a banshee believed to have died in childbirth. She resides near water scrubbing blood from the clothes of those doomed to die. Long ago, Ewen of the Little Head, the Chieftain's son, saw

Bean Nighe at the River Ba before a great battle. He demanded to know whose burial shirts she was washing. She revealed they were his and the shirts of his men. After marching into battle, the Bean Nighe's prophecy quickly came true, and they all perished.



JOCK O'BENNACHIE

Hunt in the heather hills for the iron key to release the hidden giant sleeping under the mountain of Bennachie in Aberdeenshire. Jock O' Bennachie is one of Scotland's original giants whose rivalry and boulder-throwing battles with Jock O' Noth accidentally killed his beloved. A faerie took the form of Jock O' Bennachie's beloved and cursed him as punishment. Legend says that when Jock O' Bennachie is freed from his slumber, Scotland will be rich.

CÙ SÌTH Faerie Dogs

Black, shaggy and the size of a young bull, these harbingers of death roam the Cairngorm Mountains with fire in their eyes and are also known as

"phantom hounds." Legend says that if you are lucky enough to hear their terrifying bay (they normally hunt silently), you might be able to escape being dragged into the faerie realm or death. Make sure to get to safety swiftly; for those in range of their third bark are so overcome with terror that they often die before the hound even reaches them.

EVEN MORE BEASTIES:

1. THE SÌTH (FAERIES)
2. PUDDLEFOOT THE BROWNIE
3. THE LOCH NESS MONSTER (NESSIE)
4. THE MESTER STOOR WORM
5. FACHAN
6. THE KELPIE
7. THE CEASG
8. THE WULVER OF SHETLAND



SCAN THE QR CODE TO READ ABOUT
EVEN MORE BEASTIES AND SEE
A MAP OF THEM ALL ON
[EUROPE.STRIPES.COM](https://europe.stripes.com)



Champagne Problems

in Épernay, France

By Katie Wells

I've got 99 problems, but champagne ain't one. Perhaps you have been to Épernay, France, and know that it is in the heart of the Champagne Region, famous for its eloquent *perlage* (fine bubbles). Or, maybe, you've watched the delightfully cheesy 2025 Netflix rom com, "Champagne Problems," which tells the story of Sydney Price (Minka Kelly), a determined American executive who flies to France to acquire the Chateau Cassell champagne brand by Christmas, but not before she meets Henri Cassell (Tom Wozniczka), the heir to the famed bubbly. However, did you know that Épernay also has an elevated holiday vibe each year?

Les Habits de Lumière, or The Festival of Lights, as a friend of mine puts it, is "everything an adult would want for the holidays; a Christmas market meets rave, although kids can also have fun. There are laser shows, fireworks, dancers, a silent disco, and, of course, champagne!" Champagne may seem pretentious to some. Not at this festival.

There are plenty of variations to try, and bottles are more affordable at €50 a pop, or bubble. Splitting it with friends, or the friends you make at the festival, like in the movie, is a great way to cut costs.

In 2026, my spouse and I hope to join our friend for the festival and visit filming locations from the movie, but not before a rewatch of "Champagne Problems" to set the mood. *Les Habits de Lumière* will take place from Dec. 11-13. Friday and Saturday will be the main festival, and as a finale, there is a vintage car parade on Sunday. For those heading home that day, there are traffic slowdowns since there is one way in and out of town. habitsdelumiere.epernay.fr



▲ PHOTOS BY RACHEL GROVES

Château Comtesse Lanford

This stunning estate was used for exterior scenes of the fictional Château Cassel in the film. You can book a champagne tasting on the garden terrace. You can also participate in the Comtesse Sabrage Experience, where you are taught the Napoleonic way of opening a bottle of champagne using a saber.

PHOTO BY MANDY MILLS



PHOTO BY RACHEL GROVES

PHOTO BY MANDY MILLS



1834 Champagne Boizel

The UNESCO World Heritage-listed underground cellars of this historic Champagne house are where tender moments between Sydney and Henri were filmed. You might also recognize the grand courtyard. Like Henri's family in the movie, the Boizel family has run the house for generations and offers tours and tastings.

My friend said this was her favorite champagne in Épernay.

Château Perrier

Behind this château, the formal gardens are where the Les Habits de Lumière Silent Disco (which was also featured in the movie) is held. This 19th-century palace is right in the center of Épernay and is also a public wine and regional archeology museum.



PHOTO BY MANDY MILLS

Église Saint-Martin de Chavot

Just outside Épernay in Chavot-Courcourt, this picturesque church is the perfect place to take in views of the rolling hills and vineyards of the region. The church appears in the movie during transition shots and romanticizes the area.

You can take a bike or car to get there from Épernay and then take a scenic stroll up the hill to the 12th-century Romanesque church. ■



A HOPPY EXPERIENCE AT A EUROPEAN

Beer Spa

By Tamala Malerk

With eyeball-sized snowflakes falling as we traversed the sidewalks, it felt weird to return to our hotel room to put on a bathing suit. Yet, that is exactly what we were doing in the dead of winter in Czechia. My spouse had done some research and found that he could expand his love of beer from something he adored drinking into a luxury spa experience.

We chose a beer spa that was combined with a hotel and ensured that we could book the spa room for ourselves. Just a 50-foot outdoor trek in late November snowfall from our hotel room

to the spa in our bathing suits, robes and flip-flops solidified for us that this was a great decision.

As we opened the door to the reception area, we could already hear bubbling water from the next room which featured two tubs, a fireplace and a large, square wheat straw bed. The receptionist greeted us and then gave us a quick tour and explanation before we were able to get into the hot barrel tubs.

We splurged on the longest experience: 90 minutes in the tubs, and 60 minutes lounging in the wheat straw bed.

