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November Events

By Tamala Malerk

EDITOR'S PICKS

Fall is here and it's time to put on that light sweater and enjoy these fun events. Always check an event's website before traveling.



The Irish Folk Festival Kaiserslautern, Nov. 8

Celebrate 50 years of this festival and "living the dream" with Irish music, singing and tap dancing.



JazzFest Berlin Berlin, Nov. 2-5

JazzFest features icons of the genre as well as talented up-and-comers. In existence since 1964, it is one of Europe's longest-running festivals known around the world.



34th International Pigeon Market, Kassel, Nov. 12

Interested in the world of racing pigeons? Did you, like me, just learn that this is a thing? Attend this market featuring pigeons, over 300 exhibitors, expert lectures, a miniature Bavarian Oktoberfest, music and more.



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RuPaul's Drag Race Werq the World®, 2023 World Tour, Cologne, Nov. 4

Sashay your way to this internationally renowned drag show. Set in a Sci-Fi dystopian future, the queens, featuring past Drag Race contestants and winners, must decide between the artificial and real worlds. Other dates and locations can be found at vossevents.com/werq-the-world-tour.



Red Hot Chili Pipers Lunen, Nov. 17

Donning kilts and bagpipes rather than strategically placed tube socks, you will want to check out this band combining Scottish music with rock and pop. For more dates and locations across Germany go to rhcp.scot.



Handmade Creative Market Leipzig, Nov. 4-5

Shop from vendors and exhibitors. Craft by numbers, decorate with flowers, participate in dot and acrylic painting, make a bracelet, necklace or table lamp, and so much more on Saturday and Sunday. For more dates and locations go to kreativmaerkte.de.



Tollwood Winter Festival Munich, Nov. 23- Dec. 31

Play games, get on rides, catch a show, eat some great food, shop the market (closes Dec. 23) and much more at Munich's "alternative Christmas market." On New Year's Eve, join the midnight waltz on the Theresienwiese.



American Football in Germany Frankfurt, Nov. 5 and Nov. 12

Tickets for these games sold out quickly. But that doesn't mean you cannot cheer for your team. Check with your MWR, FSS or USO for on-base opportunities for game-related watching events.

Tell Your Story!

Editor's Pick Call Out:

Did you attend one of previous Editor's Picks events? We want to hear all about it! Please share something memorable about your experience in about 50-70 words and you could be featured here. Send your submissions to contentteam@stripes.com. ■

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PHOTO of the month

Situated on a cliff edge trail up to the Ebenalp summit, the Berggasthaus Aescher is one of the oldest mountain guesthouses in Switzerland. The many caves along the route have been home to Ice Age cave bears, Neanderthal hunting parties and medieval religious hermits. Nowadays, visitors can enjoy a cable car to the peak for hiking, mountain guesthouses and traditional restaurants.

Photo by Kat Dierickx

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A DAY IN

Kusel

By Tamala Malerk

Filled with food, fun, museums and shops, Kusel is a small town that is worth meandering around for the day. Kusel is located roughly 20 minutes by car (and 35 minutes on public transit) from Baumholder and Ramstein and less than an hour by car and public transit from Kaiserslautern.





Fuel up with coffee and pastry:

There are a couple of places I personally recommend to get your morning fuel for a day in Kusel. Café Auszeit is a great place to grab a coffee, pastry and sandwiches. They've got a small area in the back set up for kids, so you can catch up with friends while watching the kids play. Unfortunately, they are not open on Sundays. However, the WASGAU Bäckerei is open on Sundays and has a fantastic latte macchiato and a huge pastry selection.

Go Shopping: Literary nerds rejoice there are not one but TWO bookstores in Kusel and they are a one-minute walk from each other: Buchhandlung Wolf oHG and Buchhandlung Schneider. If neither store has what you are looking for, they will happily order it for you. Treasure hunters will want to go see what the DRK Sozialkaufhaus (German Red Cross Thrift Store) has to offer. Looking for a new outfit? Check out Takko Fashion which specializes in quality products at discount prices.



Fests Year-Round: It seems like there is always something going on. The biggest fair in town is the Hutmacherfest in June. There is also a large fall fest in September. You can find small church fests throughout the year, too. However, what should be on your radar now is the Christmas Market at the nearby medieval castle, Burg Lichtenburg.

