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# EDITOR'S LETTER



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

*“He found himself wondering at times, especially in the autumn, about the wild lands, and strange visions of mountains that he had never seen came into his dreams.”*

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

**T**hough I am not a hobbit from the Shire, I have also felt, like Frodo, a longing that comes in the fall. The season is changing, the crisp air is energizing and I look forward to new scenery and majestic places. At the same time, dark, cold winter nights are hovering at the hazy edge of each day and I can't wait to snuggle up by a fire with some pumpkin soup.

In this edition of Stripes “Europe,” we have curated stories with travel opportunities that speak to the moody nature of autumn and winter in Europe. From spooky and poignant locations to exciting attractions, sunny ski slopes to bread-baking resources, this edition has all the feels.

Enjoy traipsing through pages full of autumn leaves and snow-capped mountains, exploring military heritage, jumping into fantasy worlds or eating it all up like only a hobbit can.

When you return from your quest, snuggle into your own burrow and flip these pages for cozy European traditions close to home. ■



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# THE BEATLES

*Finding the Fab Four:*  
*in Liverpool*

By Tamala Malerk

**F**all is a great time to explore the great outdoors. As I am not one for dirt, bugs and snakes, I prefer exploring the great urban outdoors. I recently found myself in Liverpool, U.K. and not knowing much about the area, I very quickly found out that a small indie band emerged from the area; you might have heard of them: The Beatles.

Stepping out of the train station, I was immediately greeted by souvenir shops plastered with Beatles pictures, art and merchandise in window displays. A quick Google search on "What to do in Liverpool?" spammed my phone with Beatles-related museums, stores, statues, locations and tours. All of Liverpool really digs into their history with the band. Liverpool University Press even has the "Journal of Beatles Studies." Rather than try and avoid them, I decided to spend a day indulging in "Beatlemania" scouring Liverpool for the band.

## Pro Tip

Before moving on to locales 2 and 3, grab a bite to eat at one of the many restaurants located at nearby Albert Dock. I chose Rudy's Pizza Napoletana and had some of the best Napoli-style pizza I've ever eaten (get the Romagnola featuring prosciutto, mozzarella and Grand Padano Parmesan cheese).



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©TAMALA MALERK



# 1. The Beatles Story Museum

**N**ot knowing more than superficial knowledge from the Beatles' role in the cultural zeitgeist, this place was a perfect first stop. It was also a huge tourist trap, but, keep in mind, tourist traps are popular for a reason. This interactive indoor museum taught me everything I wanted to know, and more, about the Beatles. After paying for our tickets, our first stop was a green screen photo spot where we could quickly snap a few photos, placing us at different iconic Beatles spots (Abbey Road included). At one point during this shoot, I was asked to pick my favorite Beatle and hold up a sign with his name on it. I chose Ringo Starr solely because he is Marge Simpson's favorite Beatle.

After the impromptu photo shoot, the self-paced, self-guided tour began. I followed a path of rooms, aided by an audio guide, that took me from the origins of the Beatles, their rise to superstardom, breaking into America, their dissolution and their overall legacy. I was fascinated to learn about John Lennon and Yoko Ono's "Bed-ins for Peace," where they protested for peace by staying in hotel beds for days on end. More importantly, I learned all about the places I should visit related to the Beatles in Liverpool.

In true tourist-trap fashion, the final room was a café area with themed Beatles food and drinks where we could purchase our photos. I did. And, of course, the exit is through the gift shop.

©THE BEATLES STORY, LIVERPOOL



©THE BEATLES STORY, LIVERPOOL



# 2. The Cavern Club

**K**nown as "The most famous club in the world," The Cavern Club on Mathew Street is where the Beatles played their first gig on February 9, 1961. Yet, it was not the Beatles as we know them today. Ringo Starr did not join the band until 1962 and wouldn't make his Cavern Club appearance until August of that year. After 292 live performances, the Beatles played their last show at the Cavern Club on August 3, 1963. Today, the Cavern Club is still a happening place to be for live music and has expanded to include a pub and restaurant. They host a variety of Beatles tours and on-site rock music memorabilia. I didn't take a tour, but I took some time strolling the entirety of Mathew Street to take photos, read the various dedication plaques to locales and people, and listened to the live music emerging from the many venues on the block. Other famous bands that have played the Cavern Club include Queen, Arctic Monkeys and The Who.

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# 3. The Beatles Statue

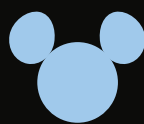
**L**ocated at the Liverpool Pier Head, this iconic statue was unveiled in 2015. This is primarily a photo stop, but on the day we visited, there was also a musician onsite playing and singing Beatles songs on his acoustic guitar. The statue was donated by the Cavern Club and the date of the unveiling coincided with the 50th anniversary of the Beatles' last performance in Liverpool at the Liverpool Empire Theater. According to Visit Liverpool, the statues, sculpted by Andrew Edwards, weigh 1.2 tons in total!

These three locations merely scratch the surface of Beatles locales in Liverpool, but are a great spot to begin your journey. They are within 15 minutes of each other by foot and make for a fun fall day adventure. ■

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# Disneyland Paris for Adults



By Tamala Malerk

I was 8 years old when I experienced the magic of Disney for the first time. I grew up watching the animated films and straight-to-video sequels and was excited to meet all of the characters I had come to love at Disney World in Orlando, Florida.

For those of us in Europe, the closest Disney option is **Disneyland Paris**, which features two theme parks and a free-to-visit area with retail and food stops called **Disney Village**.

I learned that the magic of Disney doesn't disappear as you get older; it only gets better! I am not the only adult who thinks this. There is an entire subculture that exists for those who wish to experience Disney magic after they defy their inner Peter Pan and grow up: **Disney Adults**. While I don't consider myself a full-fledged Disney Adult, I definitely acted like one on my recent trip to Disneyland Paris.

My best friend and I planned two days for our Disney adventure, one day for each park, and that was the perfect amount of time.

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On day one, we excitedly hopped off the train, checked into the hotel to drop off our stuff, which was a breeze thanks to the shuttles, and headed to our first destination: **Disneyland Park**. For those familiar with the American parks, this is pretty much the Magic Kingdom with a European twist: Jack Sparrow simply spoke to me in French on the **Pirates of the Caribbean** ride rather than in English. Don't speak French? Don't worry. Most rides and shows used a blend of French and English so that I understood everything that was going on. This park also features the Star Wars area and I got to experience a ride I had never gone on before: **Star Tours Adventures**. I loved the ride; however, take my advice, see the cool **Mickey Philharmonic Show** that is literally right next door first to give your lunch more time to digest. Disneyland Park is primarily full of rides, with parades and a few shows scattered about.

On day two, we rode one last ride at Disneyland Park and then used our park-hopper ticket to mosey on over to the second on-site theme park, **Walt Disney Studios Park**. This area mostly mimics Hollywood Studios and is more about the shows than the rides. Fret not. This is where Marvel fans can get on what was my favorite ride of the entire trip: **Spider-Man W.E.B. Adventure**. This is a motion-capture ride where you team up with three other people in your group to sling imaginary webs and capture nano-tech spiders. My arms were tired and sore afterwards, but it was a blast.

We had also made reservations for the Ratatouille-themed restaurant, **Bistrot Chez Rémy**. This is a French restaurant with a set menu with four choices. I went with the steak and made sure to take the option to get a free side of *Ratatouille* (the food, not the film). Have I had better steak in my life? Sure, but I've never eaten steak in a fun film atmosphere followed by delicious Disney-themed desserts.

Going to Disney as an adult is a blast in so many ways. I bought the ears, of course; but I wasn't rushing to stand in long lines to snap pictures with people in costumes. I sang along with the songs in the shows, danced with Minnie as she showed us steps and got spooked at the jump scare on the **Haunted Mansion** ride (despite knowing it was coming). We went during the off-season, which helped the prices and wait times. It was a magical two days of rides, shows and waving at Chip and Dale from the "Frozen" show's line. ■

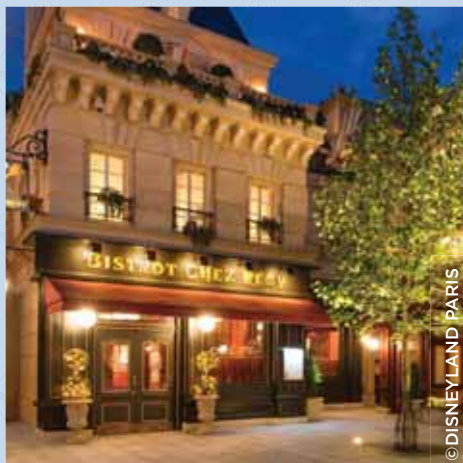


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Don't speak *French*?  
Don't *worry*. Most  
rides and shows used  
a blend of French  
and English so that I  
understood everything  
that was going on.



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©DISNEYLAND PARIS

## 5 Quick Tips

1. **Stay on-site.** Disney has plenty of options for a variety of budgets and shuttles that run every 11 minutes or so.
2. **Eat breakfast off-site.** The shuttle bus puts you right outside of the welcome gate next to the train station where there are at least three coffee shops. This was a cheaper alternative to the hotel buffet, and I was not clamoring for a big breakfast before getting on a bunch of rides.
3. **Plan ahead.** Download the Disneyland Paris app. Here you can book a table at one of the many restaurants, secure a spot at one of the shows and parades, buy fast passes either for the entire day or just the ride you really want to get on, and see wait times for rides in real-time.
4. **All food options are not equal.** There were definitely lunch and dinner spots I enjoyed more than others, both in the parks and in Disney Village. Do your research beforehand and see which stops align best with your taste buds and budget.
5. **Utilize the park-hopper tickets.** We pretty much did one park per day, but that meant mostly riding rides one day and seeing shows the next. We should have planned ahead better (see tip three) and scheduled our shows and rides evenly. My legs would have thanked me after day one.



©TAMALA MALERK





# Cave Houses in Spain

By Kat Nickola





There are many villages in Spain that appear to emerge from the precipices and rocky lands they occupy. What you may not realize is that some are actually tunneled deep into the cliffs and hills, providing a stability that has lasted for hundreds of years.

At the Cuevas de Masagó, my family enters through an arched wooden doorway. Cool air touches our sun-parched skin. Our eyes adjust to the dim light coming through the small windows. I soon realize that the boxy housefront was a complete façade for this home carved into the very soft limestone cliff in the village of Alcalá del Júcar. Wandering through dome-roofed rooms full of antiques and collectible money, I hear my kids' excited voices echoing nearby. They are venturing down a long, arched hallway. At the other end is a bright airy room with windows letting in the sun. We've just walked the entire way through the cliff.

The village of Alcalá del Júcar is carved within a high, slender spit of land bounded by tall cliffs and formed by a dramatic U-curve in the Río Júcar (Jucar River). It is a beautiful place, and our number one spot to take friends and family who visit us while stationed in Albacete, Spain.

Down the tight stone-paved street we tour another underground structure, the Cuevas de Diablo. Again, we walk (well, my kids run) through a long, arched corridor of white-washed limestone to come out on the other side of the cliff. This cave was used as a fortification and has a large, outdoor terrace perched high above the sheer cliff face. It is now a café.

We choose a big wooden table carved into its own circular niche and take a break for lunch; it is 2 p.m. after all. The *menu del día* is cheap and filling: two courses and drinks for under

12 euros per adult, with kids satisfied for half that. We eat potatoes, Manchego cheese, *jamón*, chicken, rice and, of course, sip some La Mancha wine.

This place is really two caves: one beginning high in the village, and another lower down. They are connected by a series of intricate tunnels and shafts, so after settling our bill (with cash) we start the journey down into the bowels of the cliff. The kids tease each other about ghosts and devils (it is in the name, after all) as we walk down steps carved from stone and a long spiral staircase. Emerging from the cave house, we wander around squinting in the sun and wondering whether we could live the troglodyte life. A troglodyte is a person who lives in a cave dwelling.

Archaeological sites show that prehistoric Europeans used natural caves. However, across Spain there are places where the stone is so soft it can easily be tunneled, and sometime around the fall of the western Roman Empire in 476 AD, there were people again carving out their own cave home communities. Many have been abandoned over time; yet, in arid regions cave homes became a key to survival and the tradition lived on.

Cool in the summer and cozy in the winter, cave dwellings allowed people to live in more extreme environments. Most of the Spanish cave houses still in use trace their heritage to the period of Al-Andalus in the Middle Ages when Muslim culture took cave homes to the next level.

After the Reconquista, when the Catholic monarchs took over the Iberian Peninsula and expelled Muslim and Jewish populations, some of the persecuted Moriscos (Muslims who converted to Christianity, typically by force) fled into remote cave-house villages in the mountains and cliffs of Andalucía and Castilla la Mancha. During the 1500s, these underground towns grew and have retained their cave style ever since.