She ended the introduction by pouring ingredients into the tubs that elevated this event from a typical spa trip to a uniquely hoppy experience: hops, yeast and malt. Yep, we were soaking in beer (well, the ingredients that make beer). One last thing before we got into the tubs: we were provided with unlimited beer to drink for the entire duration of our spa time. There were light and dark options on tap between our two tubs, so we didn't even need to stop soaking to get a refill.



But why beer? Soaking in this blend isn't just for a cool reel on TikTok; there are actual health benefits. The yeast contains vitamin B, which is great for your skin. The hops helps with the relaxation and revitalization of skin pores. Even the wooden tub aids in stimulating your metabolism.

Vitamin B

Relaxation and skin
revitalization



Mineral and
vitamin
absorption

Metabolism
stimulation

We chose to soak in our bathing suits for our personal comfort (nudity was an option) and were excited to finally climb into the hoppy water. The temperature was just right. I could immediately feel the heat untensing my muscles. I am not much of a beer drinker, but I poured myself a light wheat beer which paired well with the relaxation of it all.

The tubs were the perfect size, and are made to accommodate up to two people. My 6-ft-tall spouse soaked without feeling squished and my 5'3-self didn't completely sink to the bottom unless I sat crossed legged in the center of the tub. The bubbles stopping would alert us that the tubs would soon drain and it was time to move into the wheat straw area.

Honestly, the 90 minutes in the tub seemed to fly by and when the bubbles stopped, I felt like a toddler wanting to plead for five more minutes. Nonetheless, it was time to move across the room to the straw bed.

My spouse chose to just sit on the steps near the fireplace while I hopped (pun intended) into the straw bed so I could have the full experience. Lounging in the straw aids in the absorption of all the beer-related minerals and vitamins that we had just soaked in. There was a blanket on the bed, so the straw didn't stick to me. A plate of homemade beer bread next to the straw made the perfect post-soak snack. The straw relaxation is supposed to be 60 minutes, but we were both ready to go early and wished we could just get back in the tubs.

We walked back out to the reception area where there was a mini gift shop ready to supply us with soaps and shampoos to recreate the experience at home. We grabbed a bottle of soap and thanked the receptionist for such a lovely experience.

Beer spas are popping up all over Europe now, but the practice dates back centuries and I can see why. I recommend a beer spa experience for anyone looking to relax and unwind in an unconventional way. ■

European Cities WITH BEER SPA EXPERIENCES

Brussels, *Belgium*
Chodová Planá, *Czechia*
Franzensbad, *Czechia*
Karlsbad, *Czechia*
Marienbad, *Czechia*
Pilsen, *Czechia*
Prague, *Czechia*
Strasbourg, *France*
Neuzelle, *Germany*
Stuttgart, *Germany*
Budapest, *Hungary*
Árskógssandur, *Iceland*
Porto, *Portugal*
Alicante, *Spain*
Cádiz, *Spain*
Grenada, *Spain*
Islantilla, *Spain*
Madrid, *Spain*
Salou, *Spain*
Zahara, *Spain*
Norfolk, *UK*



OK

Snowboarding

Story and Photos by Kat Nickola



I attempt to catch up with my son. It's an absolute lost cause. This is my first day out at an alpine resort on my snowboard. He gave me a great intro class at the indoor slope near our home, but it will take days of his sage 15-year-old advice before I can even turn frontside without falling. The reality is that I'm bruised, my behind hurts and my quads are on fire. But the terrain is perfect for learning and the scenery is gorgeous.

As I ride past a stand of trees, the valley opens below where I can see him—a tiny dot on the sunny slope, speeding past the village church and surrounded by mesmerizing rocky peaks. And then I catch my toe edge and crash onto my knees. They'll be sore for weeks.

We are at the Oberstdorf-Kleinwalsertal ski area, called "OK" for short. It is a huge single-pass area made up of seven ski resorts, interconnected by lifts and a bus system. Straddling the border between Germany and Austria, OK has 130 kilometers of slopes and 48 lifts. Over the last few years, we've tried many of the different resorts, staying in unique small villages nearby, but we still haven't seen it all.

continued on page 46

CANARY

OXIDIO

OXIDIO is a state-of-the-art dental practice located in Gärtringen, not far from Panzer Barracks. We have welcomed American patients for many years and continue to take care of the American community, accepting new patients of all ages.

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SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #35

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Earlier this morning, after a hot and filling breakfast at our chalet-style accommodation, the Brietach Hus, we put on our boots in the hotel's ski storage room and walked to the Parsenn lift. I bought two-day pass cards at the *kasse* (cashier hut), my son got a discounted student rate, and we hopped on the lift. Breitach Hus is in the hamlet of Egg, across the Kleinwalsertal (small Walser Valley) from the bustling ski town of Riezlern, Austria. For this visit, we are mostly snowboarding at the Heuberg resort so I can learn on its wide, low-grade blue slopes.

After helping me with my first run and patiently following along with my way-too-slow second try, I free my son from his instructor duties so he can enjoy going full throttle on his own. He immediately shows off at the nearby jumps course, then goes full teenager mode and is out of sight in seconds. I, on the other hand, struggle to stand on my board, plop on my bum, struggle up again and go turtle-slow down the hill. My valiant effort is rewarded with a nearly fall-free run. Only once did I veer off, unable to turn at a tight section, and fall into a ditch through the orange plastic netting. With sun terraces on both sides of the slope, plenty of folks sipping beer and coffee got to laugh along with me as I climbed back up.





There have been minimal lines during our visit, so my son zips past me a few times on my next runs. In the afternoon, we meet at the Walserblick cafe for lunch out on the sunny patio. My knees are wrecked and I'm sweating, so after downing my schnitzel and beer, I walk back to the hotel to ditch a layer and switch out my snowboard for skis. I'm decidedly adequate at skiing, which should mean there are no more falls today. We ride the forest trails over to the adjacent red slopes at Walmendingerhorn resort. The snow here is a bit thin, but we spend the rest of the day making a massive figure-eight tour of the connecting resorts.

