experience holland

explosions of color at Germany’s spring festivals

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Ah, spring! The days are growing longer, and the first timid buds of the season, from daffodils to almond blossoms, begin to appear. Things to make us happy this month include Germany’s wonderful Easter markets. Talented artisans transform the humble egg into works of art, typically sold alongside other handicrafts at colorful spring markets. Another seasonal treat is Starkbier, a dense and calorie-laden brew, joyously feted at Munich’s traditional breweries.

By Karen Bradbury
Editor’s Picks

March

LUMINALE
March 12 – 15 in Frankfurt and Offenbach
At the Biennale for Light Art and Urban Design, iconic buildings are brought to life through installations and other effects.

HESSEN INTERNATIONAL MOTORCYCLE EXHIBITION
March 13 – 15 in Wiesbaden
The latest models of motorcycles and accessories are on display at the Rhine Main Congress Center.

MEDIEVAL MARKET
March 13 – 15 in Mannheim
Take a trip back in time to see knights, fair maidens, jesters and market folk plying their trades. Festivities take place in the Herzogenried Park.

STRONG BEER FESTIVAL
March 13 – April 5 in Munich
Strong beer was first brewed by monks during Lent centuries ago. Sample these punch-packing suds alongside Bavarian specialties and oompah bands.

LONG NIGHT OF MUSEUMS
March 21 in Stuttgart
Over 80 museums, galleries, industrial landmarks and other unexpected spaces stay open late to offer exciting and eclectic cultural programs.

HANSEL FINGERHUT
March 22 in Forst an der Weinstrasse
This village on the German Wine Road welcomes spring with this centuries-old folk play depicting a battle between summer and winter.

EASTER MARKET
March 27 – April 13 in Nuremberg
Prettily decorated eggs, Easter décor, ceramics, textiles, housewares and other handiwork are sold from stands on the Hauptmarkt.

ANTIQUES AND SPRING MARKET
March 28 – 29 in Tübingen
The pretty university town by the Neckar beckons visitors with antiques, handicrafts, a spring market, and open shops on Sunday.

CERAMICS MARKET
April 4 – 5 in Homburg
Some 100 artists from all corners of Germany and beyond display and sell their best ceramic pieces at stands set up throughout this pleasant city in Saarland. Plates, mugs, bowls, home décor and other pretty things can be picked up from their creators.

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Adorned with greenery, town fountains are decked out in a vast kaleidoscope of colored eggs. Many markets feature games, crafts, food and plenty of live entertainment for everyone.
Commemorating the resurrection of Jesus, Easter is a four-day affair beginning on Good Friday and lasting through Easter Monday. Many traditions which originated in Germany have carried on throughout the world, most famously the “Osterhase,” the Easter Bunny. Dating back to the 1600s, clever parents would tell stories of the sneaky hare who would leave behind colorful eggs for children to find. Two of the world’s oldest Easter eggs were actually found in the sarcophagus of a child believed to have been from the 4th century.

Today, Easter eggs are a staple found at the spectacular markets which typically begin after Ash Wednesday. With local vendors and craftspeople showing off their wares, the choices are seemingly endless. Ranging in size and price, eggs can be found plainly decorated for a few euros or completely decked out with crystals and jewels fetching thousands of euros. Once you’ve found the perfect eggs, be sure to stop by the flower vendors for budding tree branches. Place them in a vase and voila! An instant “Osterbaum,” Easter tree. Or hang the boughs from the ceiling over your kitchen table and decorate with your newfound treasures for a stunning Easter wreath.

Although the Ostermärkte aren’t quite as robust as the “Christkindlmarkte,” Christmas Markets, (there’s no glühwein), you can discover a peak at the spring bounty. Sample delicious “Spargel,” asparagus or the famous Hessian green sauce made of seven herbs in creative culinary dishes. Wander through the charming Altstads and check out the “Osterbrunnen,” or Easter fountains. Adorned with greenery, town fountains are decked out in a vast kaleidoscope of colored eggs. Many markets feature games, crafts, food and plenty of live entertainment for everyone.

As the days slowly begin to stretch out and the sun makes more appearances, the gray, cold days of winter are fading, and spring is around the corner. What better way to celebrate the impending warmth and greenery than with a market? “Ostermärkte,” or Easter markets, pop up with vibrant hues during the Lent season each year. Similar to the infamous Christmas markets, these colorful markets are a rite of passage into spring.