*continued on page 13*



“  
*A troglodyte is  
a person who  
lives in a cave  
dwelling.*  
”







## Where to visit cave houses in Spain

### ALTIPLANO DE GRANADA

In the highlands north of Granada, the unique geology has allowed for the highest concentration of cave houses in Spain. Tourists visit the area to experience the unique mountain, desert and badlands ecosystems. Search the internet for “casa cueva altiplano” and you will find that the region is dotted with **rural cave homes** that are open as rentals and bed and breakfasts. Some are grouped in villages like Cuevas del Campo, Huéscar, Galera, Fontanar and in the hills east of Baza.

For the highest concentration, visit the town of **Guadix** and the roughly 2,000 cave homes that mesh together in a tangle of dry grassy hills and dusty streets. It is home to the **Guadix Caves Visitor Centre** where you can tour a traditional cave home and learn the origins of cave dwelling in the area.

### CITY OF GRANADA

In the hills east of Granada, the **Sacromonte** quarter overlooks the famous Alhambra, one of the most famous buildings in Spain. The neighborhood was settled after the Reconquista by migrating Romani-speaking people who found commonality with other displaced people like former enslaved people and Moriscos.

There are numerous cave shops and underground restaurants and bars open for business along the primary street, including some with flamenco shows that invoke Romani and Moorish influences. High up on the hill is the **Cave Museum of Sacromonte**, an open-air museum with 11 historic caves showcasing the culture of the neighborhood's inhabitants.

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*continued from page 13*

## PROVINCE OF CÁDIZ

While many tourists aim for the cliff-top white villages of Andalucía, there is a unique one that took a different tactic against invaders. Petite **Setenil de las Bodegas** tucked many of its homes under the cliffside overhang of a small canyon below its hilltop fortification.

Roughly a half-hour drive from the popular and pretty town of Ronda, Setenil is in the northernmost part of the province of Cádiz. The town is tiny. Be sure to walk along **Cuevas de la Sombra Street** where the cliff hangs over the road providing shade. Pop into the shops for a souvenir or stop for a drink and bite to eat at one of the restaurants, all built into caves under the cliff. It can get crowded if a tourist bus comes through in the afternoon; staying overnight in a cave house will give you a quieter, unique experience and room to wander.

## ALCALÁ DEL JÚCAR

Far from most tourist trails, the agricultural wine and cheese basket of Spain, Castilla-La Mancha, is mostly known for its connection to **Don Quixote**. However, the fertile high plains with their unique windmills eventually give way to river-cut canyons. And the canyon walls that surround the village of **Alcalá del Júcar** were perfect for carving cave houses, much fancier than the cavern Quixote visited.

The pretty, white-washed village climbs up the canyon walls from the waterside, connecting the green canyon floor with the brown arid plains above. There are two tourist caves you can visit, both with a bar/café inside, plus a cliff-top castle with picture-perfect views of town and a river-side beach in warm weather. ■







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# Teatro Olimpico

Story and Photos by Katie Wells

**I**n Vicenza, Italy, a small town near Venice and home to U.S. Army Garrison Italy Headquarters, is a perfectly preserved, nearly 500-year-old indoor theater. In a city richly adorned with Venetian and Palladian architecture, one might easily miss Andrea Palladio's last architectural masterpiece, *Teatro Olimpico*, also known as the Olympic Theater. The theater is on a pedestrian street and its unassuming facade blends in with the other buildings tucked around it. On a fairly warm day in January, I found my way inside and wove through the halls leading to the theater.





**I** love architecture, old theaters and museums, but rarely do I struggle to find the words to describe how beautiful one is. Teatro Olimpico, as simply as I can put it, is a marvel. It is the first permanent indoor Renaissance theater and the oldest one in the world. As I walked in, a cool breeze took me by surprise. I didn't think an indoor theater built between 1580 and 1585 would feel so arid and open. Since it was the off-season, I mostly had the theater to myself.

Upon entering the room, the only way to go is up or around, so I followed the curvature of the architecture in awe. It felt like the entirety of the theater was expanding all around me. I slowly walked up the original wooden steps listening to the old wood groan and admired a motif of frescoed pink iridescent clouds floating above my head. The paint appeared to cast down a warm glow that even my camera picked up on: a scene of the heavens fit for the Olympic gods the theater was named for. The ceiling was meant to be reminiscent of the Roman and Greek plain-air amphitheaters that Teatro Olimpico was inspired by.

Statues of the intellectuals of Accademia Olimpico (the group who commissioned the theater) stood tall, carefully carved and nestled between columns in the back of the theater. Palladio can also be found amongst them. Above them are more statues that stunningly depict the feats of Hercules. I made my way to the center of the cavea (the semi-elliptical seating area for spectators) and sat directly in front of the stage; an audience of one as I tuned into the free audio guide and listened to the five-minute story of the theater.

In 1580, the group Accademia Olimpico, an institution of noble men of whom Andrea Palladio was a member of, collaborated to bring the idea of the theater to life. Palladio was at the height of his career as an architect and part of his inspiration for Teatro Olimpico was his first visit to Rome in 1541, about 40 years prior. Sadly, only six months into the project Palladio passed away at 72 years old. The solid, shared vision for the theater, along with Palladio's detailed plans, upheld the integrity of the project.

As I learned about Palladio's influence in Vicenza and how the theater was built, I directed my attention to different parts of the theater, and each time I refocused on center stage, it shifted,

taking on a new perspective. Despite feeling like my eyes were playing tricks on me, it evoked a sense of exploration and curiosity. I wanted to get closer to examine how the strange and beautiful space was made.

The scenic backdrop represents the seven streets of Thebes and although the stage is only 40 feet long, the careful use of the curvature of the space, the painting, design and placement of the columns, create the illusion that the streets are receding far into the distance. This technique is known as *trompe-l'œil*, which is a painting technique used to challenge a viewer's sense of perception and question the line between art and reality. The French word is an overarching term to describe a technique that has developed over generations and cultures, with evidence of use as far back as ancient Greece and Rome.

After Palladio's death, Vincenzo Scamozzi took lead of the project. The scenic backdrop that he designed creates the perspective of an ancient open-air stage. It represents the seven streets of Thebes as the setting for the first play that was performed in the theater, "Oedipus Tyrannus" by Sophocles.

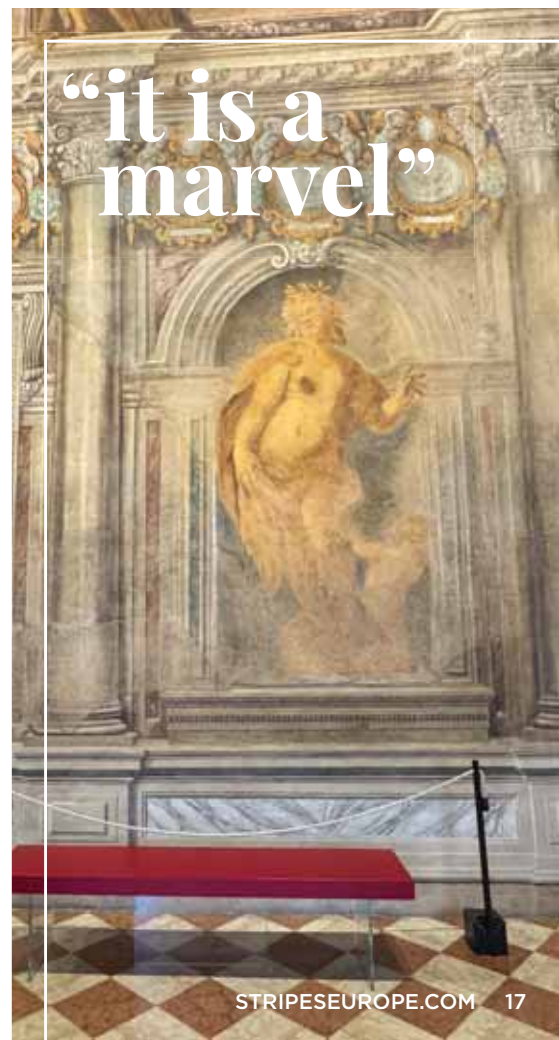
While Palladio orchestrated the design of the theater, Scamozzi's execution made it the gem and UNESCO Heritage-listed site that it is today.

Even as I stood and walked to the exit, I felt my perception of the stage shifting with discoveries of new angles, streets and nooks between columns that looked worth exploring.

After exiting the theater, another magnificent room invited me to explore, the "Odeo." This room was created by Scamozzi and has life-size frescos of the gods of Olympus painted on the walls, another nod to the theater's name.

While you can easily see everything in a 20-minute visit, there's something special about sitting on those 500-year-old wooden steps, feeling the coolness of the space, trying to wrap your head around the complex use of architectural and painting techniques and allowing yourself to be transported to times inspired by antiquity.

During the spring and fall, the theater still puts on plays and musical performances. After being in the space, it's safe to say a performance there would likely be an unforgettable experience. ■





# SPEND SPOOKY SEASON IN POLAND



By Tamala Malerk

**F**all is spooky season. Whether it's curling up with my favorite "Halloweentown" and vampire movies, grabbing a child-age relative to take trick-or-treating so I too can get in on the candy game or donning a costume to various parties, it is one of my favorite times of the year. It is also a great time to travel to some scary spots to really put the "spook" in spooky season.

Transylvania and Frankenstein's Castle come immediately to mind, but if you want to try an unconventional and less stereotypical themed-travel adventure, Poland has some great haunted and lore-filled spots to explore.

## THE VAMPIRIC MASS GRAVE IN LUZINO

Vampires are my favorite of all of the 'monsters' out there. So, of course, the first thing on my list was to try and find some vampires in Poland. Unfortunately, there are no rumors of live vampires there today; however, in 2023, a road crew stumbled upon a massive grave of 450 vampires. Okay, for legal purposes, I cannot say they are absolutely vampires. However, the skeletons were discovered to be buried in a ritualistic style, which ensured the death of the vampires.

In the past, some people believed that vampirism only occurred after death; yet there could be warning signs before death, such as extra teeth or red hair, that indicated you would become a vampire in death. To ensure grandma didn't return as a vampire, she may be decapitated post-mortem and have her head placed between her legs and a coin placed in her mouth. One may have also stacked some bricks around her, or locked a padlock on her big toe to ensure her vampiric-self did not rise. Luzino is the largest grave of vampires so far; however, similar graves have been found near Gliwice and Bydgoszcz.

## THE VAMPIRE OF PIEN

Make your way to Pien to see the hometown of an alleged vampire. Women who strayed from cultural norms were often accused of being supernatural, as witches, fairies or, in this woman's case, a vampire. "Zosia" was one of dozens of women in her neighborhood accused of vampirism. When her grave was discovered in an unmarked cemetery, she was found buried with an iron sickle on her neck and a padlock on her big toe, both ways to keep a vampire underground.

Thanks to modern technology, we now know what she looked like. Scientists were able to use modeling clay, 3D printing and DNA to rebuild her face. Scan the QR to see what the Polish vampire woman looked like.





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## SKULL CHAPEL IN CZERMNA

The small town of Czerмна in Lower Silesia is home to a chapel interiorly decorated with over 3,000 skulls (human, not vampire) known as Kaplica Czaszek (Chapel of Skulls). These skulls are the victims of the Thirty Years War and the Silesian Wars of the 17th and 18th centuries; they adorn the walls and ceiling of St. Bartholomew's Church. If the skulls weren't enough, there are 21,000 skeletons below the chapel. At the end of the 18th century, a local priest and gravedigger took it upon themselves to gather the skeletons from mass graves, clean them and put them on display in the church. Today, you can visit the chapel and see this macabre set-up yourself, but note that they have a no pictures policy.

## HAUNTED RESZEL CASTLE

Barbara Zdunk, a maid, was accused of starting a fire in the Old Town area of Reszel simply because of her reputation of being "strange" and accused of witchcraft. Zdunk was imprisoned for four years in the dungeons of Reszel Castle before being the last person burned alive as a witch in Europe in the 1800s.

Today, the castle is a three-star hotel, and not only might you encounter Zdunk while you play pool in the former dungeons, but you might also encounter an artist, Pan Franciszek, who haunts the castle bar and likes to sit on the bar stools with fellow patrons.

## "WISTOM" THE ABANDONED FACTORY

Located in Tomaszów Mazowiecki, the Zakłady Włókien Chemicznych is an abandoned chemical fiber factory that any scare-searching adventurer would want to check out. While under Soviet control, this factory was used to make insulation panels for submarines. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the factory was abandoned and fell into disarray.

Today, graffiti artists hone their talents upon its walls, musicians perform under the summer sun and people throw haunted parties in the dark dreary interior.

## TOSS A COIN TO YOUR WITCHER AT OGRODZIEŃC CASTLE

Located near outside town of Ogrodzieniec in the hamlet of Podzamcze, this castle has a harrowing past and a Hollywood future.

In the 17th century, aristocrat Stanisław Warszycki supposedly sold his soul to the devil in order to construct his castles. In life, he was well-known for his cruelty of torturing local peasants and in death is believed to still haunt the castle in the form of a black dog.

