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By Tamala Malerk

GERMANY

“The Hound of the Baskervilles” at The English Theatre of Hamburg | Jan. 1–20 | Hamburg

World Club Dome Winter Edition: EDM, House and Techno Festival | Jan. 5–6 | Frankfurt

Proud Nerd—Welcome to Starcourt Cinema Jan. 12 | Cologne

“Lobby Hero” at The English Theatre of Hamburg Feb. 5–Apr. 6 | Hamburg

The Berlinale Film Festival
Feb. 15–25 | Berlin

The Berlinale is one of the largest public film festivals in the world. This event dates back to 1951 and has since grown exponentially. Over 200 films, with different lengths and from varying genres are presented to attendees with film submissions from more than 100 countries. During the festival, people can also check out the European Film Market and Berlinale Co-Production Market.

Time Warp Mannheim: EDM Festival | April 5–6 Mannheim

German Film and Comic Con: Spring and Winter 2024 May 4–5 and Dec. 7–8 | Dortmund

“The Two Popes” at The English Theatre Frankfurt Apr. 13–May 26 | Frankfurt

“Lizard Boy” at The English Theatre of Hamburg Apr. 22–June 22 | Hamburg

Taylor Swift Eras Tour | July 17–28 | Hamburg



THE BERLINALE FILM FESTIVAL

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AUSTRIA

KokoroKon: Film, Manga and Gaming | Feb. 9–11 Schwechat

Comic Con Dornbirn | Mar. 16–17 | Dornbirn

Altitude Comedy Festival | Apr. 1–15 | Mayrhofen

HaruCon: “Carinthia’s First Geek Convention” Apr. 27–28 | Klagenfurt

Taylor Swift Eras Tour | Aug. 8–10 | Vienna



TOMORROWLAND

BELGIUM

ComicCon Brussels | May 11–12 | Brussels

Tomorrowland | July 19–28 | Boom

Tomorrowland is the world’s largest electronic dance music (EDM) festival that happens annually across two weekends in July. Since 2005, it has entertained the EDM community and has grown to over 400,000 attendees every year. Its campground, where many attendees stay, is known as “Dreamville” and has its own entertainment and stage. Past performers included David Guetta and Avicii.

FRANCE

Le Festival d’Automne à Paris: Theater, Dance and Visual Arts Festival | Jan. 1–Feb. 11 | Paris

Simple Plan Hard as Rock Tour | Jan. 18–20 | Paris

Maison&Objet: Paris Design Week | Jan. 18–24 | Paris

Ciné Junior: Annual Children’s Film Festival Jan. 24–Feb. 6 | Paris

Paris Short Film Festival | Mar. 20–24 | Paris

Escape Magique- Harry Potter Inspired | Apr. 20–21 La Teste-de-Buch

Taylor Swift Eras Tour | May 9–12 | Nanterre

Cannes Film Festival | May 14–25 | Cannes

Bordeaux Geekfest 2024 | May 18–19 | Bordeaux

From Wisteria Lane to Paris | May 25 | Paris

Japan Expo Paris | July 13–16 | Paris

Fête du Cinéma: Cinema Festival | July 2–5 | Paris

Paris Games Week | Nov. TBD | Paris

IRELAND AND THE U.K.

Liverpool Anime and Gaming | Feb. 3–4 | Liverpool

London Anime and Gaming Con | Feb. 16–18 | London

Glasgow Film Festival | Feb. 28–Mar. 10 | Glasgow

Levitation—74th British National Science Fiction Convention | Mar. 29–Apr. 1 | Telford

Manchester Anime and Gaming Con Apr. 6–7 | Manchester

25th Rainbow International Film Festival London June 2–9 | London

Taylor Swift Eras Tour | June 7–30 | Liverpool, Cardiff, London and Dublin

82nd World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon) Aug. 8–12 | Glasgow