In the evening, my son cooks spaghetti and I chop a salad in the well-appointed shared kitchen at the chalet. It's a big plus for us to be able to save some money on food, not to mention that neither of us wants to do much more than take a soak and watch TV. It's been a happily exhausting day and I'm looking forward to more slope time (and fewer knee falls) tomorrow. ■

OK Resorts

The seven resorts that make up the OK ski area are all included on a single ski pass which can be purchased at the base of any major lift. Each resort has its own unique vibe and slope character.

NEBELHORN, GERMANY

- 13 km of slopes (mostly black and red)
- Dramatic views from the mountain peak
- Germany's longest valley run—7.5 km, not for beginners
- Base: The city of Obertsdorf with competitive hotel prices and lots of amenities and apres-ski options. Parking can get congested; walking or taking a bus is recommended.

SÖLLERECK, GERMANY

- 16 km of slopes (mostly red and blue)
- Gently sloping blues are wide and beginner-friendly
- Family vibe with an adjacent *rodelbahn* (mountain coaster)
- Base: Various rural hotels spread across the valley near Kornau, or drive from Obertsdorf. Large parking area.

FELLHORN, GERMANY & KANZELWAND, AUSTRIA

- 36 km of slopes (mostly red, some blue)
- Two resorts that connect across the ridgeline that is the Germany-Austria border
- Lots of wide slopes and open space, tends to be less crowded
- Base: Riezlern on the Austria side, rural hotels on the Germany side or drive from Obertsdorf. Large parking area at the base of the Fellhorn lift.

HEUBERG, AUSTRIA

- 23 km of slopes (mostly blue)
- Wide, long blue runs for beginners, family vibe
- Easy ski trail to red runs at Walmendingerhorn
- Base: Slope-side and walkable hotels in Egg and Hirschegg, or a short shuttle bus ride from Riezlern. Very little parking.

WALMENDINGERHORN, AUSTRIA

- 15 km of slopes (mostly red)
- Long, wide red runs with pretty views, family vibe
- Easy ski-across to the blue slopes at Heuberg
- Base: Chalet hotels in the small village of Mittelberg. Small parking area.

IFEN, AUSTRIA

- 25 km of slopes (mostly blue, some red and black)
- High plateau skiing with incredible views
- Mix of wide slopes and forest trails, can get crowded (the only OK resort where we have encountered uppity skiers)
- Base: Pricey, limited options near the lifts. Drive or take the shuttle bus. Sizeable parking area.

Resources

Piste status, maps and detailed resort information:

www.ok-bergbahnen.com

Live parking availability and cost:

www.parken-ok.com

FINDING LIGHT

in the Lofoten Polar Night

By Kat Nickola





We arrive at the Harstad-Narvik airport, descending from 30,000 feet through a thick cloud bank into a snow squall and dark-as-night conditions. It's one o'clock in the afternoon. The last time we saw the sun was half an hour ago saying goodbye over the horizon out the window of the airplane.

Late December is not when most families venture nearly 200 kilometers north of the Arctic Circle. And I'm happy my two teenagers don't complain as we trudge across the white, snow-packed street to our rental car outside of the terminal. The rest of the vehicles in the lot have a foot of thick snow on top, but we are grateful an employee brushed ours clean. Driving in the snowstorm is slow, but our electric car (fueled vehicles are rarely rentable in Norway) does well. Our first stop is a small grocery store to buy food for the next five days and car snacks for our three-hour drive.

Our destination: Henningsvær, a small village perched on a few rocky islets in Lofoten, Norway. A mountainous island chain, Lofoten looks as if Jörmungandr the World Serpent were breaching out of the water. Villages squat along the edges where land meets the sea.

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We only see darkness, blowing snow and 200 feet of road illuminated by our high beams. There are few other cars.

I rethink the word *remote*. It feels isolated, but only because we travel by land. The people of Lofoten have been seafarers since they first settled here at the end of the Stone Age. The islands are the center of the world's cod migration and fishery industry, and islanders look to the sea for abundance and connection.

It is a welcome reprieve to finally step into the house, with its *hygge* warmth and light. Over the next days, we snuggle in to read books, play games and enjoy family time. This is not peak season—far from it—so we could afford a rental with a tiny bedroom for each teen, but we find ourselves cozing up together in the living room anyways.

There are six island groups in Lofoten. Henningsvær is at the lowest tip of the northern group called Austvågøy. The town is perched on two islands in the fjord and is full of colorful, tidy homes that stand out against the white landscape and gray water.

During midday, the world takes on a twilight blue filter as the sun tries to peak above the horizon. It won't succeed for another week. When the clouds clear, the moon reflects off the fresh snow, turning the nighttime bright. The moon is visible at all times.

Our boots crunch on the snowy roads as we walk around town. There are few cars as we trek past cozy lit windows. Locals bundled in reflective snowsuits smile as they drag sleds with kids and groceries. We explore the scenic port, the World War II gun bunker on the headland and visit the MIX, which we dub "the stuff store," for a hot dog.

I enjoy solo walks as well, tramping all the way to the end of the main road as it zig-zags across the islands. There are red *rorbuer* at the end. The small, traditional huts for visiting fishermen sit on platforms or stilts in the water. There is also the town's soccer field, tucked between stone outcroppings and surrounded by empty fish drying racks. I am caught in a sudden snow squall near the lighthouse, and huddle beneath an overhang until it blows over. It's a good thing we brought our warmest winter gear.





PHOTOS BY KAT NICKOLA

My son spends his days digging a snow fort out of the big drift by our rental home. He doesn't venture into town but is content to hang out, and even nap, in his snowy den.

For an adventure, we drive (in the dark) to the next island group, Vestvågøy, to nerd out on Viking history at the Lofotr Viking Museum. Over 1,000 years ago, a Viking chieftdom near the town of Borg thrived in this protected and rare inland valley. The world's largest Viking longhouse was excavated on a hilltop overlooking the settlement.