Despite its past, the castle garnered fame for being a filming location for the popular show, "The Witcher." Fans of the show will recognize the castle and surrounding area as Sodden Hill. Whether you want to spot a shot from the show or see a terrifying ghost dog, the castle is open to visitors year-round. Get tickets at [zamek-ogrodzieniec.pl](http://zamek-ogrodzieniec.pl). ■



Reszel Castle



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A photograph of a long, arched stone tunnel. The walls are made of rough-hewn stone blocks. A series of bright lights are mounted along the top of the tunnel, creating a strong perspective effect as they recede into the distance. The floor is dark and appears to be made of dirt or gravel. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and historical.

# THE SECRET NAZI OSTWALL IN POLAND

By Kat Nickola





After World War I, the Treaty of Versailles explicitly prevented Germany from building fortifications along their borders. But plans to secretly secure the eastern border with Poland were being hatched as early as 1927, and with Hitler's rise to power as Chancellor in 1933, development took off. The "Ostwall," or eastern wall, was established as a series of natural waterway barriers. However, a strip of land between the Oder and Warta rivers was a natural gateway that needed extra fortifications. A "fortified arch" between the rivers was built piecemeal beginning in 1934 as seemingly incongruous structures and anti-tank barriers.



The secret construction project was 80km long and officially approved by Hitler during his visit in 1935. The entire route was divided into three sections, with each containing around 100 facilities armed with modern weaponry. The true secret though, was below ground where over 35 kilometers of tunnels connected the buildings in the central section. There were workshops, storage spaces, social areas and barracks large enough to house 24,000 soldiers. Train tracks and stations were built in the underground space and a "main traffic road" connected it all together. At the start of World War II, however, efforts were needed elsewhere, so the project was halted with much of the aboveground work left unfinished. The front didn't see much action during the war and was used as a Daimler aircraft engine factory. Finally, in January of 1945, the small crew stationed at the facility was overrun by Russian forces.

The central section was centered around the town of Międzyrzec and is now called the Międzyrzecki Fortified Region or MRU. There are two access areas open to the public with guided tours available.. The MRU Museum and Fortifications in Pniewo has year-round underground tours that range in length and adventure. Only 10 minutes down the road is a second access point at the Boryszyn Loop where you can book either a walking or biking tour of the underground spaces.

The MRU tunnels were highly suspected of being the hiding place for Nazi treasures and stolen artworks, however, as of now, none have been found. The tunnels were abandoned after the war and most ground-level buildings were destroyed or looted. As a result, the MRU is now the largest bat refuge in Europe with thousands of nocturnal residents from 12 different species. ■



# *The Ghost*

LIBERATED *by the* U.S. ARMY

By Kat Nickola

USAG Bavaria installations in Grafenwöhr and Vilseck have a ghostly neighbor who haunts the dark rural roads and abandoned mines around the village of Freihung.

Called “Die Weisse Frau,” or the White Lady, this ghostly apparition joins a cohort of white ladies that are popular in German supernatural tales. Like the White Lady of Freihung, most Germanic white lady figures are not considered dangerous, but they are scary, appearing out of nowhere to wander the world of the living.

Some sources believe that Weisse Frau stories across German-speaking regions are a cultural relic from former pagan beliefs in elven spirits or ancestral guardians. Many of the white lady legends have, over time, taken on specific histories, often evolving to represent the unrestful spirit of noble women from the Middle Ages who met tragic ends. Such is the case at Freihung.

*Her appearance became a  
harbinger of danger. Perhaps a warning.  
Perhaps a phantom guide  
leading people to their death.*





In the 12th century, lead deposits were found in the region and mining operations began, eventually digging a network of shafts and tunnels used until 1945. During the Middle Ages, a noble family oversaw the peasants who toiled all day in mines and Freihung grew as a prosperous mining village around their manor house. Legends say that the white lady who haunts Freihung is a noble woman from that manor. In the past, she would appear in the dark tunnels, beckoning miners to follow her and get lost in the underground blackness. Her appearance became a harbinger of danger. Perhaps a warning. Perhaps a phantom guide leading

people to their death. Some of the tunnels she haunted were directly below the village. Many were still used into modern times, like those underneath the Alte Post Inn. The inn sits in the center of Freihung at the same location of the former medieval manor house where the white lady presumably lived (and, perhaps, died). Eventually, the modern owners of the inn grew tired of being spooked by the White Lady and wanted both her and the haunted tunnels gone.


Supposedly, in the 1970s, a demolition team from the nearby USAG Bavaria Grafenwöhr Training Area was called in to safely destroy the tunnels. It's unclear why American soldiers were chosen for the job instead of local German authorities. Some have speculated that it made for an interesting, if not bizarre, training opportunity for the Army.

The hope was to rid the town and the inn of its ghostly resident. But it did not work.

Nowadays, the wispy figure of a white lady is still spotted around Freihung; however, she is no longer limited to tempting people who venture underground. She is often seen wandering down dark nighttime roads, shocking drivers who think they spot her in the rearview mirror only to glance again and see nothing. Other cars have swerved around what appears to be a woman in the road who cannot be found afterward. Sometimes, people hear a disembodied female voice outside the village at night or feel an icy touch while walking along trails beyond their houses in the evening.


Is it possible that the Army helped to release Die Weisse Frau of Freihung from her confinement in the old mine tunnels? Perhaps, instead, she is wandering in the night air looking for the soldiers who destroyed her underground refuge. ■





# THE CURIOUS CASE OF MEDIEVAL CATS

By Katie Wells

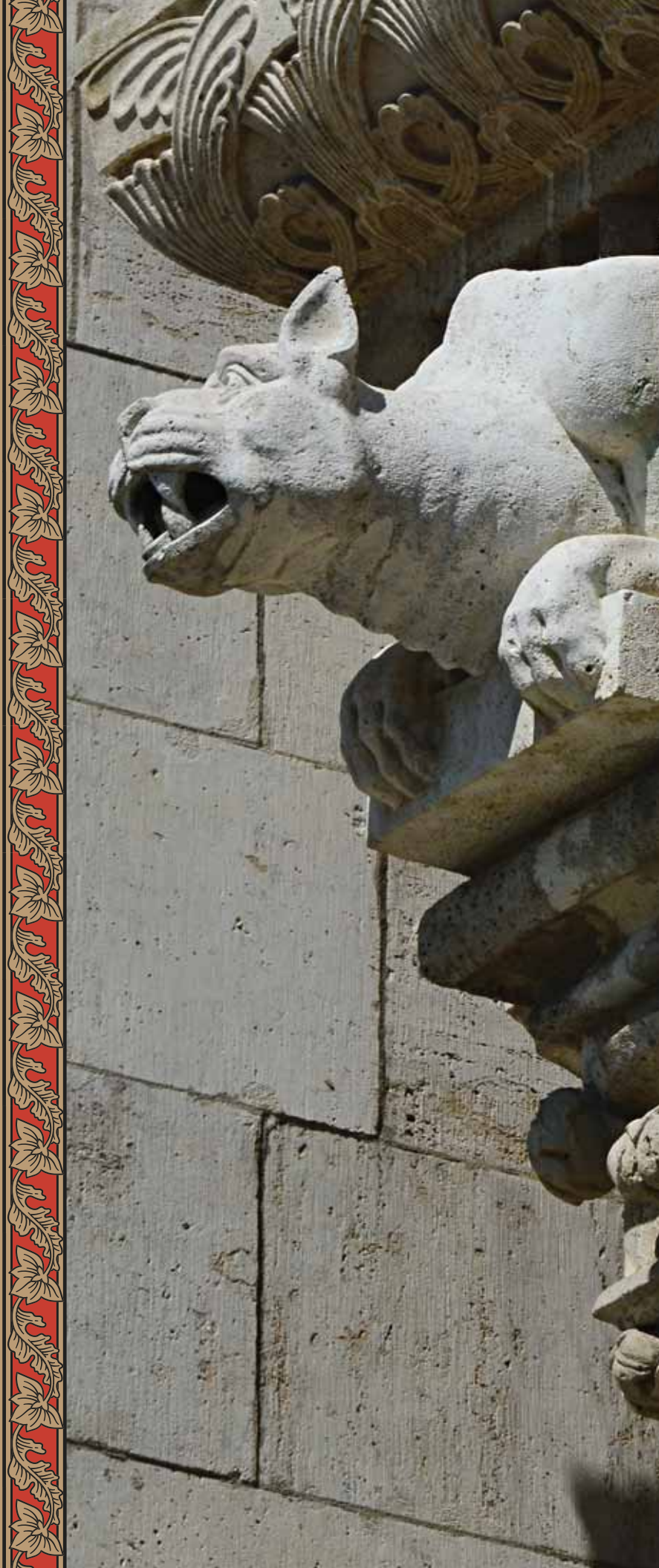


**H**ave you ever noticed the cats in medieval paintings or in the margins of manuscripts and wondered why they were painted with such dopey faces and strange poses? Did artists just not know how to paint them or is there intention behind their comical proportions and bulging eyes?

During the Middle Ages, animals were used in stories and paintings to symbolize human behavior and to reflect society. Dogs symbolized loyalty, rabbits were a symbol of lust and birds represented the soul. Unfortunately for cats, they became a prime example of deviant behavior as well as a representation of devilish magic. Any cat owner knows that while cats are incredibly loving and loyal, they are also fickle and curious creatures who live by their own rules. My orange tabby Fern had me and my spouse trained to feed him at 6 a.m. sharp each morning, even on days we wanted to sleep in. He also had the ability to materialize from some other dimension and startle us half to death—I chalk that up to cats having a bit of their own witchy magic. But evil? I'm a firm believer they are not.

---

*continued on page 28*







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## CATS AND DEITIES

**B**efore Christianity was widespread in Europe, cats were valued and loved by the ancient Greeks, Romans and Egyptians. They were considered divine in their respective religions and were entwined with the feminine. The Egyptian goddess Bastet was often depicted in paintings as a cat or woman with a cat's head. Bastet was the goddess of protection, fertility and the home. In Egyptian culture, cats were so loved that you can find paintings of them hunting alongside humans, cat talismans, jewelry and statues, plus many cats had the honor of being mummified.

The Greek and Roman goddess of magic and women, Hecate (also known as Trivia), is said to have a black cat as a familiar. In one myth, she had the ability to transform into a cat to escape the monster, Typhon. In Rome, cats were brought to war to help protect equipment and supplies from rodents. They were the only animal allowed in Roman temples—a sign of their status. If you look at mosaics, a cat will often make an appearance. In Greece, they were free to roam from home to home as a neighborhood pet, much like how Hecate was known to traverse between liminal spaces as the guardian of thresholds and boundaries between worlds. Cats' connection to paganism and women did not bode well with the Catholic Church.

## WHAT PUT THE 'EVIL' IN MEDIEVAL CATS?

**A**round the 13th century, cats' status shifted. There was a lot of animosity around the previously trusted feline. This was because the church began thinking of felines as demonic creatures. Their ability to see in the dark worried people. It was believed animals with night vision were denying Christ's light and choosing to walk with the devil. Black cats have an exceptionally poor reputation, as it was believed the devil could transform himself into a black cat. Eventually, they were strongly associated with witchcraft, perhaps due to their association with Hecate.

To the Christian Church, cats were a symbol of paganism and negatively connoted with Judaism. During the time, much like with witches, it was believed Jewish people could shift into cats and get into Christians homes to create mischief.



*In the "Book of Kells," scenes of cats and mice facing off amongst the text showcase the history of cats being needed to ward off mice from nibbling manuscript pages and to protect the food supply.*





## MEDIEVAL CATS AND MONKS

**T**he medieval cats of Europe weren't always villainized. They were kept to protect grain stores and to keep the rat population down. They were so valued for their mouse assassination skills that they cost the same price as a sheep or goat. Because of this, they were the only animals allowed in monasteries and served as companions for monks. Cats often make appearances in illustrated manuscripts. Some manuscripts even have inky pawprints stamping the pages, rather than coffee stains.

A medieval manuscript from around 1420 CE, on display in the City of Cologne, Germany, was left open one night by the monk working on it and humorously was urinated on by a cat. You can imagine the scribe's frustration and dismay when he found it. In the margins of the manuscript, he drew an illustration of the cat and penned a note:

"Here is nothing missing, but a cat urinated on this during a certain night. Cursed be the pesty cat that urinated over this book during the night in Deventer and because of it many others [other cats] too. And beware well not to leave open books at night where cats can come."

In the "Book of Kells," scenes of cats and mice facing off amongst the text showcase the history of cats being needed to ward off mice from nibbling manuscript pages and to protect the food supply. The one on the Chi Rho page especially illustrates everyday life in the scriptorium.

In the "Book of Maccabees," and in true nonchalant-cat-fashion, one can be found licking their nether regions as an archer is aiming an arrow at them. It's as if the archer is threatening the cat to get them off the sacred text. It's suggested that in contrast to the seriousness of the content of the religious manuscript, this was a snippet of medieval comedic relief, or perhaps a small act of rebellion from one of the scribes working on it.