Edinburgh International Book Festival Aug. 10–25 | Edinburgh

Taylor Swift Eras Tour | Aug. 15–17 | London

THE NETHERLANDS

Comic, Film & Manga Fest Rotterdam Mar. 23–24 | Rotterdam

Taylor Swift Eras Tour | July 4–6 | Amsterdam

NN North Sea Jazz Festival | July 12–14 | Rotterdam

Eurocon 2024 | Aug. 16–19 | Rotterdam

SWITZERLAND

Japan Impact | Feb. 17–18 | Ecublens

Sakura no Matsuri: Anime, Manga and Gaming Mar. 23–24 | Winterthur

Fantasy Basel—The Swiss Comic Con 2024 May 9–11 | Basel

Chibi-Con: Games, Trading Cards and more June 1–2 | Winterthur

Taylor Swift Eras Tour | July 9–10 | Zurich

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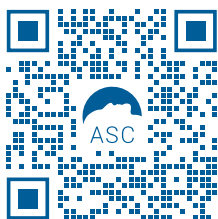


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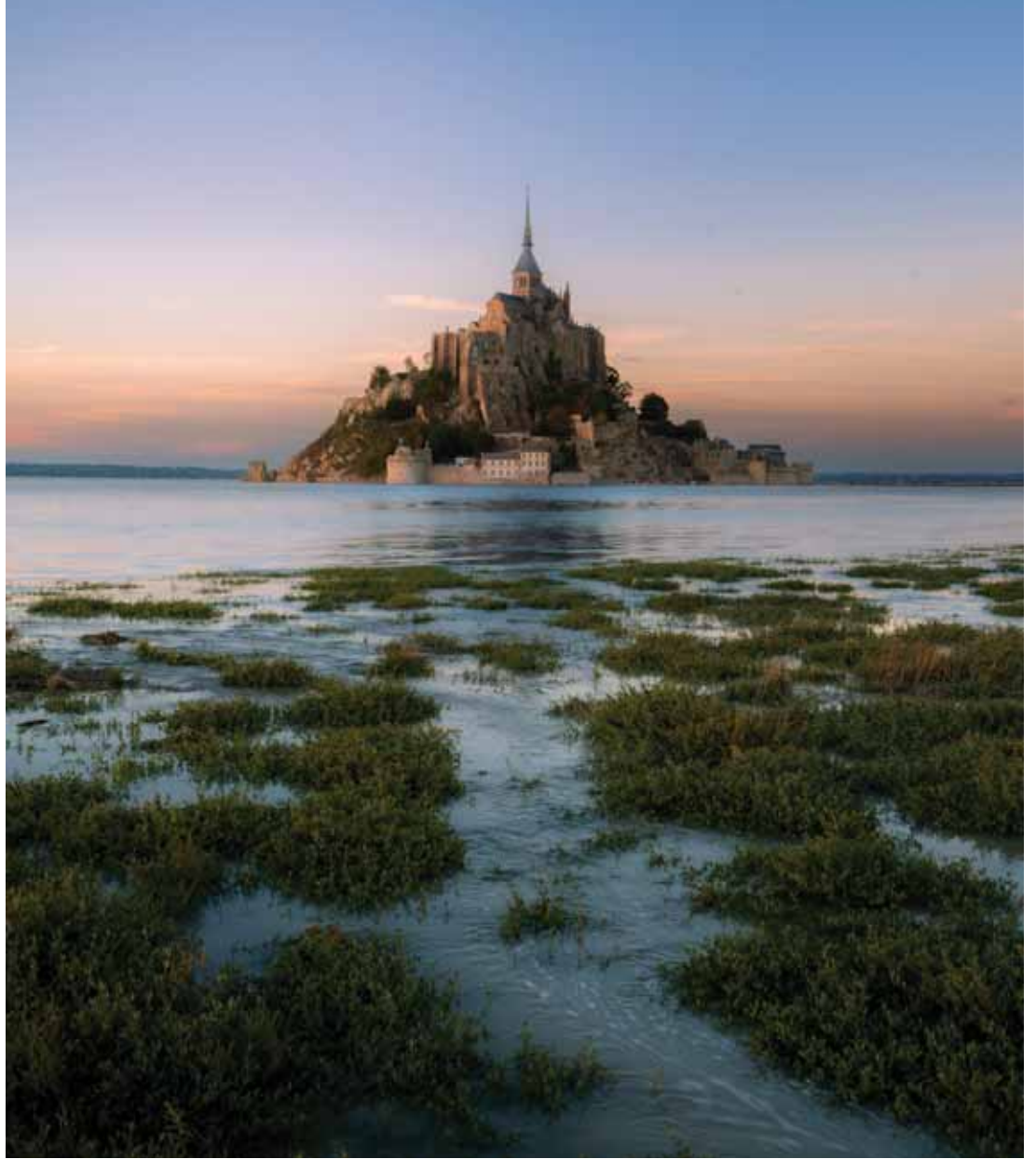
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Spotlight On