We visit the Lofotr Viking Museum for a Viking feast in the meticulously recreated longhouse. It is divided into three segments. Our visit begins in the chieftains' quarters that is full of daily life items we can touch and interact with. We try on armor, sit on the bed, pick up the knitting, sample the leather shoes and even play a Viking board game. After our first glass of mead, it is on to the feasting hall where carved wooden columns divide rows of table boards and benches. A raised chieftain's table sits at the far end. Past that, a modern restaurant kitchen occupies the segment Vikings used as a horse stable.

We claim seats by the central hearth. Mead is poured and refilled, the fire is lit, and a blessing ensures the gods are with us. The feast begins. We devour the savory roasted lamb, root vegetables, barley, flat bread, sour cream and lingonberry preserves. There is more mead, then singing, storytelling and we even get up for a circle dance.

When the feast is over, we stumble out into snow as the aurora spreads toward us across the sky, green tendrils dropping eerily into place, reaching to touch us. I feel the magic of this place, and I swear it's not just the mead.

On New Year's Eve, Henningsvær sheds its quiet demeanor as fireworks from the small central square fill the night. Kids run around and sled down the road as sparklers crackle. In the distance, other town fireworks reflect across the still fjord: a connection in the darkness.

We will be home by January 5th, when the sun peaks over the horizon to begin its slow return, but I'll fondly remember the Lofoten Polar Nights and all the light in that darkness. ■

Fantastic POZNAŃ Festivals

By Tamala Malerk

Stationed in Poznań, Poland and looking for something to do? Poznań is a city immersed in history and culture, and there is always a new festival on the horizon, including these annual and bi-annual events.

GRANDA Poznań Crime Fiction Festival

SEPT. 25-27, 2026

In 2026, the 12th edition of this literary festival takes place with the theme of "Mirrors." Meet bestselling authors along with up-and-coming writers and chat with fellow book lovers.

17th International Henryk Wieniawski Violin Competition

OCT. 8-25, 2026

The 17th edition of this international competition takes place in 2026. 50 violinists will compete to see who is the best of the best.

International Young Audience Film Festival Ale Kino!

NOV. 22-29, 2026

Annually, for eight days, kids and young adults can attend a film festival created just for them.

Christmas Market

NOV. 15-DEC. 21, 2026

This large Christmas market allows for you to try tasty local treats as well as find something for that special someone (or yourself). While there, you can also go ice skating, marvel at the Christmas tree and, perhaps, meet Santa.

Name Day of Saint Martin Street

NOV. 11, 2026

Every year on Saint Martin's Day, the city celebrates with Saint Martin's croissants, performances, music, kids' activities, food and drinks.

Anniversary of the Outbreak of the Wielkopolska Uprising

DEC. 27, 2026

While the rest of Poland celebrates Independence Day on Nov. 11, Poznań had to assert its independence over one month later at the end of World War I. Celebrate the uprising annually with speeches, reenactments, laying of wreaths and musical performances.

Poznań Ice Festival

DEC. 11-13, 2026

Ice sculptors compete for the top three prizes at this annual competition during the Christmas market. Smaller competitions such as the one block competition and the speed competition also take place. On the third day, there are also workshops for children.



Three Kings Procession

JAN. 6, 2027

Celebrate the Feast of Epiphany with a procession and performances.

Kaziuk Fair

MARCH 7, 2027

This event occurs on the Sunday closest to March 4, the Feast Day of Saint Casimir. Poznań celebrates with singing, dance, music, food and crafting.

Next Fest

APRIL 15-17, 2027

This is a combination of a festival, showcase and conference. See what is up-and-coming in the world of music and enjoy live performances.

Poznań Science and Art Festival

APRIL 2027

This festival dates back to 1997 and exists to inspire people's interest in art and science with demonstrations, events, workshops and lectures.

Poznań Music Spring

APRIL 2027

Come out for this multi-day international festival of contemporary music featuring authors, an exhibition, sound walks and performances from Polish and international artists.

Enter Enea Festival

MAY 2027

This invitation-only-for-artists event by Leszek Możdżer is a multi-day, open air jazz concert.

Poznań's Museum Night

MAY 2027

20+ museums across Poznań participate in this annual event with special hours, events, exhibitions and demonstrations.

Children's Art Biennial

MAY 30-JUNE 6, 2027

Poznań celebrates all things children's art. This event features art, music, literature, film and more, and even though children is in the name, this event is for adults as well.

Pyrkon Fantasy Festival

JUNE 18-20, 2027

Put on your best cosplay for a weekend of fan events, competitions, a puzzle zone, concerts, shopping and much more.

Malta Festival

JUNE 2027

Named after the artificial lake in the area, this festival is all about music, culture, dance art, theater and film. This cultural festival dates back over 30 years and focuses on creating community at the local and international level.

Ethno Port

JUNE 2027

Ethno Port celebrates culture through music with performers from all over the world.

International Animated Film Festival

JULY 3-11, 2027

This is the largest animated film festival in all of Poland. First held in 2008, each festival shows around 300 films from around the world.

Bittersweet Festival

AUG. 2027

Check out this three-day music festival. In 2026, the line-up included Gorillaz, Twenty One Pilots and Lorde.

Gotango Poznań Festival

AUG. 2027

Dance the weekend away at this newer dance festival featuring performances, musicians, DJs and classes centered on the tango.

Poznań Old Jazz Festival

AUG. 2027

Jazz bands from all over Europe will perform in the 2026 edition of the festival. Attendees can also enjoy film screenings, parades and workshops.

National Festival of Good Taste

AUG. 2027

This multi-day festival celebrates local and regional foods. Try something tasty, take a workshop, enjoy a concert or watch a culinary show.