The "Belgium Book of Hours" is like a scavenger hunt for musical medieval cats. All throughout the pages, you can find cats playing instruments in the margins.

It's safe to say these unique cat portraits not only show us a bit about the history of the relationship between cats and humans, but also demonstrate that the people of the Middle Ages had a sense of humor. Even a respected monk would get frustrated at a cat's curious and sometimes wearisome behavior. Throughout the ages, cats have remained consistent with their curious, aloof and funny natures. In the modern era, many classrooms and office breakrooms are decorated with the "Hang in There!" poster featuring a cat dangling from a rope by just its claws. I have a medieval cat calendar hanging by my desk that makes me chuckle, despite ever-encroaching deadlines. And maybe the strange way medieval cats were drawn was partly that, comedic relief to get through everyday life. ■



**"THE CAT FROM SCHEIBLER ARMORIAL,"** made in Germany around 1450–1480, features a cat with a tall crown on his head, a very derpy face, sitting tall and looking pleased with itself. This could represent the sin of pride.

The practice of *ailuromancy* (predicting the future by observing a cat's movements) started out as something that earned the feline appreciation. It was believed that by watching a cat's behavior, one could predict the weather, an unexpected guest at the door or things of a similar nature. Then, the ritual took a nasty turn. In Scotland, an exaggerated form of *ailuromancy* called *taghairm* started in which a cat's suffering was used to summon the devil and force him to fulfill a promise, only then would the cat be put out of its misery.

The widespread Christian connotations of the cat with evil is likely why medieval artists used exaggerated expressions and twisty poses to depict cats' untamed nature. It demonstrated their "evilness" and "otherness" compared to their devout human counterparts, who as good Christians could control their emotions and were painted with stoic expressions.



# COLLECTING

## *Chestnuts*



By Katie Wells

I know it's finally fall when I'm taking my dogs for a walk in the forest and the trails are covered in bright green, spiky balls. These threatening tree droppings are chestnuts. And, those green spikes are the burr, or shell, that encases the nut (seed) while it grows. At Christmastime, Bing Crosby croons about them being roasted on an open fire, and if you live in Germany, you may recall their enticing, sweet-smokey smell luring you to the nearest Christmas market. There is something quite nostalgic about collecting chestnuts and smelling them roasting from fall through winter.

There are two main variations of chestnuts, and before you gather them from the forest, it's important to know the difference. **Sweet chestnuts** are tasty and sweet; **horse chestnuts** are poisonous to eat. Nonetheless, horse chestnuts are great for a fun game which could be your new holiday tradition.

**Sweet chestnut** burrs are green, but eventually turn brown with a lot of long bristly spines. They contain up to three seeds that are small and have a flat side. The seeds come to a point. After roasting them and peeling the shells, you can eat the nuts.

**Horse chestnut** burrs are thick and bright green with widely spaced spikes, they usually only contain one larger, rounded nut.

**DO NOT EAT!**



*continued on page 32*





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Chestnuts go by a couple of different names, particularly horse chestnuts:

## BUCKEYES

In the United States, horse chestnuts go by the name of buckeyes. One legend says the buckeye resembles the eye of a deer and carrying one in your pocket can bring you good luck. Ohio is known as the "Buckeye State" because of the surplus of buckeye trees in the area during early settlement. The bark of the tree produces a yellow dye which has been used for tanning leather and oils. Oils from the buckeye seed have been used for bookbinders' paste and oil in lamps. While you cannot eat buckeyes, you can eat buckeye candies which are delicious homemade treats made of peanut butter, sugar and chocolate.

## CONKERS

Conker (French origin) means: "to hit or biff."

"Oddly oddly onker my first conker," is a chant said when you find your first conker of the season around September or October. This ensures fewer tangles and good fortune for playing the game of conkers. Conkers is a playground game that has been passed down for generations and is a British custom. It originates in the U.K. and was first recorded on the Isle of Wight in 1848, but it is believed to date back to the 15th century.

Horse chestnuts or "conkers" are what inspired it. When the spikey green burr turns brown and cracks open, you'll find the conker inside. The best conkers for the game are uncracked, smooth and perfectly rounded. Or in the words of Roald Dahl (allegedly a big fan of the game) "...a great conker is one that has been stored in a dry place for at least a year. This matures it and makes it rock hard and therefore formidable."

Another tip to find a conquering conker is to see if it sinks or floats in a bucket of water. The denser, the better. Pick the conker that falls to the bottom of the bucket.

If you like the game, you could become a professional conker player! The World Conker Championships are held every year on the second Sunday in October in Northamptonshire, England.

*"Oddly oddly onker  
my first conker..."*

CC BY 2.0. JANE BELINDA SMITH/Flickr.COM



*Buckeye candies*



## ROAST SWEET CHESTNUTS *at Home*

### Materials:

- Fresh sweet chestnuts
- Water for soaking
- Cutting board
- A baking sheet or cast iron skillet
- Damp towel to let them steam after roasting

*Adapted from Tastes Better from Scratch*





## PLAY A GAME *of Conkers*

- ✦ Puncture a hole in your conker and thread string or twine through it.
- ✦ Each player takes turns at hitting their opponent's conker.
- ✦ One player wraps their string taut around their hand and lets their conker hang down. The opponent chooses at what height, and it is held very still.
- ✦ The opposing player (**THE STRIKER**) winds the string taut around their hand, then takes the conker in their other hand, drawing it back to strike.
- ✦ The striker releases the conker and lets it swing, trying to hit the opposing players'.
- ✦ If it's "**A MISS**," the striker is allowed up to two more turns.
- ✦ If the strings tangle, the **FIRST** player to call "**STRINGS**" gets to take an extra shot.
- ✦ "**ROUND THE WORLD**": If the striker hits their opponent's conker and it completes a whole circle after being hit- the player gets another turn.
- ✦ "**STAMPS**" or "**NO STAMPS!**": If a player drops their conker, or it's knocked out of their hand, the other player can shout "**STAMPS**" and jump on it. If the owner of the conker cries "**NO STAMPS**" first, then the conker can be reclaimed.
- ✦ The winner is the first to completely destroy their opponent's conker.



*The winner is the first to completely destroy their opponent's conker.*



### Step one:

Place the chestnuts one at a time on the cutting board with the flat side down. Use a serrated knife to cut a long slit across the rounded side of the nut. Make a second cut to form an "x." This step is very important, so the chestnut doesn't explode in the oven, and it makes them easier to peel.

### Step two:

Place the chestnuts in a bowl and cover them with water. Let them soak overnight. 10-12 hours is best.



*10-12 hours is best*

### Step three:

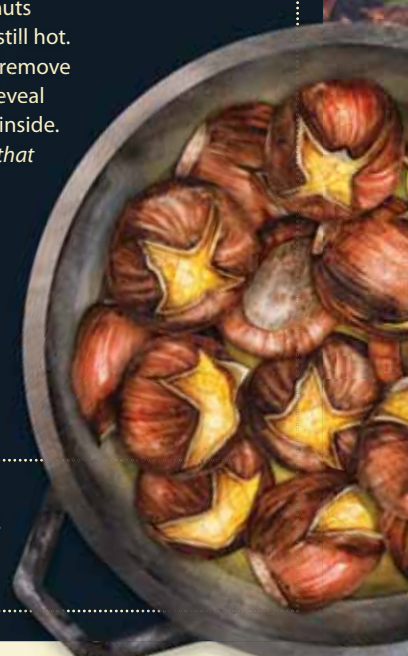
Roast them. Preheat the oven to 175°C / 350° F. Remove the chestnuts from the water and pat them dry. Spread them out on your roasting pan with the flat side down a the "x" you cut facing up. Let them roast for 35 minutes, or until you see the skins have pulled back and the inside of the nut has softened.

### Step four:

Steam. As soon as they are removed from the oven, use an oven mitt to wrap the chestnuts inside a damp kitchen towel. Twist the towel closed so the chestnuts are firmly inside (you should hear them crackling). Keep them in the towel for 10-15 minutes.

### Step five:

Peel the chestnuts while they are still hot. Use your "x" to remove the skins and reveal the yellow nut inside. *Do not eat any that look gooey or spoiled inside.* Eat them plain or serve them with a feast!



- ✦ On an open fire, use a cast iron skillet and follow steps one and two. Then, place the skillet on the hot coals for about 10-15 minutes. Stir the chestnuts once or twice to keep them from burning, then follow steps four and five of the recipe.
- ✦ For more flavor, you can coat the peeled chestnuts in salt, or in a brown sugar glaze. ■



# DRAGON'S TEETH & DOOM TURTLE TANKS

A conversation between  
Baymax and Zuko







## BAYMAX & ZUKO



© PHOTOS BY KATIE WELLS

*Hey, Brother!* I jump up to lick Baymax's cheek. Mom and Dad are getting our leashes! You know what that means? We both cry out in our highest pitches to show Mom and Dad our excitement. I wish I could cover my ears when Baymax starts his husky howls.

Beep. Beep. The car door unlocks. My body shudders, oh no, not the vet! But Mom grabs our collapsible water dishes. "Huzahh! No vet for us."

"Huzahhh!" Baymax chimes in. We leap into the backseat and wait. From our home near Kaiserslautern, the drive doesn't seem too long! Mom says something to Dad about it only being 20 minutes from folks stationed at Ramstein.

The car starts to slow in a village, and we're in front of a house. Dad lets Baymax out from the back and Mom grabs my leash before I launch out of the car and make a beeline for the house. Mom pulls me back. "Not there buddy! We're going to the forest! We're going to go see some dragon's teeth!"

There are so many smells, I hardly hear her. Baymax gives me a gentle "gurruff" and "aarghh" as we butt heads and twist leashes.

"Come on buddies!" Dad chimes and we rush across the street to the trail head. Dad takes my leash because I'm excited and pulling Mom just a little too much. Mom takes Baymax. On one side of us is open fields and on the other, the woods. It's been so hot; the trees overhead feel nice and cool. I'm so excited to get to sniff a new place! Baymax is trotting ahead, then veers to the left, shoving his head in a patch of tall grass.

"What did you find, Brother?" I pull Dad over too.

Baymax sneezes violently. "I don't know, but it smells like other dogs have been here."

"Show them whose boss," I say.

Baymax circles the patch and lifts his leg up. It's our territory now. Mom and Dad are chatting, and a cool breeze picks up. It feels so nice out.

"Wow! Turtle tanks sound so interesting." Mom says to Dad as we stroll. My ears prick up.

"Turtles? Brother, did they say turtles?"

"Not that kind of turtle, Zuko." Baymax rolls his eyes and tilts his ears. "Haven't you been listening? Dad was telling Mom about how that World War II Doom Turtle Tank was found in the middle of a field near Fort Belvoir, Virginia after being lost for 27 years. Alright, listen up young pup..."

I quiet my panting to a lull and slow into a smooth trot so I can hear Baymax better.

"A long time ago, many lifetimes for us canines, the Doom Turtle Tank, or T28, was America's only super heavy tank and was created to break through Germany's Siegfried Line, a defense line made up of reinforced concrete pyramids known as the 'Dragon's Teeth' (what this trail here in Lambsborn, Germany leads to). The 400 miles of the Westwall were designed to be impenetrable by tanks and other allied vehicles. The Americans found out about it through German propaganda. It was said to be absolutely impenetrable."

"...Uh, Brother what does impenetrable mean?"

"It's like the fence in the backyard; it's too heavy and tall for us to get past even if we wanted to. That's what it was meant to be like for the Allied forces."

"Oh no! So, what did the Americans do?"

*continued on page 36*



© CC BY-SA 4.0/T28 SUPER HEAVY TANK US ARMY ARMOR & CAVALRY COLLECTION/ SCHIERBECKER/COMMONSWIKIMEDIA.ORG

"American troops were up for the challenge. They knew there had to be weak point in the Siegfried Line, so the engineers decided to build a tank so big and strong it would break through. The tank was so heavily armed, including with a 105mm artillery gun, that it could take out bunkers. It ended up weighing 95 tons (210,000 pounds)."

"How many Zukos would that be?"

"Hmm, let me calculate," Baymax pauses. "That's like 5,000 of you! While it was an enormous and heavily armored tank, it was also incredibly slow, as slow as a turtle compared to how fast regular tanks can go, hence the name 'Doom Turtle.'"

"Looks like we're about halfway there guys," Dad says. We wag our tails so Dad knows we heard him.

"How many were there?" I ask.

"Originally 25 were planned, but only two prototypes were built. While the prototypes were being tested, the first tank's engine caught fire. And during that time, it turned out the Siegfried Line was not as strong as the Germans had made it out to be. The allied forces were able to penetrate it by pushing dirt over the teeth, with a bulldozer of all things, then drove over it with tanks. So, the Doom Turtle stayed in the U.S. and was used to test transportation equipment. If the equipment could move a tank of the Doom Turtles' weight, it could move anything!"

"Are we going to see the tank here, Brother?"

"No, not today; it never deployed to Europe and one day someone parked it in a field, and everyone forgot about it. Museums started asking about it. And nobody could remember where it was parked."