Learn Something: Kusel can trace its roots to over 1,000 years as part of a Franconian royal court. It has been burned by enemies three times, with the last time being in the 1700s by the French. Since the last attack, it has maintained the Baroque and classical style of the final rebuild. To learn more, you can visit the City and Local History Museum in Kusel. It is open Tuesday – Sunday 2 – 5 p.m., so it's a good way to walk off a big lunch. It is recommended to make an appointment to visit, which can be done onsite, by calling 06381-8222 or by e-mail at museum@kusel.de.



Lunch and Dinner: If you want to eat with the locals, head to the Bier Stubb in the town center. You will have two choices for lunch: the daily special or schnitzel; either is a fine choice. You can choose between sitting in the “smoking permitted” bar or the restaurant section. I was hesitant to include this next one because it feels like my own little secret, but for a great Italian afternoon or night out, I recommend Ristorante Nino Ziegelhütte. At least two Friday nights a month, you will find me there ordering an appetizer of Insalata Caprese and enjoying one of their pizza, pasta or monthly specials. My favorite is the cannelloni. They also have a fantastic dessert selection and I always make sure to have room to choose one. ■



Navigating NORTH MACEDONIA

By Kat Nickola



WHERE IS MACEDONIA?

Defining modern Macedonia can be thorny, so a little background is helpful. In the fourth century BC, the ancient kingdom of Macedonia under Alexander the Great became an empire stretching south to Egypt and east to Pakistan. But it didn't last. The area was fractured and lost power while part of the Roman and Byzantine Empires. Ottoman occupation in the 14th century ended the use of the term Macedonia.

It wouldn't resurface again until the end of the Balkan Wars in 1913 when the modern Greek state of Macedonia was formed. Then, at the end of WWII, Yugoslavia redefined the most southern constituent republic as the People's Republic of Macedonia. Both regions have a shared history and culture. After Yugoslavia's breakup in 1991, Greece disputed the new country's use of the word Macedonia by claiming it was cultural appropriation, but in 2019 the UN mediated an agreement adding the descriptive "North."

We now distinguish between the Republic of North Macedonia as an independent country, and Macedonia, a large state within the country of Greece. The tumultuous history of the region has left behind a rich heritage of Greek, Byzantine and Ottoman influences that make visiting the mountainous country of North Macedonia a magnificent treat.



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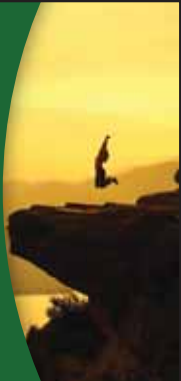
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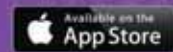
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What to See in NORTH MACEDONIA

SKOPJE

The capital of Macedonia, Skopje, gives off a dingy Soviet-era vibe from the outside, but it's worth a day of exploration to see the unique brand-new, yet ancient-looking, government buildings and statues in the city center. Start at Macedonia Square to see a massive fountain monument of Alexander the Great riding Bucephalus. The city's eclectic bronze statues get more interesting as you wander. Look for the skeletal beggar while heading south toward the Memorial House of Mother Theresa's birthplace, or keep your eyes peeled for the divers below the statue-lined Stone Bridge.

Escape the quiriness by venturing to the narrow alleys of the Old Bazaar where time stands still, and you can still haggle for your souvenirs. It's also a great place to try *tavče gravče*, a baked bean casserole, or have a *sarma*, a tasty meat-stuffed cabbage leaf. There is also the delicious *burek* pastry filled with meat or cheese, and Macedonian *Rakija*, a fermented fruit brandy.

Above the town is the Kale Fortress, a sixth-century bastion which was likely built by Emperor Justinian on a spot occupied since prehistoric times. It is free to meander through the gates and explore the walls for a perfect photo of the city. In the evening, venture west of downtown to the Debar Maalo neighborhood where the concrete is masked by trees and the calm cafes and bars are open late.



LEFT: Monument of Mother Teresa
RIGHT: Famous sculptures on the Art Bridge



BOTTOM: Fountain monument of Alexander the Great

Logistical Details:

- **VISA:** Until December 2023 U.S. passport holders do not need a visa for trips less than 15 days. The policy will be reevaluated in 2024. Visit www.mfa.gov.mk for current regulations.
- **MONEY:** You will need to exchange money for the Macedonian Denar (MKD), currently one U.S. dollar is worth roughly 55 MKD.
- **TRANSPORTATION:** Public transit is slow; a car rental is recommended.
- **ITINERARY:** On a long weekend you can loop in the highlights of Skopje and Ohrid, taking in Matka Canyon along the way. With a week you can add on outdoor adventure in Mavrovo National Park or wine tasting in Tikveš.