Summer Sounds

SEPT. 2027

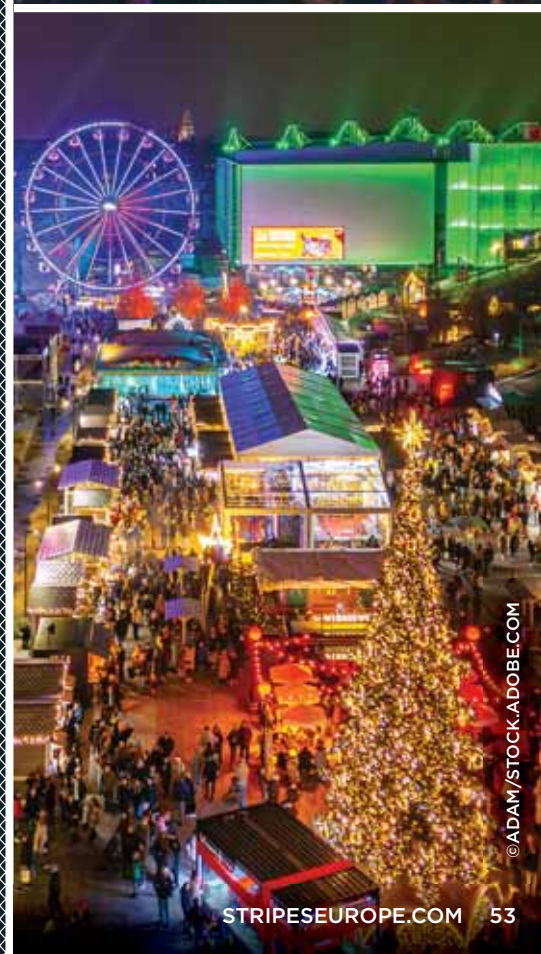
This multi-city festival makes its final stop in Poznań. An ever-growing festival, it features the best of Polish music along with up-and-comers and formerly famous artists. ■



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LUXURY MEETS ACCESSIBILITY AT *Milan Fashion Week*

By Tamala Malerk

 One of the first things I noticed about Milan when I had the pleasure of visiting, in addition to the gorgeous *Duomo* (cathedral) and tasty coffee, was the abundance of high fashion stores and brands, and that was apparently intentional.

Milan Fashion Week has become the “most glamorous fashion week of the Big Four,” according to the writers of *British Vogue*. Fashion Week also occurs in London, Paris and New York. But how did this famous fashion event come to be?

It all started in the 1950s. Milan was a textile industry power and drew the attention of the newly created Camera Nazionale della Moda Italia (National Chamber of Italian Fashion). Milan’s fashion style began competing with the haute couture fashions in Rome and Paris as well as the fashion shows of Venice and Florence by combining its ready-to-wear style with luxury.

Solidifying Milan’s status as an iconic fashion city, designers began to flock to the area and fashion magazine *Vogue Italia* made it their home in 1961. Over the next 50 years, Milan hosted some of the most notable moments in fashion history.

In the 70s and 80s, Milan-based designers Gianni Versace and Giorgio Armani gained popularity. The first official Milan Fashion Week as the global event we know today took place in 1975, replacing earlier, regional fashion shows that were bringing buyers and designers together since the 1950s. Soon after, other famous Italian designers including Miuccia Prada and Dolce & Gabbana moved to Milan.

The 90s saw the era of the supermodel, and stars such as Naomi Campbell and Cindy Crawford dominated the runway of Milan Fashion Week making it an unmissable event for the who’s who of the fashion, Hollywood and celebrity industries. In 1991, Campbell and Crawford, along with Linda Evangelista and Christy Turlington made Milan Fashion Week history when they walked side-by-side on the runway while lip-synching George Michael’s “Freedom! ’90,” during a show for Gianni Versace.

Sadly, the memorable moment of 1997’s Milan Fashion Week was the tribute show, “Viva Versace,” hosted by Donatella Versace three months after her brother Gianni Versace was murdered. Tears streamed down Campbell’s face as she walked the runway in her light pink chiffon dress. Twenty years later, in 2017, five of fashion’s veteran supermodels, including Crawford and Campbell, as well as Claudia Schiffer, Helena Christensen and Carla Bruni commemorated the anniversary of Versace’s death during a catwalk tribute in Donatella Versace’s Milan show paying homage to the “Freedom! 90” walk.

Milan Fashion Week transitioned fairly seamlessly into the 21st century, incorporating a mix of technology, entertainment, sustainability, music, fashion, art, accessibility and marketing into the shows. It goes beyond fashion; it is a demonstration of Italian innovation and creativity for an international audience.

It is not just famous brands on the runways, but up-and-coming designers as well. Many of the designers on display have dedicated themselves to eco-friendly practices such as using recycled materials and utilizing sustainable, ethical fashion practices.

There are events throughout Milan Fashion Week that occur outside in public venues, which are free and open to everyone. For the most up-to-date information on events open to the public, go to cameramoda.it. They occur at locations all over Milan including castles, museums and cobblestone streets.

However, there are some exclusive events you must obtain an invitation to. Even if there is an exclusive event you cannot attend, you can pre-register for the event's afterparty, where you can soak up the opulence and fun; check out fashionweek-online.com for ticket information for these events. Milan Fashion Week has become so accessible, you can attend events if you are not there in person through its livestream at milanofashionweek.cameramoda.it. ■

WANT TO EXPERIENCE MILAN
FASHION WEEK YOURSELF?
**HERE ARE THE DATES FOR
THE UPCOMING SEASONS.**

- **Women's Spring/Summer**
Sept. 22–28, 2026
- **Men Fall/Winter**
Jan. 15–19, 2027
- **Women's Fall/Winter**
Feb. 23–March 1, 2027
- **Men's Spring/Summer**
June 2027

GLUTEN FREE *in Rome*

By Katie Wells

A pistachio cornetto, tender homemade pasta or creamy, crunchy cannoli: these are some of the delicacies anyone with gluten sensitivities or celiac disease dreams of eating when visiting Italy but may know all too well that heart-sinking feeling of not wanting to risk it. No worries. Italy, especially Rome, is a very gluten-free-friendly place and the quality is *bellissimo!*

When in Rome, I never felt like I was struggling to find options or a place to eat. I often found something I could eat even at places that didn't advertise being gluten free (GF). Best of all, Rome takes cross-contamination very seriously and if you are eating GF, many restaurants will have an AiC certified stamp on their menu that stands for "Associazione Italiana Celiachia," or Italian Celiac Association. Some also stick a little flag in the food to signify it is GF. All the pasta, breads and pastries I feasted upon were truly handmade and not pre-packaged; I was still getting an authentic Italian dining experience. Below are some of the places I went, but there are many more in Rome and throughout Italy.