"Someone lost a 200,000 pound tank!" I snort.

Baymax leans in closer, "And remember there's only one of them in existence! The tank was MIA for the next 27 years, until one day a hunter out in the woods found it incognito hidden by a couple of bushes."

"How could something so big be hidden by a couple of bushes? It's so easy to spot even tiny birds in the bushes."

"Don't forget, Zuko, humans don't have strong noses, maybe they can't see so good either. Dad said something about camouflage."

"So, what happened to it?"

"Now, it's on display at the National Infantry Museum at Fort Benning, Georgia."

Mom and Dad slow down in front of a sign; there's a tiny trail in the forest to our right.

"We're here!" Mom darts into the forest with Baymax. Dad and I follow close behind, they were right! Giant dragon's teeth spread out all over the forest floor and up the hill like a ramp. Baymax and I sniff them. Somehow, we both know not to mark our territory here.

"Come on, ZuZu; come on, Bay!" Mom and Dad pat the cement for us to jump up and walk on with them.

"Watch their paws," Dad tells Mom, "There's shrapnel or bolts poking up."

Baymax and I mind our paws as we explore this strange remnant of the past in the forest.

"So cool!" Baymax wags his tail and walks up to Mom who's crouched down snapping pics and gives her arm a big lick. I lean into Dad for a minute as we all just absorb the neat little piece of history and enjoy the shaded forest and cool concrete on a warm day.

"That was fun," Mom exclaims.

"Yeah, we should take the pups and visit some of the other locations like the ones in Orscholz, Hollerath or Aachen," says Dad.

"We can't wait!" Baymax and I woof in unison. ■

Scan here to see a map!







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“  
The same  
procedure as  
*last year*,  
Miss Sophie?”

”

## Germany's *Quirky* New Year's Eve Traditions

By Kat Nickola

©IMAGO/UNITED ARCHIVES





## Fireworks

If you've been in Germany for New Year's Eve, you will recall the frenzy of fireworks. In November, bundles of *Silvesterraketen*—New Year's rockets—went on sale everywhere, from grocery shops to hardware stores. On the last day of December, at the stroke of midnight, your neighborhood exploded with noise and color, and it didn't really taper off until the sun was up. This year, try walking to a rise in your village or a viewpoint nearby; the scene is beautiful. If you buy your own fireworks, be sure to only set them off during the legal window from Dec. 31 to Jan. 1 (midnight or afterward is the norm). Be sure you aren't in restricted areas like churchyards or forests.

## Raclette

To occupy the evening leading up to midnight, many Germans will enjoy a party with friends or family at home. Large, organized events are becoming more popular, but enjoying drinks around an outdoor firepit, or having a long dinner is still the norm. Raclette is a very popular meal to have; it takes a long time and allows for socializing while grilling meats and vegetables and then melting cheese over your own special combination of ingredients. Special raclette grills and raclette cheeses appear in shops in November.

## "Dinner for One"

While grilling raclette and imbibing a few drinks, many German families will sit down around 6 p.m. to watch an 18-minute short black-and-white film called "Dinner for One." This British comedy was periodically performed on stage in the U.K., and in 1963, a famous German comedian named Peter Frankenfeld saw it. He asked the two-person cast to come perform the sketch live on his TV show in Hamburg. It was so well received, they recorded it to show on ARD (public broadcasting) channels periodically. In 1972, ARD played it on New Year's Eve and has continued the tradition since then.

"Dinner for One" was recorded in English with British actors May Warden playing lady of the house Miss Sophie and Freddie Frinton as her butler James. The comedy plays out as James gets more and more drunk while standing in to toast for Miss Sophie's long-dead birthday guests. The complete title in Germany is "Dinner for One oder: Der 90. Geburtsdat" (Dinner for One, or the 90th Birthday). You can join in the fun by watching on ARD 1, typically at 6 p.m. The channel is available for free on most smart TVs while in Germany. ■

“  
The same  
procedure as  
every year,  
James!  
”

# A Treasure Hunt for Trolls

By Katie Wells

**L**urking under bridges, camouflaged by stone and dwelling in the mountains, or perhaps they are the mountain itself—trolls are a strange mystical folk featured in legends all around the world.

Trolls originate in Nordic folklore, dwelling in Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Iceland. Many of these tales depict trolls as evil, with one eye, many heads and giant. They came from snowy mountains, dense forests and occasionally, the ocean. It is said they were angered by the smell of Christian blood, and they would turn to stone if they didn't take shelter by daybreak. Naturally, these legends have evolved. In Denmark, some trolls are said to be small and mischievous, tiny enough to hide under floorboards. A famous illustrator, John Bauer depicted trolls from Swedish Fairytales as more endearing, often with a few human features. Notably, his trolls often had tails poking out of robes. They were connected to nature and influenced by Sami culture as seen by their tools and clothing.

In a small North Carolina town, my dad built a bridge over the creek in the woods behind my childhood home. At bedtime, he told me about the troll who notoriously played under "troll bridge" and came out at night to guard the creek and creatures who lived there. Although occasionally, if the troll saw a girl with long hair playing by the bridge during the day, he might come out to give it a tug. Another variation of my dad's story was if my brother or I could catch the troll, and only if we were very lucky and very good children, he would have to give us a gold coin and grant our wishes. Even now, in my 30s, when I visit home and dangle my legs over the bridge to watch the water, I feel a prickle sneaking up my spine and I imagine our resident troll (I have yet to catch him and learn his name) yanking my leg just for fun.

As an adult, the magic of trolls and troll hunting is not lost. Thomas Dambo, an artist from Denmark, has created a scavenger hunt of large troll installations. His inspiration for the trolls comes from his background in street art. In an interview with "Best Ever You," he discusses how his art evolved from bird houses into trolls and although legends of trolls from Denmark typically feature small ones, he wanted to "create something really big and hidden."

It ties in with the concept that with graffiti and street art, the artist makes it somewhere hidden and then people find it. The trolls are the same principle, just on a larger scale. They are meant to be found slowly, or better, happened upon. Each troll has its own personality and acts as a guardian of the forest and the land they reside on. Dambo uses only reclaimed wood, pallet boards and other waste, which has earned him the nickname of "The Trash Artist." There's something symbolic and quite beautiful about this contrast between waste and the natural forest. These trolls are seen as guardians and protectors of nature, yet Dambo uses the very trash people have dumped in these precious environments to make them. The trolls serve as an important reminder to take care of what's left of our natural world from days of old, the present and future.

Since 2014, when the project first began, Thomas Dambo has hidden over 150 trolls across Europe, Asia, Australia, South America and North America. The global project has become a community effort as well. The story of each troll starts with Dambo getting a feel for the chosen area. Then, based on what he notices about the environment, perhaps, a lake, certain animals or man-made structures, a narrative emerges, and he imagines himself as a 20-foot troll. Once he decides on the body language of the troll, he builds the head and feet. From there, the local community, volunteers, his team and sometimes a school

will get involved to bring the troll to life. While the community often gets involved, Dambo emphasizes keeping the trolls a secret so they can be discovered.

Although they may not be the "real" trolls of legend, the sculptures have captured the spirits of ancient giants, each with their own whimsical name and story. Finding one as you wander is like coming upon a fox or magnificent stag in the forest. It suddenly appears and fills you with excitement and a glimmer of magic, even if it's just for a breath.

While many stories portray trolls as goarish, eating children, or maybe dim-witted like the one in the dungeon in "Harry Potter," Thomas Dambo's trolls are all good-natured, with cheerful and creative expressions. They have a sense of wisdom and intelligence about them. You can discover the trolls almost anywhere in the world, and Europe is a great place to start!

If you are in Holstebro, Denmark, keep an eye out for the sleepy troll Vild-Emil who lies on the forest floor amongst the crooked trees he loves. Little Lisa of Edelweiss, Germany, is a shy troll hidden behind her tree. Her nails are painted black, and she is adorably bald. Gargon Villeinvisible lives in Rouen, France, surrounded by a circle of colorful, tiny-to-him homes that might suit some fairies. Or, if you're in London, England, find the group of cheeky trolls on a field study. Head to [thomasdambo.com](http://thomasdambo.com) for the **Trollmap** where 'X' marks the spot for your next troll-hunting adventure.

To maintain the integrity of his work, it is rumored that some of Dambo's trolls don't have clues on the map. There could be many more out there. So, keep your eyes peeled; you never know where a Dambo troll may appear. ■





*Finding  
one as you  
wander is  
like coming  
upon a fox or  
magnificent  
stag in the  
forest.*

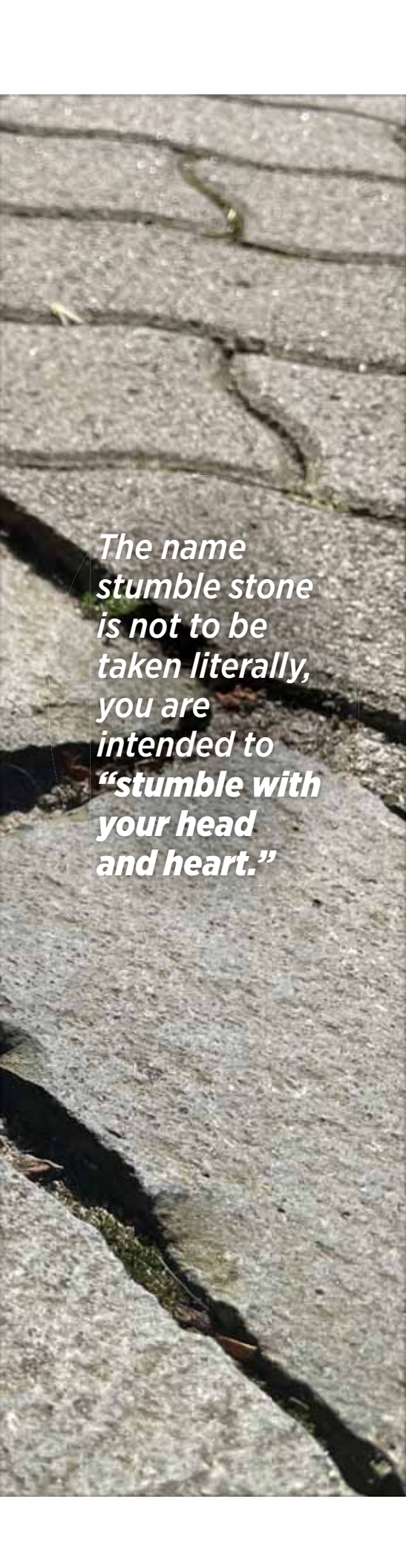


# EUROPE'S MEMORIAL STUMBLING STONES

By Kat Nickola







*The name  
stumble stone  
is not to be  
taken literally,  
you are  
intended to  
“stumble with  
your head  
and heart.”*

©KAT NICKOLA

**While walking through Kaiserslautern** one day, I noticed a small brass cobblestone in the street. Coming nearer to it, I could see that it had an inscription. It read, “Heir Wohnte BERTHA WERLE Geb. Grünwald Jg. 1874 Deportiert 1940 gurs interniert Noe seit 1943 mit hilfe überlebt.” In English, it says, “Here lived Bertha Werle (née Grünwald) born 1874, deported in 1940 and interned at the Noe camp until 1943; survived with help.”

It was a *Stolperstein*; a stumble stone, one of thousands that dot cities across Europe to memorialize former citizens who were victims of Nazi persecution. They are placed in front of former residences or businesses and researched in detail to tell the individual stories of people who lived and worked at those locations and to hold the atrocities of the Holocaust in memory.

Werle’s *Stolperstein* is one of 191 in Kaiserslautern. The most recent was placed on Sept. 29, 2024. Jewish residents were first documented in the city in 1241. At the time, they primarily lived on Judengasse (Jewish Alley), now called Glaserstrasse (Glass Street). It is a small road adjacent to Kaiserslautern’s popular shopping street and would have been inside the city walls near the oldest market square during the Middle Ages. A *mikveh*—a deep, stepped basin used by Jewish communities for ritual bathing—was also discovered along this road and dated to the 14th century.

However, Kaiserslautern, like many European towns, does not have a history of tolerance. In 1349, Jewish residents were technically expelled from the city and, though it was largely ignored at first, by 1388 the expulsion was enforced. It was only in the 1800s, during the French occupation of the area, that a Jewish population returned. They eventually built a new synagogue in 1886, the remnants of which have been preserved as a memorial. It was destroyed in the summer of 1938, preceding the November 9th Kristallnacht (night of broken glass) in which all the known homes and businesses of Jewish people were destroyed by Nazi hoards and 192 Kaiserslautern residents were rounded up and taken to the train station for deportation to death camps.

In Kaiserslautern there are 170 *Stolpersteine* placed for Jewish victims, 10 for political victims, six for nonconformists, two for homosexuals, two for people with disabilities and one for a Jehovah’s Witness. Werle was arrested for being of Jewish decent. Visit [stolpersteine-kl.de](https://stolpersteine-kl.de) to understand more about the individuals who are remembered and to see where the *Stolpersteine* are placed.