Mont Saint-Michel

By Kat Nickola

The tiny village of Mont Saint-Michel, France, sits on a tidal island off the west coast of Normandy. Its skyline is dominated by the Abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel, which was founded in 966 at the site of a chapel popular with Christian pilgrims for more than 200 years. Over the centuries more pilgrims came, which contributed to its wealth, increased its political influence and helped with the development of the village.

Until a raised road was built in 1879, the island was only accessible by boat during high tide and surrounded by dangerous quicksand during low tide.

The area was occupied by German soldiers during World War II, and a small contingent of Luftwaffe members was stationed at the island to man an aircraft tracking station built atop the abbey. The island became a popular tourist destination for off-duty German soldiers.

On D-Day, the 6th of June 1944, Allied forces invaded France on the northern beaches of Normandy roughly 100 kilometers north of Mont Saint-Michel. As German soldiers fled south, some sought safety at the island with stories of men arriving barefoot and collapsing from exhaustion.

Over the course of the following months, the German military led a massive retreat as Allied forces liberated the region. On Aug. 1, 1944, an Allied publicity unit was sent to Mont-Saint-Michel where they accepted the surrender of any Germans who had been unable to retreat.

In 1979, Mont Saint-Michel was added to the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. The abbey remains an active religious order with two monastic groups still welcoming pilgrims. ■



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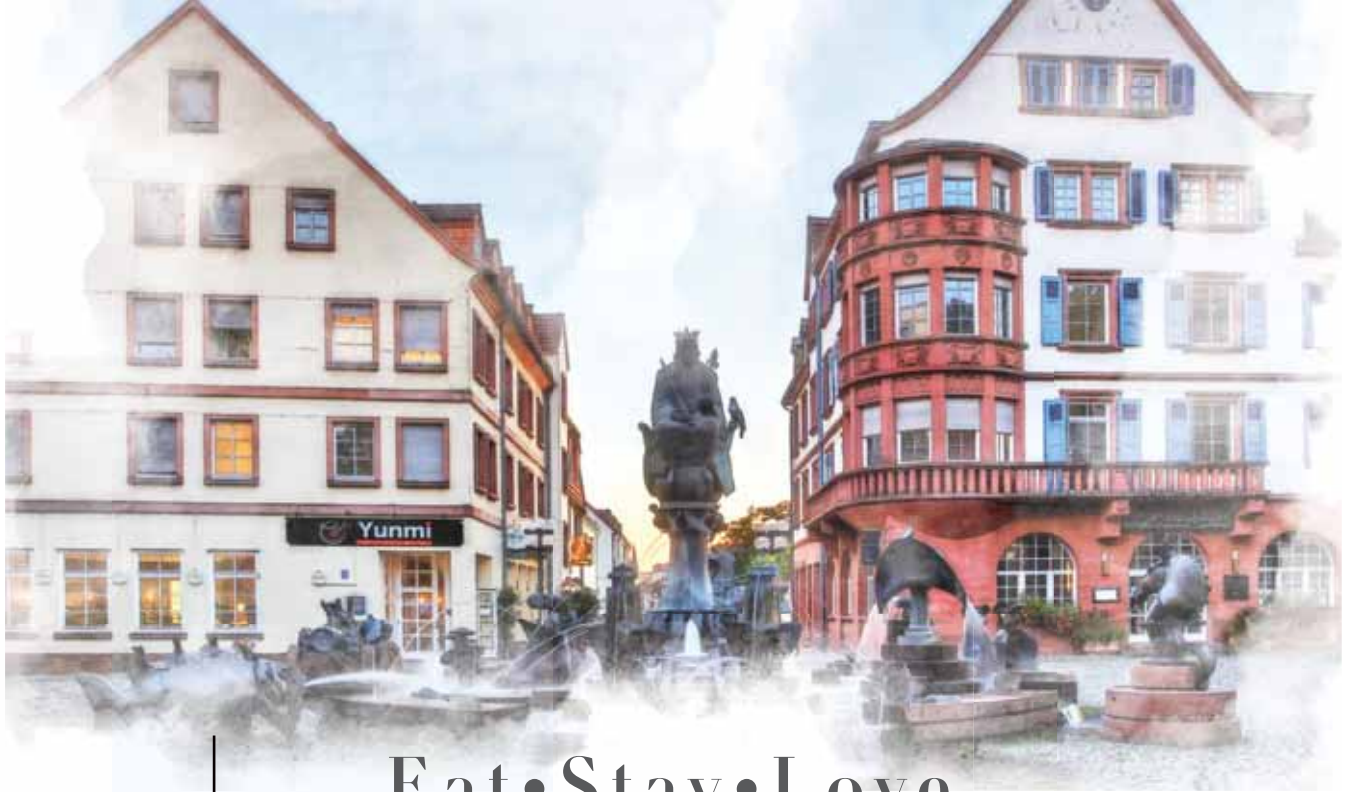
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Kaiserslautern