PHOTO BY KATIE WELLS



PHOTO BY KATIE WELLS



PHOTO BY KATIE WELLS



PIZZA in Trevi

Right by the stunning Trevi Fountain is Pizza in Trevi. This AiC-certified restaurant produces GF items in a separate facility to avoid any cross contamination. The GF pizza is made with organic brown rice flour, organic buckwheat flour, extra virgin olive oil and sourdough starter. The pasta is completely organic with a simple list of ingredients: organic rice flour, organic buckwheat flour, organic quinoa flour, and organic corn flour. I appreciated seeing a list of their ingredients on their website.

I had heard this pizza place was amazing, but I thought the GF crust might be, well, nothing special like a lot of places I've tried with a "fresh" GF crust in the states (aka the same frozen brand I would buy from the grocery store). I was so happy to find out that this restaurant really cared about their GF options and, like with the pizza they are known for, used a sourdough starter. My sister-in-law and I shared the Capricious Pizza. This was our first meal after landing and the warm crispy crust, prosciutto, mushrooms, melty cheese and olives were a perfect welcome for our first time in Italy. I only had the pizza that night, but they had a wide variety of GF appetizers, pasta dishes and desserts.

PANTHA REI

Nearly 90% of Pantha Rei's menu is gluten free. They are recognized by the AiC and retain the integrity of Roman trattoria cuisine by using homemade, seasonal and fresh ingredients in their dishes. Here, I joined my husband, brother-in-law and sister-in-law for a sit-down meal at a well-dressed table on the cobblestones just outside of the restaurant. We listened to the sounds of Rome accompanied by a violinist playing nearby. What I loved about this place is that I felt spoiled for choice.

For an *Antipasti* (starter) I tried the *Suppli*, a fried rice ball with tomatoes, ground meat and gooey cheese. Then, my spouse and I split the *Raviolo Ripieno di Ricotta e Spinaci*, a delicious ravioli with ricotta and spinach. I was also on a mission to try a true Italian meatball while in Italy, but you know... breadcrumbs. Here, however, I ordered *polpette al sugo con pecorino* (meatballs with tomato sauce and cheese) and it did not disappoint. Sadly, I had no room for dessert. If I had, the classic tiramisu with coffee would have been my choice. Many of the dishes offered at this restaurant also have a lactose free (LF) and vegan variation.

RICCARDO TALIANI BANQUETING

Riccardo Taliani Banqueting was one of my favorite breakfast spots of the trip. The inside was small; however each time we visited we found seating on the patio. It opened early and the service was quick, which was beneficial since we booked a lot of morning tours while in Rome.

There were a few GF pastry options like croissants and cannoli; however, my eyes lit up when I saw a unique cake/muffin hybrid filled with a generous swirl of chocolate cream and topped with crushed pistachio nuts (sadly, I can't remember what it was called). If you go, you will know it when you see it! Despite the sugar rush, paired with a double cappuccino, it was perfect and so, so delectable. If I could have that in place of a birthday cake each year, I would. (AiC certified)

"SENZA GLUTINE" MEANS "GLUTEN-FREE" IN ITALIAN.
A HELPFUL PHRASE TO ASK IF A PLACE HAS GLUTEN-FREE OPTIONS IS: "AVETE OPZIONI SENZA GLUTINE?"

A FEW OTHER GLUTEN-FREE PLACES IN ROME TO TRY:

Napoleoni Gluten Free Roma

A three-generation family-owned *Pasticceria Artigianale* (artisanal pastry shop) that is now 100% GF with every Italian cookie, cake, cannoli or tart you can dream of, and they have a savory menu as well. They even have a GF laboratory for production and new creations. (AiC certified)

La Soffitta Renovatio

This restaurant just outside Vatican City offers plenty of GF options like calzones, pizza and pasta. They are said to be pizza masters, blending over 100 years of Roman and Abruzzo cuisine tradition. (AiC certified)

Mama Eat

Mama Eat offers GF and LF options at their homestyle cooking restaurant. Mamma Marcella and her two brothers founded the restaurant when she was diagnosed with celiac disease. The menu features her recipes based on the fundamentals of Neapolitan staples. Each of their restaurants have two kitchens so that guests can have GF, LF or both options safely for their meal. They are 100% GF and offer pizza, pasta and even beer. If you are travelling across Italy, Mama Eat is now located in Naples, Pompeii, Florence and Milan as well. (AiC certified)

Ironically, a place that is so well known for gluten-based foods, was also very accommodating. Don't be afraid to try other GF places in Rome and to simply ask if there are options wherever you pop into. I even found a tasty GF lemon cookie at an airport coffee shop on the way home. ■



CHEESES OF EUROPE

By Tamala Malerk



Cheese is one of the most versatile and tastiest foods in the world. It goes well scrambled into eggs for breakfast, paired with a deli meat for a sandwich at lunch, melted onto potatoes for dinner, with fruit and jams as a dessert or as a snack by itself.

While you are living in Europe, why not try some of these cheeses on your travels?



1—BRANZA DE BURDUF | ROMANIA [s]

This cheese is aged in unique ways, either in the stomach of a sheep or in tubes made from fir bark. Unlike other cheeses listed, branza de burduf is only aged two to three months before consumption. Traditionally, people ate it directly from the sheep stomach or fir bark; now, you can purchase it from plastic tubes at the grocery store.