---

*continued on page 44*



## BERTHA WERLE'S STORY

Bertha Werle was born in 1874 in Mehlingen (a small village outside of Kaiserslautern), the daughter of a German rag collector and Jewish mother. All but one of her siblings emigrated to the USA before World War II. She became a seamstress in Kaiserslautern and had three children. As an adult she converted to Protestant Christianity, and at the age of 33 she married a widower 20 years her senior with three children of his own. The couple had four more children, three survived infancy. In 1937, her husband died.

In 1940, 65-year-old Werle was deported to the Gurs internment camp in the Pyrenees of what was then Vichy France, a state that collaborated with Nazi Germany. While there, she found her one brother who had stayed in Germany; he and his family had also been deported. Werle was housed in lot K, barracks 26. From Gurs she wrote a letter\* to the Deutsche Oberkommando in Vichy:

*"I, widow Bertha Wehrle, born on December 30, 1874 in Mehlingen near Kaiserslautern, Saarpfalz, religion: Protestant. My parents are of no religion. Only my late mother was of Jewish descent. My five Protestant sons, three of whom are in the military, live in Kaiserslautern. My late husband was an Aryan and of Aryan descent. When all the Jews from Baden and the Palatinate were transferred here, I was also brought here, perhaps by mistake. According to the law, I am more Aryan than Jewish in percentage terms and since I live here alone and my whole family lives in Germany, I ask the esteemed German High Command to take on my exceptional case and carefully check that all the information written down here is true, and so that I am allowed to return to my homeland of Germany."*

In 1942, nearly all Jewish people from the Gers camp were sent to Auschwitz where they were subsequently murdered. Werle was sent, instead, to the Noé camp near Toulouse. On August 17, 1943, she was released and returned to Kaiserslautern where she lived until passing away in 1953.

\*TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN

## WHY STUMBLING STONES?

The first 22 Stolpersteine were placed in 1993 in the city of Köln by the artist Gunter Demnig. The idea for the stumbling stones rose from a single brass, engraved cobblestone Demnig had set in the ground at the Köln Rathaus in 1992. It was a memorial honoring the memory of the 1,000 Sinti and Roma people who were deported to Auschwitz by the Nazi government 50 years prior.

Following the trial run in Köln, Demnig began the Stolpersteine Project with the goal of restoring the names of Nazi victims back to the places where they lived. Since then, the wide-reaching memorial installations have expanded to include thousands of stones across cities throughout Europe.

The name stumble stone is not to be taken literally; the brass cobbles are laid smoothly into the surrounding surface. Instead, Demnig is quoted as saying you are intended to "stumble with your head and with your heart." Happening upon a stone, whether touring a famous city or wandering a tiny village, is a heart-rending reminder of how deeply local, but paradoxically wide-reaching, the impact of Nazi ideology was. Each represents a human life.

Before a stone is installed, the victim's life is researched and surviving family members are involved in the process of memorializing. Local interest groups typically take the reins for bringing the project into their town, applying for approval by the city government, and often involving high school groups to aid in the research process.

There have been some cities and individuals that choose not to have the Stolpersteine Project install memorials. Notably, the city of München has rejected the installation of stumbling stone memorials, citing concerns that it is disrespectful to step on victim names. Instead, other commemorative pieces are used.

Visit [www.stolpersteine.eu](http://www.stolpersteine.eu) for more details about the Stolpersteine Project.



## STUMBLING STONES NEAR YOU

Because installation of the brass markers is a local project, databases for the memorial stumbling stones may be held at the local interest group level, by a local government or even by the state. Here are some websites with information about cities with Stolpersteine near U.S. military installations.

### “Stolpersteine” in Germany and the Netherlands

- Ansbach: [www.synagoge-ansbach.de](http://www.synagoge-ansbach.de)
- Frankfurt: [www.stolpersteine-frankfurt.de](http://www.stolpersteine-frankfurt.de)
- Heidelberg: [www.stolpersteine-heidelberg.de](http://www.stolpersteine-heidelberg.de)
- Kaiserslautern: [stolpersteine-kl.de](http://stolpersteine-kl.de)
- North Rhine-Westphalia: [stolpersteine.wdr.de](http://stolpersteine.wdr.de)
- Netherlands: [stichting-stolpersteine.nl](http://stichting-stolpersteine.nl)
- Nürnberg: [www.stolpersteine-nuernberg.de](http://www.stolpersteine-nuernberg.de)
- Stuttgart: [www.stolpersteine-stuttgart.de](http://www.stolpersteine-stuttgart.de)
- Wiesbaden: [www.am-spiegelgasse.de](http://www.am-spiegelgasse.de)

### “Pietre d’inciampo” in Italy

- Region of Veneto: [www.internamentoveneto.it](http://www.internamentoveneto.it)
- Venice: [www.pietredinciampovenezia.it](http://www.pietredinciampovenezia.it)
- Map of stones in Italy: [lab24.ilssole24ore.com/pietre-inciampo](http://lab24.ilssole24ore.com/pietre-inciampo)

### “Paves de memoire” in Belgium and France

- Brussels: [pavesdememoire-struikelstenen.be](http://pavesdememoire-struikelstenen.be)
- France: [mapstr.com/user/stolpersteinefrance](http://mapstr.com/user/stolpersteinefrance) ■



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The background of the entire page is a photograph of the Seven Sisters Cliffs in East Sussex, England. The cliffs are white and jagged, stretching along a coastline under a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The sea is visible in the distance.

# Dance Through Life at These “WICKED” Filming Locations

By Tamala Malerk

**T**wenty years after its Broadway debut, “Wicked” (the film version of the musical, based on a book, based on another book series...it’s a little “Inception”-ey) hit movie theaters in November 2024, and grossed over 750 million dollars world-wide. What may have come as a surprise to some, the film ended at what is intermission for the musical. This means audiences must return to theaters a full year later to find out what happens to Elphaba, Galinda/Glinda and Fiero.

Based on the book of the same name by Gregory Maguire (who based it on the book series from L. Frank Baum), the musical debuted on Broadway in October 2003. The full title of Maguire’s text is “Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch” (1995) and brings an alternative story and history to the character we all just remember screaming “I’m melting” in the 1930’s “The Wizard of Oz” film. In this version of the story, we learn that the witch’s name is “Elphaba” and she, Glinda (aka Galinda), the Wizard and other characters from Baum’s world have a long and intricate history.

“Wicked: For Good” will be released in theaters on November 21, 2025, and if you are waiting with bated breath for it, fret not. We’ve got a list of locations in the U.K. you can visit that appear or inspired sets in the film. Feel free to belt out the tunes yourself.

Seven Sisters Cliffs



## Norfolk Tulips and Belmont Nurseries

The film is a blend of CGI, special effects and real-world practical scenery and effects. The tulip fields that enchant our eyes at the beginning of the film are a prime example of this blending. Over nine million tulips were planted in Norfolk for the film; however, the different bulb colors didn't bloom at the same time, so shots had to be "stitched" together according to production designer Nathan Crowley.

## Seven Sisters Cliffs and River Cuckmere

Images of these cliffs and the river at the base of them were used for the scene where Galinda is arriving at Shiz University. You will be happy to know that you can visit Seven Sisters Country Park for free.

## Bournemouth Cliffs

Not all of the cliff scenes were filmed at the same spot. When Elphaba is seen on the white desert cliff's edge, it was filmed at the Bournemouth Cliffs in Dorset. (The white desert was CGI'ed in).

## Royal Pavilion

Did the dorm rooms in good ole' Shiz look familiar to you? Shiz University is where Elphaba and Galinda become frenemies. The university windows were inspired by the Royal Pavillion palace in Brighton. The Pavillion was built for King George IV in the 1700s and he loved it so much that he expanded it into an (even more) extravagant royal retreat in the early 1800s. Today, you can take tours inside the Pavillion and experience the extravagance yourself.

## Sky Studios Elstree and Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden

These are not the most fantastical places, but these film studios are where a lot of the filming took place. In fact, this was the first major film to be filmed at Sky Studios Elstree. Sky Studios are reported to be the most sustainable film studios in the world.

## The Village of Ivinghoe

You will have to use your imagination when visiting here because the entire village was converted into Munchkinland for the film and all the set pieces (many of which were built previously and brought from Sky Studios) were removed when filming ended in 2023. However, residents talk about how strange it was to constantly be surrounded by cranes and to hear singing as they went on with their everyday lives. Members of the crew would also go to the local pub, the Rose and Crown, during filming. ■



Norfolk Tulips



River Cuckmere



Bournemouth Cliffs



Royal Pavillion



Warner Bros. Studios



Ivinghoe



**The name Elphaba is Maguire's tribute to the world of Oz's creator L. Frank Baum and is a take on Baum's initials: L(El), F(pha), B(ba).**







# Skiing at **CORTINA D'AMPEZZO** is a Win

Story and Photos by Kat Nickola





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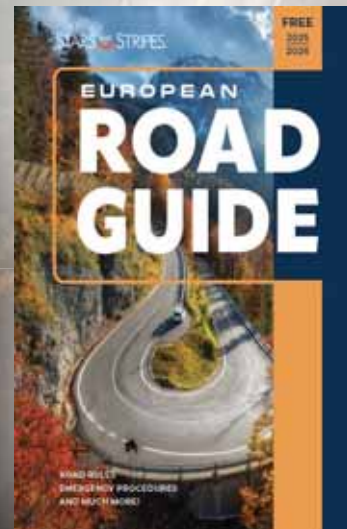
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**W**hile many ski resort reviews are written by die-hard black diamond skiers, I'm here with the real scoop from a "seasoned amateur."

I ski about once a year on a three- or four-day trip and learned when I was a tween, so I have experience. I also have a semblance of confidence when the weather is good, so I'm not a true beginner. But, still, my teens would agree that I'm not a good skier.

You may also be a seasoned amateur if any of this sounds familiar...

My technique, if we can call it that, is basically an amalgamation of wide parallels that quickly revert to my trusty 'snowplow' (or pizza) as needed. I snowplow on steep turns, on icy patches, if I encounter a thick chunk of snow, if the slope feels steeper than expected, or even if I just feel like the skiers around me are going way too fast. By the end of my annual first day out, I remember how to come to a stop without using my snowplow. I never actually know what to do with my poles. I get really "good" on day two, snowplowing less, but only if there is a tidy, groomed slope. In the U.S., I start on green slopes. After a day I can upgrade to blue trails, where I contentedly hang out forever.

In Europe, I have struggled to find a resort with the perfect blend of long-trail blue and green pistes. My family has tried numerous resorts in the Alps, and most only offer tiny bunny slopes for classes before jumping into the difficult blue category. Only in France and Scandinavia are green slopes even offered. Elsewhere, the level of blue is tough to discern; I have found myself loving a nice, mellow blue trail only to turn a corner to find the route has changed into a steep slope beyond my (lack of) skill.

Going fast and looking like a pro are not my goals, but having fun is! And I finally found a resort that checks the boxes for a seasoned amateur like me: Cortina d'Ampezzo.

This is one of 12 resorts in the massive Dolomiti Superski conglomeration. You can buy tickets for just Cortina, but a full Dolomiti pass is not much more and may be worth the added cost if you think you will get bold on day three and venture to another resort in the region.

With only one day, I lucked into one of the best ski days I've ever had. The sun was bright, and the snow was perfect. My friend and I stayed in the hamlet of Pocol and simply walked to the nearby Hotel Villa Argentina to rent skis. From there, we glided down a quick starter slope to the nearest lift. The snow was well-groomed, the slope was nice and wide so I could remember how to turn and there was a short steepish section at the very end perfect for a quick control check. I was stoked; no surprises and good snow! We bought day tickets at a small kiosk and rode up our first lift: Olimpia.

We spent the morning enjoying the just-long-enough easy blue slopes around the Olimpia lift. My friend was more of a beginner and struggled a bit. Without guidance, I'd recommend that true beginners head to the Socrepes area where there is a nice, long bunny slope.

At lunchtime, we took the gondolas high up into the Dolomite peaks, eating with the birds at the restaurant in Ra Valles. We watched as a massive cloud grew and then engulfed the outdoor sundeck where we noshed on panini. Getting down on skis was only for those comfortable on a black slope, so we joined lots of other folks taking the gondola back to the land of blues.



“Going fast and looking like a pro are not my goals, but having fun is!”



In the afternoon, we ventured further afield. Beyond the Olimpia lift area, the blue slopes included short steep sections that pushed my skills a little, but not beyond comfort. My beginner friend tried, but needed to bow out.

I spent the rest of the day skiing solo. Lines were short and the snow was well-groomed with very few spots of ice or slush. The long, trail-like 38 slope became a favorite, with views across the valley to other rugged peaks that define the Dolomites punctuated by calm sections through pine trees. My confidence surged. Never have I felt so “seasoned” and less “amateur” on a first day out on skis.