By Tamala Malerk

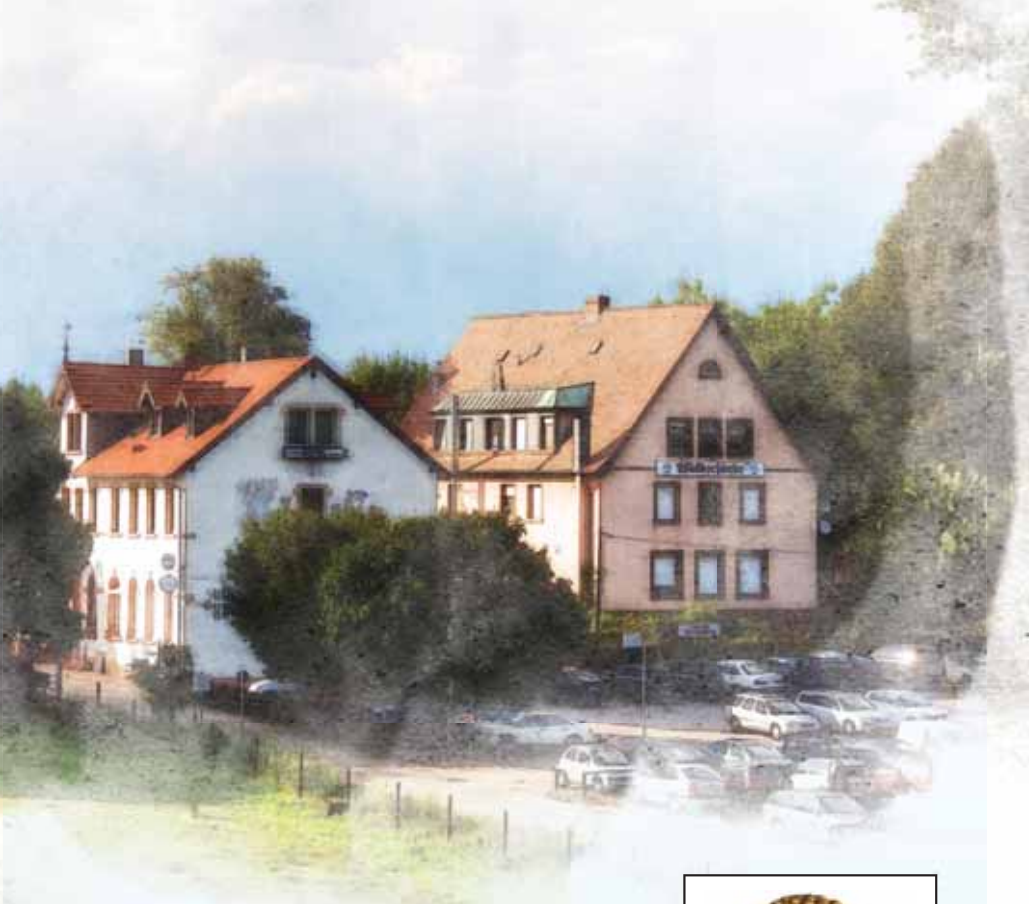
For those in Kaiserslautern (K-Town) or coming to visit the Kaiserslautern Military Community, we've got plenty of places to stay inside and not only keep you warm but also keep you surrounded by fun this month.