2—BRYNDZA PODHALAŃSKA | POLAND [s]

From the sheep of the hills of Nowy Targ County, this cheese is soft and spreadable. It begins as curds that are crushed, salted and aged to form its shape and taste. Make sure to get this cheese when you can; it is only available from May to September every year. Bryndza Podhalańska also has the honor of obtaining a Protected Designation of Origin (PDO).

3—CHEDDAR | ENGLAND [c]

While visiting the town of Cheddar, England, take some time to learn about the cheese that originates from the area. The earliest reference to cheddar cheese dates back to 1170 when King Henry II purchased over 10,000 lbs. of it. For a cheese to be called “cheddar,” it had to be produced within 30 miles of the city of Wells. That distinction is not in place today.

4—DUBLINER | IRELAND [c]

You would think that this cheese is made in Dublin, its namesake, but that is a common misconception. It actually comes from the city of Cork, but was given the Dublin name so it could be more easily associated with Irish identity for international audiences. It has taste and texture reminiscent of both cheddar and parmesan and pairs well with pasta, bread, wine and beer. Dubliner cheese must age for 12 months before eating, but it is worth the wait.

5—EDAM | THE NETHERLANDS [c]

Located in the province of North Holland, the city of Edam is where this cheese comes from. The wax coating was a preservative originally, but Edam became known for its red coating, compared to the yellow wax on other cheeses. There are three different ages of Edam cheese, which impacts the flavor: *Jong* (young), *Belegen* (aged) and *Extra Belegen* (extra aged).

6—FETA | GREECE [c] [s]

Greek mythology says that Aristaios, son of the Greek god Apollo, was sent to Greece to teach them the art of cheese-making. The most famous of Greek cheeses is feta, and like many Greek cheeses, it can be made from either goat or sheep's milk. “Feta” in Greek means “slice;” however, today it is ascribed to the crumbly cheese that goes great on bread and salads. Like many great cheeses, feta also has a PDO.

7—LEIPÄJUUSTO | FINLAND [c] [c] [r]

Also, known as juustoleipä, narskujuusto, or simply “juusto,” this Finnish cheese has a funny English nickname, “Finnish squeaky cheese.” It gets that funky nickname from the squeaky sound that happens when you chew the cheese. It is primarily made from cow's milk, mostly from cows who have recently given birth, but can also be made from goat or reindeer milk.

8—MANCHEGO | SPAIN [s]

This cheese is solely produced in Castilla-La Mancha and made from the milk of Manchego sheep. Manchego cheese is considered “the King” of Spanish cheese and

its lineage is nothing short of royal: It dates back to the Roman era. The cheese was granted a PDO in 1975, which protects its strict production procedure and qualities.

9—MYCELLA | DENMARK [c]

This blue-green veiny cheese is made on the tiny Danish island of Bornholm. It is strictly made from the cows that live and graze there. It has a distinct smoky and cherry flavor and is an important component in the local sandwich which features mycella, smoked herring, egg yolk and chives on a dark rye bread.

10—PARMIGIANO-REGGIANO | ITALY [c]

This well-known cheese originated in the Emilia region of Italy back in the Middle Ages. Because it is so old and well-known, it has many imitators. Italy has gone out of its way to protect the quality of Parmigiano-Reggiano as a European PDO cheese though it is still “one of the most counterfeited cheeses in the world.” Parmigiano Reggiano sponsors an Olympic athlete; needless to say, it's a tasty, historical and versatile cheese.

11—RANOLDER | HUNGARY [c]

This award-winning cheese sometimes has the rind washed in merlot during the aging process to give it a noticeable purple-red tint. In 2017, it won first place in the hard cheese category at the prestigious Mondial du Fromage cheese competition. Ranolder was named after János Ranolder, Bishop of Veszprém, who improved the winemaking culture of the area. Pairing this hard, milky cheese with dried fruit is almost a given.

12—RAUCHKÄSE | GERMANY [c]

Lovers of BBQ will want to try this smoked cheese which comes from Bavaria. While different companies produce the cheese now, the process dates back hundreds of years. This semi-soft cheese has a spicy, salty and smoky flavor and makes for a good raclette to melt on bread and potatoes.

13—VALENÇAY | FRANCE [c]

This cheese hails from an area in France with the same name. It has a unique gray-blue ash rind, and is rumored to have once angered Napoleon. Supposedly, he stopped at the Château de Valençay after his loss in Egypt and was appalled when he was served this cheese that just happened to be a pyramid-shaped reminder of his military failure. Some stories even credit him with the current shape of the cheese alleging he was so angry he chopped off the peak of the cheese pyramid with his sword.

14—VÄSTERBOTTENSOST | SWEDEN [c]

From the region of Västerbotten, this cheese is one of the most in-demand in Sweden. Legend has it that this cheese was invented by a dairy maid who was interrupted by her lover when stirring a traditional curd of cheese, creating a unique repeated heating and stirring practice for this elegant cheese that is twice as expensive as similarly aged cheeses.

15—VIHOLA | UKRAINE [c]

Ukraine has produced cheese for over 1,000 years; however, it's presence on the global cheese market is fairly new. This cheese made its debut at the World Cheese Awards in 2022. Made from the milk of goats who graze on pine twigs during the winter gives this cheese a particular pine flavoring that is enhanced by the cheese-makers who add pine needles to the cheese itself. ■

Dairy Source: [c] Cow Milk | [c] Goat Milk | [r] Reindeer Milk | [s] Sheep Milk



THE GREEN SAUCE OF FRANKFURT

By Tamala Malerk

When one thinks of famous foods of Germany, they might think of Schnitzel or Dampfnudeln. Zooming in on the map of Frankfurt, one might think of the Frankfurter sausage. However, Frankfurt is home to a creamy sauce that is famous in its own right: *Grüne Soße* (Green Sauce).