Sticking to the west side of the valley, I explored as many blue slopes as I could manage. Still, I never hit them all. There is so much for a skier like myself at this one resort, but there were also plenty of red and black slopes for folks with skills beyond mine. Many were around the scenic double-peak at the Duca D'Aosta lift and on a high plateau on the east side of the valley.

A first for me: I skied until the bitter end, barely making the final lift that would return me to Pocol where I slid right into the rental shop to drop my skis. It was a long, impressive day for this seasoned amateur. ■

## 2026 WINTER OLYMPICS

Cortina d'Ampezzo will be busy and expensive this year because it is one of the four areas hosting winter Olympic events. Not surprisingly, this includes alpine skiing, but also the biathlon, curling and sliding sports.

### Dates

**Winter Olympics:** Feb. 6-22, 2026

**Winter Paralympics:** March 6-15, 2026

### Locations

- **Milan** (opening ceremony, ice hockey, skating)
- **Cortina d'Ampezzo** (skiing, biathlon, curling, sliding)
- **Valtellina** (skiing, mountaineering, snowboarding)
- **Val di Fiemme** (ski jumping, cross-country)

### Tickets

Ticketing opened in April at [milanocortina2026.olympics.com](https://milanocortina2026.olympics.com). There are standard ticket options and “hospitality” options that can include priority seats, food and drink, special lounges and accommodation packages.

### Torch Relay

The Olympic torch relay is traversing all of Italy and coming close to many U.S. military installations.

- Near Camp Darby in Livorno on Dec. 12, 2025
- Near NAS Sigonella in Catania on Dec. 18, 2025
- In Naples on Dec. 23, 2025
- In Vicenza on Jan. 20, 2026
- Near Aviano AB in Udine on Jan. 24 and Belluno on Jan. 25, 2026

For a map of all the torch relay locations, visit [milanocortina2026.olympics.com/en/the-greatest-journey](https://milanocortina2026.olympics.com/en/the-greatest-journey).





## A Guide to Baking Flours in Europe

By Kat Nickola

**W**hile living in Europe, you may try locally bought flours in your tried-and-true recipes and find unexpected results. This is because the wheat varieties used across Europe are often different than those used in the U.S. That variation means unique protein content and a variety of whole grain levels that can change your baked goods' texture and ability to rise. In addition, American flours often contain additives not found in Europe. For example, bleached flours are banned, and flours are not enriched in Germany or Italy.

Flour types in the **U.S.** are defined by the amount of soft (low protein) or hard (high protein) wheat and how much they are refined. In **Germany**, flour parcels display the "mehl" (grain) and the "typ" number; low numbers have lower-protein wheat blends and are more refined, high numbers have blends of increasingly higher-protein wheat or whole grain. In **Italy**, most baking wheat is a soft, lower protein variety called Grano Tenero which has a "tipo" number indicating how finely ground it is; a different hard wheat called Grano Duro is used for pasta. In the **U.K.**, a low protein soft wheat is most common, though "strong" flour indicates a high protein hard wheat; this is taken into account on the following equivalency chart.

**Here is a guide to help you figure out which European flour matches your baking project.**

### • *gluten-free flour varieties* •



#### Cornbread, corn tortillas

**U.S.**— Corn meal

**Germany**—Maismehl

**Italy**—Farina di mais

**U.K.**—Maize flour, Maize meal



#### Buckwheat pancakes

**U.S.**—Buckwheat flour

**Germany**—Buchweizenmehl

**Italy**—Farina di saraceno

**U.K.**—Buckwheat flour



#### Rice noodles

**U.S.**—Rice flour

**Germany**—Reismehl

**Italy**—Farina di riso

**U.K.**—Rice flour



#### Cookies, macarons

**U.S.**—Almond flour

**Germany**—Mandelmehl

**Italy**—Farina di mandorla

**U.K.**—Ground almonds

*continued on page 54*





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## flour varieties



### Delicate cakes and pastries

**U.S.**—Cake flour (7–9% protein)  
**Germany**—Weizenmehl: Typ 405  
**Italy**—Grano Tenero: Tipo 00  
**U.K.**—Plain flour (sifted)



### Cake, pastry, pie crust, biscuits, scones, croissant, egg pasta

**U.S.**—Pastry flour (8–10% protein)  
**Germany**—Weizenmehl: Typ 480  
**Italy**—Grano Tenero: Tipo 00  
**U.K.**—Plain flour, white flour



### Cake, muffins, biscuits

**U.S.**—Self-rising flour (has baking powder and salt pre-mixed)  
**Germany**—None  
**Italy**—Farina autolievitante  
**U.K.**—Self-raising flour



### Quick breads, cookies, pancakes, muffins

**U.S.**—All-purpose flour (10–12% protein)  
**Germany**—Weizenmehl: Typ 550  
**Italy**—Grano Tenero: Tipo 0, Manitoba: Tipo 00  
**U.K.**—Bread flour



### White bread

**U.S.**—Bread flour (12–14% protein)  
**Germany**—Weizenmehl: Typ 750  
**Italy**—Grano Tenero: Tipo 0, Manitoba: Tipo 0  
**U.K.**—Strong white flour



### Whole wheat bread, hearty muffins

**U.S.**—Whole wheat flour (13–15% protein)  
**Germany**—Weizenmehl: Typ 1600 (light), Weizenvollkornmehl (whole grain)  
**Italy**—Grano Tenero: Tipo Integrale  
**U.K.**—Wholemeal



### Pizza dough

**U.S.**—All-purpose flour  
**Germany**—Weizenmehl: Typ 00, Pizzamehl  
**Italy**—Grano Tenero: Tipo 00  
**U.K.**—'00' Grade



### Pasta

**U.S.**—Semolina (durum wheat) flour  
**Germany**—Hartweizenmehl  
**Italy**—Semola: Rimacinata (fine ground), Gran Duro (course ground), Integrale (whole grain)  
**U.K.**—'00' Grade



### Artisanal wheat breads, ancient varieties

**U.S.**—High-protein flours, Emmer, Khorasan (Kamut®)  
**Germany**—Weizenmehl: Typ 812, Typ 1050, Emmermehl: Typ 1300, Khorasan weizen  
**Italy**—Grano Tenero: Tipo 1, Tipo 2, Farina di grani antichi, Farina Senatore Cappelli, Farina Verna  
**U.K.**—Very strong bread flour, Multigrain flour, Emmer wholemeal, Khorasan flour



### Spelt products

**U.S.**—Spelt flour  
**Germany**—Dinkelmehl: Typ 630 (light), Vollkornmehl (whole grain)  
**Italy**—Farina di farro  
**U.K.**—Spelt flour



### Rye Breads, pumpernickel

**U.S.**—Rye flour  
**Germany**—Roggenmehl: Type 720 (light), Vollkornmehl (whole grain)  
**Italy**—Farina di segale  
**U.K.**—Rye flour





## Midwest Family Dentistry American Dentists in Stuttgart

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Both doctors are native Midwesterners, trained and licensed in the USA. Dr. Weydert, a University of Iowa graduate, performs routine procedures with her focus being pediatrics, root canals, crowns, and esthetic procedures. A graduate of the University of Alabama, Dr. Hennessy also practices general dentistry and she focuses on oral surgery, implants, crowns, and esthetic procedures. Annual continuing education in the U.S. ensures the latest technology and optimized treatments are available to patients. Call 07031-7655920 or visit [www.midwest-family-dentistry.com](http://www.midwest-family-dentistry.com).

SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #31

## American Dentist in Heidelberg & Stuttgart

Dr. Charles A. Smith is an American-trained dentist in Heidelberg and Stuttgart. A Metlife/Preferred Tricare provider, he provides care for the entire family. He is a graduate of the University of Buffalo School of Dental Medicine and an LVI Fellow of the prestigious Las Vegas Institute for Advanced Dental Studies. He provides advanced services such as Smile Makeovers, INVISALIGN, traditional orthodontics, TMJ, implants, and Full Mouth Reconstruction, as well as routine services including cleaning, periodontal treatment, fillings, pediatrics, crowns and root canals.

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SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #21

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SEE OUR AD ON PAGE #2

# MEET BIB:

*Your New* BUDGET-FRIENDLY *Bestie*  
FOODIE

By Mandy Mills

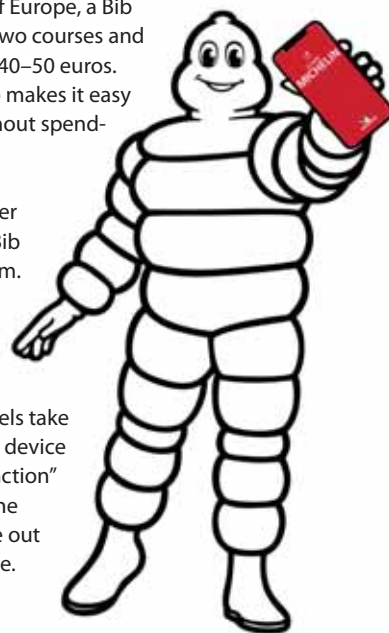
The seemingly endless opportunities to travel and experience new cultures, especially at mealtime, are an undeniable perk of being stationed in Europe. But if you're anything like me—someone whose eyes (and taste buds) are bigger than their stomach when it comes to budgeting—those great opportunities and all the decisions can sometimes make your stomach churn. That's when it helps to have a friend who knows their way around both a menu and a map.

## LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO BIB.

Despite being the friendly mascot of the Michelin Company for over 125 years, Bib (short for Bibendum) has only had his own award in the Michelin Guide since 1997. While Michelin stars recognize culinary excellence regardless of price, the Bib Gourmand distinction highlights restaurants that expertly balance quality and value. Or, as my husband puts it, "it's like Michelin star quality for regular people."

At these lesser known, often supremely local gems, chefs craft memorable meals without the sometimes shocking markups normally associated with fine dining. The exact formula for determining the quality-to-value ratio varies based on local dining costs, but in much of Europe, a Bib Gourmand meal typically includes two courses and a glass of wine or dessert for under 40–50 euros. With so many options out there, Bib makes it easy to find great food you can trust without spending too much.

For military families, expats and other wander-lusting weekend warriors, Bib is a great addition to your travel team. You don't even need to carry a printed copy. The Michelin Guide's official website and app make it super simple to search by location, cuisine or rating wherever your travels take you. Just enter a location or let your device find you, then filter the list by "distinction" to show Bib Gourmand spots. For the more spontaneous, just keep an eye out for Bib's signature lip-smacking smile.



*...it's like Michelin star quality*





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©PATRICK MILLS



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Here are a few of my favorite Bib Gourmand finds:

## NO. 2

[nummer2.dk](http://nummer2.dk)

Christianshavn—Copenhagen, Denmark

Just steps from Copenhagen's unique **Cirkelbroen** bridge and overlooking the **Royal Library**, or Black Diamond, is **No. 2**, the laid-back, low-key younger sibling of the two-Michelin-starred restaurant **alôc**. You can order from their seasonal Nordic à la carte menu, but I suggest their own prix fixe option, where both the courses and the prices are set. My husband calls this a "no decisions menu." At lunch, you get two or three courses for 40–50 euros, while dinner adds a fourth or fifth course for 67 euros or 94 euros. If your newly trimmed dining budget allows, adding the wine pairing eliminates even more decisions.



©PATRICK MILLS

## RESTAURANT 20 EIFFEL

[restaurant20eiffel.com](http://restaurant20eiffel.com)

7th Arrondissement—Paris, France

Next to the **Eiffel Tower**, the most Parisian thing I can think of is the "prix fixe." Combining the two with traditional cuisine is Restaurant 20 Eiffel, located about 200 meters from the tower. A prix fixe menu offers a complete meal with your choice of starter, main and dessert for a set price. As of the time of writing, that price is 27.50 euros for lunch and 37.50 euros for dinner. My husband and I chose different options for each course, so we collectively got to taste more of the menu, although I don't think he got a single spoonful of my raspberry soufflé. Visit between spring and autumn and you might just be seated at a table outside with an impressive view of the tower.

## TIPO

[tipoedinburgh.co.uk](http://tipoedinburgh.co.uk)

New Town—Edinburgh, Scotland

Family-style Italian might not be the first thing you think of for a night out in Scotland, but it was just what we needed the night before the **Edinburgh Half Marathon**. Whether carb-loading is a superstition or truly affects performance doesn't matter, because with that in mind, Bib led a group of six hungry runners to Tipo where we ordered and devoured literally everything on their sharing menu. Tipo's house-made pastas, cured meats, generously sized mains, and delectable desserts fueled our bodies and soothed the superstitious among us, all for about 40 euros per person.

FOR REGULAR PEOPLE.



BIBENDUM CHARACTER AND LOGO ARE ©MICHELIN

No matter where you're stationed or exploring, Bib is the ultimate foodie friend who knows where to find delicious meals that don't break the bank. So next time hunger strikes on your travels: Bib's got your back. ■



# The Hunt for THE BEST

## European McNugget®

By Tamala Malerk

**B**eing stationed in Europe comes with quite a few perks. My favorites are the opportunities to travel and try new foods. I have eaten escargot in France, Belgian chocolate and waffles in Antwerp, Schnitzel in Germany as well as sipped tea with scones and clotted cream in England. While these regional dishes elicited a variety of responses (snails are not for me; however, Belgian chocolate is superb), there is a commonality hidden amongst all of the restaurants I've seen in city centers: McDonald's.