EAT Every year we ask our Stripes audience what their favorite things in the local area are for our "Best of" publication. We've got some great suggestions for the K-Town area. For those looking for a delicious fried chicken sandwich, check out **Benji's Birdhouse**, the 2023 winner of Best American Restaurant. For those following the vegan lifestyle, check out **Cafe Susann**, which specializes in regional, sustainable, vegan and gluten-free foods and drinks. For those looking for the best German fare, make your way to **Big Emma Brew House and Coffee Roastery**. Here, you can grab homemade coffee and beer, along with German favorites such as Kaesepaetzle and Schnitzel. For the breakfast lovers out there, **Sanders Cafe and Bakery** has been delighting taste buds since 1896. Bring euros to enjoy breakfast combos, omelets, sandwiches, coffee specialties and more.

Benji's Birdhouse serves up chicken sandwiches of the hot and extra hot varieties. Pair one with a yummy milkshake for an all-out American-style meal





STAY

If you are looking for a great place to stay while in the area, we recommend the **Bremerhof**. They have a variety of hotel room sizes to accommodate singles, couples and families. Located in the heart of the Palatinate Forest, the Bremerhof has existed for over 200 years. However, the name and location of Bremerhof first appeared in documents in the 1200s C.E. when it was given to a monastery by Frederick I. Their beer garden has been a part of Kaiserslautern culture since the 1950s and 60s. Since 1939, their farm has been open to visitors. For those willing to brave the cold, you can watch the horses graze at the farm and the kids can play on their forest playground. Their onsite restaurant features different beers, hot drinks to keep you warm this time of year, delicious German food, a kids' menu and a tasty dessert menu.



Above: The bust of Frederick I (Barbarossa), monarch of medieval Germany. He partially resided in Kaiserslautern and erected a Kaiserpfalz (an emperor's residence) from 1152 to 1160. The remains are still visible between the city hall and the main bus stop



LOVE

Kaiserslautern is filled with plenty of fun indoor activities to help you escape the cold outside and get out of the house. **Team Escape** has six escape rooms with the themes of crime, tension, horror, adventure and surprise. The rooms are created for teams of two to seven people. They offer English and German escape room challenges and offer deals for students, families and school or youth groups. They are open seven days a week, but it is recommended you book in advance since these rooms are quite popular. **GO! Indoor eKart** features indoor racing fun for the entire family. Children as young as eight can join in on the fun of electronic go-kart racing. Tickets start at 14 euros for ten-minute rides, and they also offer birthday packages. There are early bird, Sunday and student specials and they are open seven days a week. **GATE99** has three locations across Kaiserslautern to take on the competition in laser tag, gleam golf (blacklight miniature golfing) and escape rooms. There really is something for everyone at **GATE99**. There are opportunities for children's birthday parties and bachelor or bachelorette parties. Opening hours and prices vary by location, but each activity offers some kind of discount rate for "early birds," groups and more. ■

Escape the blustery weather and give Go! Indoor eKart a try. Race along a 400 meter, indoor track. The karts clock speeds of up to 60 kilometers per hour and are sure to boost your adrenaline.





INDOOR ADVENTURES: *Tropical vs. Arctic*

By Kat Nickola



We are always looking for the perfect adventure, but it's hard to decide what that looks like. Do you see yourself basking in tropical waters and sitting on sandy palm-lined beaches? Or, do you prefer the arctic chill of fresh snow and ice, feeling the freeze as you freestyle downhill?

Lucky for you, both adventures can be tackled year-round at indoor facilities across Europe. Here are the two biggest contenders: Tropical Islands Resort, an hour south of Berlin, is the world's largest indoor water park, while SNØ, situated in the suburbs of Oslo, is Europe's largest indoor ski resort. But that is just the tip of the iceberg.

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Tropical Islands

In the dreariest of German winters, it's not uncommon to fantasize about swimming in sunny, warm waters. At Tropical Islands, that dream vacation can be a reality without the need to fly beyond Europe.