Where to go

Check out the Seligenstadt International Easter Egg Market near Wiesbaden. Artists from around the globe proudly display and sell their dazzling works of art. Just outside of the Kaiserslautern Military Community (KMC) is the enchanting village of Sankt Wendel. Visitors are welcomed with the sight of a huge crown of brightly decorated eggs, a petting zoo and plenty of vendors. Better known for its Spargel festival later in the spring, Schwetzingen near Stuttgart puts on a fabulous Easter market. Located at the castle, watch craftspeople work their magic on the delicate decorations. Not to be outdone, the historic city of Nuremberg transforms its old town into a maze of varying shade of spring pastels. Whichever one you choose, enjoy the unique beauty of this German tradition. Frohe Ostern!
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Quaint Towns: Dinkelsbühl

The definition of “quaint” may change over the centuries but Bavaria’s Dinkelsbühl has not. This historic city is one of the most well-preserved medieval towns in the world. Transport yourself back in time just by strolling into its city center and you’ll see what was considered “quaint” in the 15th century.
Transport yourself back in time just by strolling into its city center and you’ll see what was considered “quaint” in the 15th century.

The German magazine, FOCUS, that knows a thing or two about beautiful German cities, chose Dinkelsbühl as “Schönste Altstadt Deutschland” or “most beautiful old town in Germany.” It impressively beat out cities like Heidelberg and its Bavarian brother Rothenburg ob der Tauber.

A major piece of the city’s historic authenticity is it was unscathed during both world wars as well as the Thirty Years War. Every summer, its residents celebrate “Kinderzeche” when the town surrendered to Swedish troops. The legend claims when the Swedish army stormed the town in 1632, a brave teenage girl gathered the town’s children, approached the general and begged for mercy. The move touched the general who recently lost his young son and he spared the town.

Dinkelsbühl is one of the first stops on Germany’s Romantic Road on the north end. The fortified city was first established in 1305. It is still surrounded by old, intact medieval walls and towers as if still protecting it, but instead of invaders, it keeps modern or outside influences out. Most are in nearly mint condition, giving so much more than a glimpse of the past. You’re getting the full picture.

Two of its most famous towers (there are 16) are Rothenberger Tor and Segringer Tor. Rothenberger Tor still greets travelers coming from the north, as it has for centuries. You can drive through its entry for a “Back to the Future” type experience. The other tower sticks out like a sore thumb, a beautiful sore thumb that is. The original Segringer Tor collapsed and was rebuilt in 1655 but in Baroque style, giving it a classic dome in burnt-orange and a green lantern on top.

The area that will stop you in your tracks with an audible gasp is the city’s Weinmarkt on the Altstadt’s west side. Five gorgeous gabled houses line the street but to call them just “houses” is far too ordinary of a word. They are works of art rather than just timber and stone, radiating pastel hues that demand you stop and take in its beauty. It is Dinkelsbühl’s visual main event.

At the very end sits the city’s former “Ratstrinkstube” or councilor’s tavern which acted as a gathering place, bar and lodging for not only its council but famous figures like Emperor Charles V and King Gustav Adolf. The 470-year-old three-story building with its famous spire is now the city’s library.

Before you leave Dinkelsbühl, you need one more postcard-worthy view. Saint George Church, completed in 1499, is a gothic cathedral that looks so much bigger on the inside. The wide-aisled church with its towering columns and a vaulted ceiling complete with ornate religious statues and paintings could give Cologne’s Cathedral a run for its money. While the inside will distract you with its commanding stonework, head to the bell tower. Like many other churches in Europe, you can climb to the very top and get the panoramic view of one of the most beautiful cities that has the award to prove it.

There’s a lot to see on Germany’s Romantic Road but Dinkelsbühl should be your first or last stop.
It's as if someone took a box of crayons and let loose on the landscape. Vivid strokes paint the countryside with purple, yellow, orange and red. A multicolor patchwork covers the fields carving a path around windmills and streams all the way to Holland's expansive shoreline. What I have described is Holland's world-famous tulip season, when for a short period of time each spring, fields erupt into a kaleidoscope of colorful blooms.
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STARS AND STRIPES.
TULIP TIME
From the end of March to the end of May, these oval flowers dominate the landscape. The tulip fields are everywhere. For an up close and personal view, enthusiasts can visit a tulip farm, which not only cultivates and houses a variety of tulips, but almost every flower and plant known on the planet. The most famous of these tulip farms is Keukenhof, located in the town of Lisse. The land where this botanical nursery is now situated once served as a hunting area and herb garden during the 15th century. Today, Keukenhof is dedicated to the preservation and evolution of a great number of earth's botanical creations. Beneath arching trees, wrapped around ponds, statues and walkways, and within flower houses, Keukenhof supports fields and garden patches of everything from red roses to purple lilacs. Of course, the tulips are the highlight as they dominate the park in these spring months.