Also known as *Grie Soß* in Frankfurt's dialect, this sauce is typically served cold with hard-boiled eggs and boiled potatoes, but it can also be served on top of schnitzel, fish, asparagus or beef. It's a versatile condiment.

Every family has their own take on the recipe; however, the one thing that doesn't change is the seven herbs that give the sauce its namesake: borage, chives, sorrel, parsley, chervil, garden cress and salad burnet. Other typical options include blending the herbs with a combination of lemon juice, hard-boiled egg, yogurt, sour cream, salt and pepper.

Where did Frankfurt's famous sauce come from? Well, no one is 100% sure; however, a few local legends persist. One legend asserts that the French Huguenots brought the sauce with them to Germany in the 16th century. There is one that says it was the Italian traders that brought the recipe to Germany. Another, more popular, belief is that the sauce was invented by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's mother, and that it was his favorite food. Nonetheless, the first recipe for the Green Sauce didn't appear in a German cookbook until 1860, almost 30 years after Goethe's death.

Almost 200 years after its first appearance in a cookbook, the Green Sauce has evolved into such a local celebrity that it warrants its own annual eight-day festival featuring competitions, live music and a market: **Grüne Soße Festival**.

Every year, 49 restaurants from the greater Frankfurt area compete in a March Madness-like competition. Across eight evenings, 650 guests blindly test seven different sauces and vote for a nightly winner until an ultimate champion is crowned on the final night. In 2026, **Darmstädter Ratskeller Hausbrauerei** earned the prestigious title.

Along with the taste-testing, there is a nightly performance featuring comedy, music, cabaret and more. Even if you cannot make the evening competitions, you can shop from vendors and listen to live musical performances throughout the daytime hours of the festival without purchasing tickets.

Want to be one of the lucky 650 to vote? Go to gruene-sosse-festival.de to buy tickets to the festival and learn more. The Grüne Soße Festival takes place in annually in mid-spring; the next fest is April 20–May 1, 2027. ■

Make your own Grüne Soße*

Can't make it to Frankfurt to try the local specialty? It's fairly easy to make on your own. Since it's made for your own taste, you can experiment with the ingredients and measurements to decide which one is the best. Invite your friends and family to host your own Green Sauce Festival competition.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoon each of the seven herbs: borage, chives, sorrel, parsley, chervil, garden cress and salad burnet.
- 2 finely chopped hard-boiled eggs
- 2½ tablespoons of sour cream or crème fraîche
- ½ tablespoon of heavy cream or 1 tablespoon of yogurt
- 1 tablespoon olive oil or walnut oil
- Lemon juice to taste
- Salt and pepper taste
- ½ small, chopped onion (optional)
- 2 tablespoons quark (optional)
- 1 teaspoon of mustard (optional; use instead of egg)
- 1 teaspoon white vinegar (optional)

DIRECTIONS

1. Finely chop the herbs with a knife or a food processor.
2. Mash the eggs, herbs, lemon juice and oil together in a bowl.
3. Mix in the sour cream, yogurt, quark, salt and pepper. Add more lemon juice to taste, if desired.
4. Blend the mixture all together in a food processor or blender and then sieve the mixture to remove larger chunks.
5. Serve over hard-boiled eggs, potatoes, Schnitzel, vegetables, bread, salad or beef.

*Recipe inspired by *The Spruce Eats*, *My Dinner*, and *Meike Peters*.



IN THE FIELD

Our team visits communities, events and people all over Europe to bring you stories especially for an American military audience. Lately, we have been diving deep into the heritage of World War I and II at sites across the continent.

Here are some of the most poignant military history sites visited by the Stars and Stripes team.



With only 20 minutes prior to its closing, my family stopped at the **Netherlands American Cemetery** one winter evening. We were on the way back to our rural vacation rental from the cave Christmas market festivities in Valkenburg. All the rushing and excitement was immediately contrasted when I walked past the memorial and into the cemetery. The tranquility calmed my mind and my feet, but the number of crosses in tidy rows overwhelmed my senses. I was unprepared for what I felt as I stood there arm and arm with my daughter comprehending that each one was a life lost. I didn't try to contain my tears. I highly recommend visiting the military cemeteries across Europe; they need not be famous or large to understand the impact, and it need not be a special event for your visitation to matter.

KAT NICKOLA, LEAD WRITER-EDITOR



I took in the "Kortrijk 1302" multimedia presentation about the legendary defeat dealt to France's tyrannical King Philip IV by the citizenry of Flanders in the Battle of the Golden Spurs. The beautiful church in the **Belgian town of Kortrijk** where it's held has special shutters that cover the stained-glass windows during showings. Dynamic scenes are projected onto the ceiling and walls, while a narrator describes the before, during and after of the famous battle. Although it's only about 20 minutes long, the free presentation is riveting and was more than worth the side trip from Bruges.

DAVID EDWARDS, COPY EDITOR

The cratered ground around **Verdun**, which was the site of one of the longest World War I battles, is a particularly memorable physical reflection of history. More than 100 years later, the area is still littered with unexploded ordnance.

ANN PINSON, DIGITAL MANAGING EDITOR



In December 2024, I had the chance to attend the 80th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge in **Bastogne, Belgium** and watch reenactors bring history to life in the Ardennes Forest. Standing in those woods, surrounded by the sights and sounds of what those soldiers endured, was a rare and powerful way to honor the men who gave everything there. It's one thing to read about the history, it's another to feel it. I'd recommend to anyone that they visit the Ardennes and walk around to see the foxholes still there today. It's a humbling experience to see such a historic area where the fate of World War II was decided.

KATELIN FRY, MARKETING COORDINATOR

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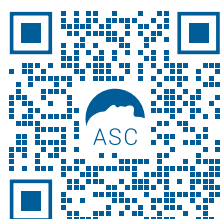
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