Themed areas allow you to travel around the world. The Tropical Village features restaurants, hotels, and entertainment that reflect the architecture of Southeast Asia. But, these aren't just inspired fantasies, they were traditionally built and created with the help of local architects and the tourism boards from Thailand, Samoa, Bali and Borneo.

The world's largest indoor rainforest is also housed in the Tropical Islands dome. The rainforest is biologically managed and is home to flamingoes, peacocks, turtles, fish and a new butterfly garden. Instead of chemicals, insects and soil bacteria are used to keep the ecosystem in balance. You may see a beetle scurry past the sandy beach and, just like in nature, it has a job to do. The rainforest sits between the waterfalls and grottos of the lagoon and the massive Südsee—an indoor ocean and wave pool surrounded by a long sandy beach.

There is plenty of adventure, as well, with two beachside water-play areas full of slides and sprayers for the kids (and kids at heart). There are 13 slides in all, plus even more kid adventures to be had out of the water. Between the large climbing playground, indoor hot air balloon, mini golf, and the Treasure Island arcade, kids of all ages can have some dry fun as well.

The Amazonia area is outside, but heated water keeps it open year-round. Here you can try your hand at surfing, or ride along Germany's longest whitewater slide. If you'd rather relax, Amazonia has a massive selection of pool spaces with massage jets, jacuzzi beds and bubbles galore.

In keeping with the scale of things, Tropical Islands also hosts Germany's largest tropical sauna and spa area. This is a textile-free zone, meaning you must be nude but wrapped in a towel. It has numerous hot saunas, spa services like clay treatments and massage, and an air-conditioned gym.

Tropical Islands was first opened in 2004 and is housed in a gigantic former airship hangar. Interestingly, the resort is located on the former Nazi-built Brand-Briesen Airfield, but the airship

hangar is a modern development. Following the reunification of Germany, the CargoLifter company bought the airfield intending to develop airships for heavy cargo transit. The giant hangar was built to produce and construct the gigantic CL160 airship, but only a small prototype was ever created. When the company went bankrupt in 2002 the Malaysian-based company, Tanjong, bought the hangar and the grounds to build Tropical Islands.

The resort truly aims to be a destination of its own with numerous unique overnight options, from tent camping on the sand to lodges beside the waterfall, there is a lot of variety. In addition, there are plenty of meal options. A food court satisfies any cravings, while three restaurants offer international and Asian delights. For a special night out, try one of the five waterside lounges to sip a fruity cocktail from a striped paper straw (surprise: you're still in Germany).

Visit www.tropical-islands.de/en for details and booking.

SNØ

On the flip side, the magic of winter can be found year-round (yes, even during the hot summer) at Norway's SNØ facility.

There are ski slopes for all abilities, and an indoor controlled climate means excellent slope conditions all the time. With one massive indoor hillside, the five impressive trails are easily accessible to all. So, while you tackle the red Racing Hill, your kids could be improving their skills nearby on the blue Fjon Hill. Three lifts—a chair lift, a button and a magic carpet bring everyone back to the top with ease.

Park rats can hit the jumps and rails on the 300 meters of free-style slope, and then quickly take the chairlift back to do it again. You'll get a lot of airtime here! There are even freeski courses to help you move those terrain park skills to the next level.

For total newbies, there are plenty of ski course options and equipment rentals available right at SNØ. Most beginner courses take place over two days, with formal instruction for 90 minutes each day. This is a great place to hone your abilities. Classes cover all levels of alpine skiing, plus snowboarding, cross-country skiing, and even ice climbing.

How can they fit all that in one facility? Well, the cross-country course is ingeniously suspended on a mezzanine in the rafters of the enormous building. At one kilometer in length, it's a no-joke workout space perfect for snow lovers with twists, turns and hills to climb and descend. The total elevation change is an impressive 32 meters.

The Mammoth Wall is an ice-climbing wall. The 15-meter-high ice block is one of the biggest in Europe. With a front-facing beginner area and rear technical zone for drop-in pros only, it's a wonder to behold. The wall is especially monumental in the heat of summer when ice climbing enthusiasts, and learners alike, can still train on real ice.