As quickly as the tulips first emerge through soil, they are just as quickly gone. The best advice to any Holland sojourner wishing to catch the tulips in action is not to hesitate since they begin to lose their luster toward the end of May. Visiting Keukenhof is a must for anyone who wants to see a concentration of tulips. But to experience the raw nature of these flowers, take the time to cruise the countryside in Holland where tulips spread out over more than 10,000 hectares of well-groomed farmland. Step out of the vehicle and stroll alongside one of these fields. Walking paths are fairly easy to come by and may even lead you to the base of a windmill.

WINDMILLS AND WOODEN SHOES
Windmills can be found everywhere in Holland, but just like Keukenhof is to tulips, Zaanse Schans is an open-air conservation area and home for an abundance of Dutch windmills. This town and its surrounding countryside are packed to the gills with these iconic wooden giants and traditional 17th- and 18th-century wooden houses that are sure to be a sightseer’s delight. Just like Keukenhof, Zaanse Schans has become a popular mecca for those seeking to find the Dutch traditional way of life. The locals can often be found going about their day, dressed in traditional garb and sporting their famous wooden clogs, giving tourists a taste of Holland’s old-world culture.

While touring Zaanse Schans, don’t miss the shoe-making facility where skilled craftsmen transform local wood into the unique and famed Dutch clog. They have the largest wooden shoe inventory in all sizes and colors imaginable. Clogs can be purchased natural, personalized or with painted Dutch scenes. No visit is complete without posing for a photo inside the giant wooden shoe.

Another tourist industry not to be missed in Zaanse Schans is the town’s cheese-making facility. Stacks of wax-coated cheese wheels entice visitors to taste these rich and delicious dairy products. Unique cheeses infused with herbs, spices and smoked ham make delicious gifts for friends and family. All together the Zaanse Schans represents an authentic piece of Holland.

Just north of Amsterdam, cheese is the star once again in the quaint town of Edam, whose signature cheese has become world-renowned. Edam sits on the coast of IJsselmeer, a vast bay that empties into the North Sea. Charming cottages and lofty stone towers dominate the scenery in Edam, which is surrounded by water: the bay to its east, and a boat-strewn canal that winds its way along the outskirts of the town. Edam’s streets are lined with small shops selling flowers, including fresh-picked tulips, fresh cheese and nautical themed gift items that are a delightful trait of the Netherlands. Outside the town is a traditional cheese factory, along with a shoe shop that has its own abundant collection of hand-made clogs.

SEASIDE FARE AND CULTURE
A quick jaunt from Edam is the picturesque fishing village of Volendam. A popular coastal hotspot, Volendam is lined with Dutch cliches and is known for its bustling harbor. It is among the few places in Holland where the inhabitants still don traditional Dutch costume. Even visitors have the opportunity to suit up in folk dress at a number of local photo studios such as Foto de Boer and Fotoshop Volendam. Don’t forget to stroll along the dike and witness gulls as they dive bomb the fishing boats moored in the harbor. Another must-see is the stilted Visafslag. Once a fish auction house, Visafslag is one of Volendam’s central landmarks and defines the town’s architectural flare. Not to be overlooked, the area is dotted with a handful of notable churches. The aroma of baked and fried seafood fills the air. Visitors can indulge in the local cuisine at one of many seaside restaurants whose dining rooms afford guests a romantic view of the bay.

Across the water from Volendam is the island of Marken. This isolated fishing village is reminiscent of the past, seemingly untouched by time. Marken has seen its fair share of flooding throughout the years. For this reason, houses were built on stilts and mounds that offer visitors an architectural treat. Marken also supports souvenir shops and seafood restaurants on its waterfront. Visitors can take a step back in time by wandering beyond the waterfront walkway to view picturesque neighborhoods right out of a postcard. Small and colorful fishermen’s cottages with wide and square window frames are surrounded by private gardens growing everything from tomatoes to tulips. Beyond the narrow town streets are the high-grass fields housing herds of plump sheep.

Holland is relatively easy to navigate through with well-marked signs and a straightforward road network. Whether you are a botanical enthusiast or just a leisurely traveler, there are many delights to see from tulip fields, quaint coastal towns, canals, bays and sleepy country roadways.
Tulips spread out over more than 10,000 hectares of well-groomed farmland.
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Amsterdam is a city that has stolen many hearts. From the dreamy canals, the charming shops and the overall hip atmosphere, the capital of the Netherlands is a city that will call you back time and time again and here are a few reasons why.
10 Reasons to Love Amsterdam