When I see the sign, I almost immediately hear the voice of Michal Keaton in my head saying, "The Arches." Those M-shaped golden arches alert every visitor, especially travelers with picky eaters amongst them, that McNuggets®, cheeseburgers, Happy Meals® and more are accessible to them, even when they are far from home.

When I am visiting a new country, of course I want to try their culinary specialties; nonetheless, I also try McNuggets® in every country I visit to see who reigns supreme in having the best chicken nugget. I have tried McNuggets® in 11 countries: the U.S. (yes, I count this), England, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Liechtenstein, Belgium, Italy and, most recently, Ireland.

I realize that the term "best" is subjective and what I think is the best could be different from what the best is for someone else. The three main things I consider when trying McNuggets® are:

- 1. Flavor**—Does it taste good?
- 2. Breeding-to-chicken ratio**—Is there too much breading and lack of chicken? Or is there too much chicken and not enough breading and seasoning to add flavor?
- 3. Crunch**—No one likes a soggy nugget. To make it to the top of my list, there must be a distinctive \*crunch\* sound when I first bite into the nugget.

I have yet to have a bad McNugget®, but most of them fall under, "yep, this is a McNugget®." However, some McNuggets® stand out. France reigned supreme for the best nugget from 2019–2023. However, in summer 2023, Liechtenstein, which had the most expensive McNugget® at 5 Swiss Francs for four (not even a full Happy Meal®), took the crown. It must be those high-quality, expensive ingredients.



**S**ometimes, I will get an entire Happy Meal® so that I can see how the toys vary across the countries and that has afforded me some really cool German Pokémon cards as well as French and Dutch children's books. It also lets me experience what different countries consider a side dish for a kids' meal. Instead of apples in the Netherlands, they gave me cherry tomatoes.

*If McNuggets® aren't your thing or you want to try other food, each country tends to have something special that you will not find in the U.S. Here are some items to try on your European adventures.*

## GERMANY

- **MCNUGGETS® + PIZZATASCHEN (PIZZA BITES) BOX:** Add some fries and a McFlurry® and put on your favorite comfort movie for the ultimate night in.
- **CHOCOLATE CHIPS AND CARAMEL SAUCE MCFLURRY®:** Vanilla ice cream with chocolate chips and caramel sauce.

## ITALY

- **MCCHICKEN® THE PROVOLONE:** The Italian take on a McDonald's classic featuring Provolone Valpadana and mayonnaise with capers from the Aeolian Islands.
- **BACI® PERUGINA® MCFLURRY®:** This decadent Italian dark chocolate treat is swirled with vanilla ice cream for a tasty after dinner treat.

## THE U.K.

- **VEGGIE DIPPERS:** Red pepper and sundried tomato pesto covered in breadcrumbs and fried.
- **GALAXY® CHOCOLATE AND RASPBERRY PIE:** Chocolate pastry filled with raspberry compote and Galaxy® chocolate ganache.

## POLAND

- **MCROYAL® CHEESY JALAPEÑO BACON:** A cheesy, spicy and saucy twist on the classic burger which features jalapeños and BBQ sauce.
- **COCONUT ICED LATTE WITH WHIPPED CREAM:** Espresso is combined with a creamy coconut base, topped with chocolate sauce and whipped cream for a sweet drink.

## SPAIN

- **MCEXTREME® PULLED PORK DOBLE:** Two beef patties are topped with pulled pork and crispy fried onions and smoky bacon, smothered in BBQ sauce with smoked cheese and bacon.
- **MCDALENE®:** You have your choice of muffins, either chocolate or salted caramel, that make for a yummy bite with a hot coffee from the McCafé®.

## BELGIUM

- **MCCRISPY® SAMURAI:** A crispy chicken sandwich with Batavia lettuce, cheddar cheese, two pieces of bacon, red onion and slightly spicy Samurai sauce.
- **LOTUS BISCOFF MCFLURRY®:** Vanilla ice cream with Lotus Biscoff cookie crumble.

## THE NETHERLANDS

- **MCKROKET:** A fried beef burger topped with a creamy mustard sauce.
- **STROOP WAFFLE MCFLURRY®:** This Dutch classic dessert is blended with vanilla ice cream and caramel sauce for a delicious treat.

## FRANCE

- **THE ROYAL™ DELUXE:** A beef and steak burger, onions, lettuce, mustard sauce and tomato. Add cheese for Samuel L. Jackson's iconic "Royal™ with Cheese."
- **LE BIO À BOIRE FRAISE (ORGANIC STRAWBERRY DRINK):** A French dessert that is a healthier, yogurt-based version of a strawberry milkshake.

All "Mc" titles such as McFlurry, McNugget, Happy Meal and McCrispy are registered trademarks and owned by the McDonalds corporation. Some items listed may no longer be available when you go on your European McDonald's adventure. ■



# UNIQUE HARD ROCK CAFES ACROSS EUROPE

By Katie Wells

It may surprise you that Hard Rock Cafe was founded in England. It feels like such an American staple, especially since most of the music memorabilia features Elvis and many other American rock icons. There are over 300 Hard Rock Cafes located in over 74 countries with some of the most unique establishments residing in Europe. In our travels around Europe, my spouse and I love trying regional cuisine and specialties; however, when we spot the iconic Hard Rock Cafe logo (an homage to Chevrolet's hood ornament) we often pop in to indulge in a burger and fries as well as to check out any special rock relics in that location's collection.

As someone with gluten sensitivities, it's also a relief to not have to research what we will be eating for the night as they have a gluten-free menu I can order from. Below are several of many Hard Rock Cafes with special memorabilia or unique locations in Europe that you can check out as you travel. It's also fun to visit the Rock Shop® and add to your Hard Rock Cafe t-shirt or pin collection or start one stamped with cities from your travels.

## LONDON, ENGLAND

The first ever Hard Rock Cafe was built in Piccadilly Circus London by two Americans: Isaac Tigrett and Peter Morton in 1971. When you stop here, admire the original memorabilia donated by Eric Clapton that started the restaurant's collection. This location is also where a fan tribute phone booth dedicated to Liam Payne of One Direction stands. The photo booth was originally used on the One Direction 2012 album cover, "Take me Home." For more information, visit [cafe.hardrock.com/london](http://cafe.hardrock.com/london).

### NOTABLE MEMORABILIA

- One of Eric Clapton's guitars, a Fender Lead II (The first true relic of history donated in the 70s by the guitarist to the local owners.)
- Jimi Hendrix's famous Flying V guitar
- One of Prince's iconic shirts



©ZIMMYTWS/STOCK.ADOBE.COM



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## PRAGUE, CZECHIA

Located in the heart of Prague, this Hard Rock Cafe is a four-story building with three levels and two vibrant bars. Visitors can watch live music from above as they dine. One of the more beautiful Hard Rock's, it is adorned with Neo-Renaissance frescos and a five-meter custom-made guitar-shaped chandelier. For more information, visit [cafe.hardrock.com/prague](http://cafe.hardrock.com/prague).

### NOTABLE MEMORABILIA

- A pair of Elvis Presley's studded black bell-bottom pants
- A black shirt embroidered with silver and gold eagles that belonged to Johnny Cash
- A black tuxedo coat, top hat and cane from Madonna's 1985 "Virgin Tour"

---

## KRAKÓW, POLAND

Boasting the "hottest live entertainment in Poland," this Hard Rock Cafe is right next door to the famous St. Mary's Basilica. One of the larger locations, with three floors, you can find many pieces of memorabilia to marvel at. After dinner take a stroll through the architecturally stunning UNESCO World Heritage Market Square. For more information, visit [cafe.hardrock.com/krakow](http://cafe.hardrock.com/krakow).

### NOTABLE MEMORABILIA

- Brian May's (Queen) black cape, butterfly shirt
- Keith Moon's (The Who) cowboy boots
- A pair of wire-framed glasses with shield shaped prescription lenses and a design of stars and stripes worn by Elton John.

---

## DUBLIN, IRELAND

The Hard Rock Cafe in Dublin is located in the neighborhood of Temple Bar which has a lively music and cultural scene and, of course, the famous Temple Bar. The restaurant has two floors and regularly plans events and live music. It's a perfect location as Dublin has its own Rock Route honoring artists and bands like Sinéad O'Connor, U2, The Script, Kodaline and more that you can stroll down. For more information, visit [cafe.hardrock.com/dublin](http://cafe.hardrock.com/dublin).

### NOTABLE MEMORABILIA

- A pair of Bono's (U2) iconic sunglasses
- Handwritten lyrics by Dolores O'Riordan (The Cranberries)
- Slash's (Guns N' Roses) hat

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## VIENNA, AUSTRIA

Viennese charm meets contemporary design at this Hard Rock Cafe, and you can opt for a set lunch or dinner menu (gold or diamond) for a flair of elegance. The collection here is designed to pay homage to international musicians, local artists and up-and-coming acts. It also evokes a glimpse into the musical heritage of Vienna. For more information, visit [cafe.hardrock.com/vienna](http://cafe.hardrock.com/vienna).

### NOTABLE MEMORABILIA

- Jethro Tull's Zauberflöte
- Gene Simmons' (Kiss) signed axe bass
- Chris Martin's (Coldplay) Yamaha CP-70 electric piano

---

## MUNICH, GERMANY

Enjoy a traditional beer and a "Bavarian cheeseburger" at this Hard Rock Cafe in Bavaria's capital city. The location makes this restaurant special as it is nestled in the historic old town and sits directly across from the Hofbräuhaus a famous beer hall dating back to the 16th century. Here you can admire the medieval and neogothic architecture as you dine. Allegedly, 150 of the greatest music-related memorabilia can be seen at this location. Visit [cafe.hardrock.com/munich](http://cafe.hardrock.com/munich).

### NOTABLE MEMORABILIA

- Madonna's white bustier from her 1985 world tour
- An angel wing jacket from the band, the Fantastic Four
- A bass from Gene Simmons (Kiss) with the fake theatrical blood still visible

---

## BARCELONA, SPAIN

This Hard Rock Cafe with Catalanian flair resides in the historic city center of Plaça de Catalunya. As you sample the classic Hard Rock Cafe menu with flavors from local ingredients, you can admire Barcelona's gorgeous gothic architecture and lively, famous pedestrian street, perhaps from their outdoor terrace. For more information, visit [cafe.hardrock.com/barcelona](http://cafe.hardrock.com/barcelona).

### NOTABLE MEMORABILIA

- A dark green Aria Pro II autographed by members of Metallica
- A velvet gown worn by Whitney Houston
- Michael Jackson's personalized leather jacket

---

## ROME, ITALY

It seems everything in Rome is more beautiful. There's even a fancy McDonald's with marble floors and a tile mosaic on the wall. The Hard Rock Cafe in Rome is no exception. With a unique design referencing historical Roman architecture, wide glass windows and painted ceilings, this is a lovely place to dine and admire the city's architecture and passersby. For more information, visit [cafe.hardrock.com/rome](http://cafe.hardrock.com/rome).

### NOTABLE MEMORABILIA

- A vest worn by Elvis Presley
- The bass used by Flea during the Red Hot Chili Peppers' "Californication Tour"
- A jacket belonging to John Lennon

---

## VENICE, ITALY

Pull up to this Hard Rock Cafe tucked into the historic architecture as if it has always been there overlooking the canal in a gondola and dine surrounded by Venetian décor. This Hard Rock is one of the smallest in Europe; however, it is located behind the famous St. Mark's Square which makes it a perfect area to walk off your meal. For more information, visit [cafe.hardrock.com/venice](http://cafe.hardrock.com/venice).

### NOTABLE MEMORABILIA

- A stage dress worn by Shakira
- Metallica's original contract with Megaforce Records signed by James Hetfield
- A Fender Telecaster Deluxe Guitar belonging to Richie Sambora (Bon Jovi's guitarist)

---

## TROMSØ, NORWAY

At the Hard Rock Cafe in Tromsø, deemed the "northernmost" Hard Rock Cafe, you might have the unique experience of catching the Northern lights dancing to the live music as you eat your meal. It is located in a beautiful, historic bright red wooden house that once served as the Apotek Nordstjernen, or Northern Star pharmacy. There, you can walk up and down the "Memorabilia Stairs" to check out their collection of rock-and-roll relics. For more information, visit [cafe.hardrock.com/tromso](http://cafe.hardrock.com/tromso).

### NOTABLE MEMORABILIA

- A signed Joan Jett shirt with jacket
- Signed ESP guitar by Ron Wood (Rolling Stones)
- A signed t-shirt worn by Bjørk ■

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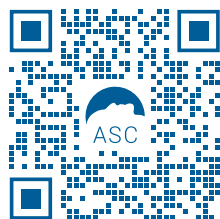
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