For off-piste fun, visit the JumpYard where trampolines run the show. This full-body fun and exercise zone has it all: rock climbing walls, ropes courses, obstacle runs and more. For a more traditional workout, you can visit the modern Sportytude gym.

The SNØ structure was built with environmental sustainability in mind. In fact, the building produces energy, sending an excess of 23 percent into Snøbyen—the area around the facility. This means that both the heat generated from the machinery at SNØ and its extra cooling is not wasted. The Snøbyen district is a sports-minded planned city that currently has a large shopping area and business park.

For those who want to soak up the wintry atmosphere, the adjacent Thon Hotel Snø is a must. With ski-in / ski-out rooms right on the slope, there is a true resort feel. In addition, there is a café and two winter-inspired restaurants on the premises. The Snøfonna offers a big, varied lunch buffet, while the Rifugio della Nonna keeps things alpine with northern Italian favorites.

The best part about visiting SNØ is that there will never be a white out nor will the summer sun ever melt your dream of a perfect ski day out.

Visit www.snooslo.no for tickets and information. ■



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THE LOW DOWN ON COMIC CONS

By Kat Nickola
and Stacy Roman



HISTORY OF COMIC CONS

In 1964, the first one-day comic convention (comic con) was held in New York City, drawing around 100 attendees. The event was organized by Jerry Bails, the “father of comic fandom” and creator of The Academy of Comic-Book Fans and Collectors (ACBFC).

In Europe, the Italian Lucca Comics & Games held its first gathering in 1965. This classic comic con is now the second largest in the world and a must for die-hard comic book and role-playing game fans.

In 1968, the U.K. held its first ComicCon. Many of the first British Comic Art Conventions (as they were officially titled) were organized by Bram Stokes, the “godfather of British fandom,” and owner of the iconic Dark They Were and Golden Eyed Bookshop in London.

However, it wasn’t until July 1, 1970, when the Golden State Comic Book Convention opened its doors that the world of fandom hit the mainstream. In 1973, it became the iconic San Diego Comic-Con.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, comic cons grew into massive pop culture events around the world. With the incorporation of comic book plotlines into mainstream media, film and TV, their popularity in the 2000s has swelled.

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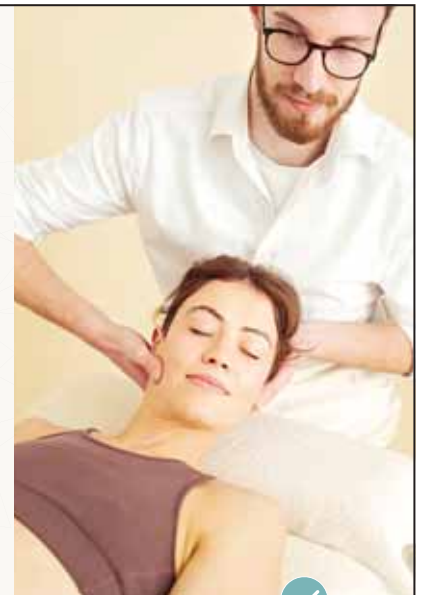
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WHAT HAPPENS AT COMIC CON?

When I walked into my first Comic Con in Dortmund, Germany, I was shocked at how big the event was.

There were hourly discussions and guest panels with famous individuals on the main stage. Plus, there were talks on the smaller stage that ranged in topic from props to the psychology of Star Trek. During panels, an open microphone was available, and I learned to line up early when I had questions for my favorite cast.

A big part of the convention was given over to personal interactions with the actors and personalities. It cost extra for these brief meet-and-greet sessions with the actors, and prices ranged based on their popularity. I opted for a professional photo with my favorite actor, and it is prominently tacked to my office wall. Autograph sessions and quick selfie time were also on offer.

Later, I wandered a massive marketplace where vendors sold all kinds of items related to comic culture, film and TV, and gaming. There were T-shirts, collectors' items, comic books, cosplay outfits and even realistic weapon replicas. Link's Master Sword was calling to me.

An entire section of the convention was dedicated to cosplay with sets created for free picture taking. A few had small additional fees for extras like a photo printout. I was happy to pay one euro for an ice cream cone (a real one: I ate it) to go with my Scoops Ahoy pic.

It took me a while to understand that pictures were welcome from personal cosplayers as well, I just needed to ask. After that, I took selfies with every Jedi, superhero and Genshin Impact character I came across.