By Mary Del Rosario

1. The smell of Stroopwafels (thin wafer cookies with caramel) wafting through the air will tease your taste buds.

2. Looking at the iconic narrow houses as you cruise down the canal is a sight you’ll always remember.

3. Jordaan is a popular neighborhood peppered with trendy shops and cute boutiques.

4. The Anne Frank Museum will give you goosebumps.

5. The whole city is one big Instagram-worthy picture.

6. From food to its stores, Amsterdam thrives on creativity.

7. There are many kid-friendly attractions such as Vondelpark and Scheldestraat, a street filled with shops for kids.

8. The locals are very friendly, liberal and they all speak good English!

9. You have the feel of a big city and a quaint village all in one.

10. All the bicycles.
If you love Venice and are looking for another canal city, give Annecy a chance! From the fairytale castles to the astounding natural surroundings, everyone can find something to enjoy. The lake is the perfect place to spend a sunny day, but the churches offer shelter if it happens to rain. Regardless of the weather, Annecy is the perfect canal city for your next adventure!
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One of the main attractions in this area is Lake Annecy. Fed by mountain springs, the crystal clear water is perfect for swimming and all sorts of water sports. Paddleboard, wakeboard or even scuba dive in the blue waters. Fancy sailing? You can try it at the lake! If you’d prefer to stay dry, there are plenty of sandy beaches where you can sunbathe to your heart’s content.

For a leisurely hike near the lake with astounding views, consider taking the “Tour of the Taillefer Mountain” trail. In just three hours, you will complete one of the most beautiful hikes in the area. Stop for a rest on one of the many benches and gaze at the landscape, or complete it at a faster pace and carry on to the next adventure!

The city itself offers a multitude of things to do. Visit Palais de l’Ile, a 12th-century castle shaped like a ship that is now a history museum. Over the years, the castle has been a prison, a courthouse, a minting workshop and an administrative center. The castle is uniquely located in the river and splits it into two canals. Cross one of the two pedestrian bridges to access this amazing piece of history.

If you just can’t get enough castles, head to Chateau d’Annecy in Old Town. This restored castle was home to the Counts of Genova in the 13th and 14th centuries. Today the castle is a museum. Pay special attention to the changing architecture, which ranges from Medieval to Renaissance. While in Old Town, wander through the winding cobblestone streets, past pastel houses, lovingly decorated with colorful flower boxes.

After all that sightseeing you are likely famished. Take this opportunity to dine al fresco next to one of the canals. Le Fréti is a delightful restaurant serving up cheesy French dishes. Try one of 10 fondue varieties or traditional Swiss raclettes with some homemade, crispy, hot bread. Of course, you can’t pass up the French onion soup or the cold cuts platter filled with dried ham, smoked noisette and lamb pancetta.

For more outdoor fun, visit Lover’s Bridge. This iron bridge joins Jardins de l’Europe and Pâquier Esplanade. Jardins de l’Europe are located in front of city hall and offer panoramic views of the lake and picturesque picnic spots. Lounge under a weeping willow or stroll along one of the many paths. Cross the bridge to the Pâquier and utilize the bike path or let your kids ride the mini horses. This area is perfect for just enjoying the great outdoors!
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**Easter Market**

Through April 19 in Prague, Czezh Republic

Decorated eggs, lace, ceramics, and other handicrafts are sold by vendors in wooden stalls on the Old Town Square. Sweet and savory treats await sampling.

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**Joan of Arc Celebrations**

April 26 – May 17 in Orléans, France

The national heroine is feted with parades, sound and light show and a medieval market. This year’s edition marks the centenary of Joan of Arc’s canonization.

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**London Marathon**

April 26 in London, England

Runners in wacky costumes and the odd celebrity make watching this famous marathon a treat. A course past iconic landmarks helps too.

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**Things to do next month!**

*April*

By Karen Bradbury

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**Snowbombing**

April 13 – 18 in Mayrhofen, Austria

The line-up of this Alpine festival includes Liam Gallagher, Foals and The Streets, along with DJs, après ski sessions, parties in a forest and raves in an igloo.

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**Su e Zo per i Ponti**

April 19 in Venice, Italy

This fun group walk over the bridges and through the streets follows a different route each year. Folk groups perform at the Piazza San Marco.

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**Brussels International Fantastic Film Festival**

April 7 – 19 in Brussels, Belgium

One of the world’s biggest film festivals of its kind screens more than 150 fantasy, horror and sci-fi films and stages unique events including the Vampire Ball.

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**King’s Day**

April 27 in Netherlands

King Willem Alexander’s birthday is celebrated with music, street parties, flea markets and other fun activities. To fit in, be sure to wear the color orange.

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**Kings of the Forest**

April 26 in Córdoba, Spain

A parade with 20 decorated floats, participants in Andalusian costume, and the tossing of colorful carnations give this event its unique flair.
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