Another large part of the convention was dedicated to an artisan's market where I made a few purchases from very talented individuals. There were jewelers, painters, digital artists and crafters all with their own style and take on film, comic or game art.

Even die-hard fans get hungry, so food trucks were parked throughout the convention center, plus there was a food court with picnic tables and seating.

Living in Europe gives you the chance to visit some unique conventions. Check our monthly Con Together articles for ideas of where to go. You don't need to dress up, but cosplay looks so fun! ■

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ANGOULEME INTERNATIONAL COMICS FESTIVAL

Angouleme, France. Held in January
www.bdangouleme.com

THOUGH BUBBLE FESTIVAL

Yorkshire, England. Held in November.
www.thoughtbubblefestival.com

MCM COMIC CON

London, England. Held twice yearly in May and November.
www.mcmcomiccon.com

GAMESCOM

Cologne, Germany. Held in August.
www.gamescom.global

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Various locations (largest in Dortmund), Germany. Held throughout the year, the two largest cons are in May and Dec.
www.germanfilmcomiccon.com

ZURICH POP CON & GAME SHOW

Zurich, Switzerland. Held in September or October.
www.zurichpopcon.ch

COMIC CON STUTTGART

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www.comiccon.de

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FAVORITE Cafes OF GERMANY

By Tamala Malerk



When the weather is chilly, nothing can seem nicer than going inside a welcoming cafe for a nice hot cocoa. But what are the best cafes in Germany? I found dozens of digital results that spammed me with lists of the best cafes in Berlin alone. The more I thought about it and researched, it seemed hard to qualify what makes a cafe “the best.” Rather than create a list based on internet reviews, here are my five favorite cafes in Germany.

1. Kaffeesaurus

BONN AND COLOGNE

While I was initially drawn into this place because of the name, the fantastic matcha latte and banana-topped, chocolate-drizzled toast is what brings me back. With one location in Bonn and one in Cologne, it is perfect for those visiting the Haribo Factory Outlet or the Lindt Chocolate Museum. Take a little piece of the shop with you in one of their logo-branded triceratops espresso cups.

2. Das Ludwig Kaffee Bar

GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN

Those stationed in Garmisch or visiting Edelweiss Lodge can enjoy this spot in town featuring delicious cakes, coffee drinks, and hot chocolate. I discovered this place when a light rain sprinkling on the historic and beautiful Ludwig Street quickly became a storm, and I wandered inside to stay dry. The double-walled cup ensured my drink stayed nice and hot, but my hands didn't get too warm. Now, I make it a point every time we visit Garmisch to stop in for a slice of cake and a hot cup of coffee.

3. Chocolat Grand Cafe

COLOGNE

With its famous cathedral and Chocolate Museum, many people find themselves visiting Cologne. While you are there, make sure to stop at the Chocolat Grand Cafe. It is conveniently located at the Chocolate Museum. After touring the museum, I had worked up an appetite, and wanted to sample more chocolate treats. You can visit the cafe without paying for admission to the museum so repeat visits are not an issue. My partner tried the hot chocolate with Baileys, but I stuck to a regular hot chocolate with whipped cream. I recommend both.

4. Cafe Zeitsprung

TRIER

One of the first places we visited after moving to the Kaiserlautern area was Trier. We found this cafe attached to the State Museum which had a beautiful view of the Electoral Palace and Palace Garden. It was the first place that I experienced the German style of offering a variety of dips and jams for one croissant, and it was quite tasty. I enjoyed breaking apart my croissant and trying it with citrus jam, Nutella, butter and more. For great food and views, make this cafe a stop on your next visit to Trier.

5. Coffee Fellows

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I love supporting mom-and-pop shops and one-off cafes; but when asking about “the best,” Coffee Fellows has never let me down. Whether I am rounding a corner on a street in a new town in search of caffeine or running into an Autohof to pay 75 cents to use the restroom, Coffee Fellows has been there to provide a delicious croissant, bagel sandwich or a delicious, sugary coffee drink that rivals Starbucks. In fact, Starbucks has never topped my mocha with marshmallows. For those who enjoy a more traditional latte or espresso, they have those as well. ■



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