TOP TO
BOTTOM:
Matka Canyon,
Church of Saint
John at Kaneo,
Mavrovo
National Park



MATKA CANYON

This must-see natural beauty is only 15 kilometers outside of Skopje. The gorge has beautiful green waters backed by jagged mountains and a three-kilometer trail carved into the canyon wall. You can even hike to the canyon in good weather by taking the cable car in Skopje up to Mount Vodno and following the 13 km trail to the canyon rim. Alternatively, rent a kayak or take a small motorboat down the canyon to Vrelo Cave, which has one of the deepest underwater cave systems in Europe.

MAVROVO NATIONAL PARK

With activities for all ages and seasons, this national park is a highlight. There are numerous hiking and biking trails throughout the mountainous terrain. In winter, the ski resort above Mavrovo village boasts 15 km of slopes and 13 lifts. Interestingly, when Mavrovo Lake was dammed, the old village church was partially submerged and can still be seen peeping above the water line. If possible, stay a night in one of the numerous scenic high mountain villages like Galičnik or Lazaropole which are known for their traditional woodcarving. Don't miss a visit to Saint Jovan Bigorski Monastery, a fortified complex whose 1000-year history is displayed in the numerous relics, beautifully carved iconostasis and frescoes that completely cover the church interior.

OHRID TOWN & LAKE

The town of Ohrid oozes history. Inhabited since the Iron Age, this UNESCO Heritage Site includes the cultural sites within one of the oldest human settlements in Europe and the unique lake ecosystem. Within the walled old town is the ancient Macedonian theatre, a Greek open-air amphitheater dating from 200 B.C. The Church of Saints Clement and Panteleimon is a Macedonian-style gray stone struc-

ture with red brick trim and intricate mosaics. Nearby is the Plaošnik archaeology park where you can wander around the Byzantine ruins and then head to the local Church of Saint John at Kaneo, angelically perched on a cliff above the lake. A waterfront boardwalk connects the pebble beaches along the cliff-backed shoreline.

Above Ohrid is Samuel's Fortress – a massive walled fortification atop the hill in old town built by Tsar Samuel of Bulgaria in the 11th century. Recent archaeological excavations have shown that it was built on an earlier fourth century B.C. fort, possibly built by King Philip II of Macedon (Alexander the Great's father). To go back even further in time, drive roughly 17 kilometers south of Ohrid to the Bay of Bones Museum, a reconstructed village of stilt houses from the prehistoric pile-dwelling peoples who lived in the area from 1200 to 700 B.C.

TIKVEŠ WINE REGION

Since the fourth century B.C., the climate and vines of this region have produced quality wines. The biggest concentration of wineries is located in the area north of Kavadarci near the many arms of the Vardar River where the rolling hills are reminiscent of Napa Valley. Try visiting the large eponymous Tikveš Winery or the small family Winery Peshkov. For a great overnight, the Winery Lazar is situated in a lush green oasis along the river and offers overnight accommodations and a restaurant with four to six-course menus. ■



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Volunteering with **KMC PRIDE**

By Tamala Malerk

Volunteering can be such a fulfilling activity. This year we are highlighting a new organization or event for those who are looking to learn more about the services and resources available to them as well as for those who are looking to give back to the community.

This month we are featuring KMC Pride. I had the pleasure of speaking with the President and Founder of KMC Pride, Natalie Ricketts, about the creation of KMC Pride and how you can get involved.





BEING ABLE TO PROVIDE THOSE ‘SAFE SPACES’ ...TO HAVE THAT COMMUNITY ... WHERE YOU CAN FEEL LIKE YOU CAN

JUST BE YOURSELF

...THAT IS WHY I KEEP VOLUNTEERING. 

After “Storytime at the Library” at the Ramstein library and other Pride Month-related events were canceled in 2022 due to social media backlash, Natalie realized there weren’t any advocacy groups for the LGBT+ DOD community in the area. She and her wife were upset because “We didn’t expect this from such a large base. There were no advocacy groups here or gay bars in town. We wanted to start a group to help the community.”

She elaborated, “Ramstein is one of the biggest bases overseas. My wife is trans[gender] and the real reason I started it [KMC Pride] is because of her.”

Natalie noted that since forming KMC Pride in September 2022, they have had no issues as a private organization. “We’ve hosted a handful of fundraisers. We had the Pride Picnic ... which was super successful. We have not had any backlash or discriminatory comments made towards us.” At the time of writing, their Facebook group has almost 500 members, and the organization has become a safe space for the LGBT+ community in the KMC area: “In the short time that KMC Pride has been active, we’ve had five people come out as gay or trans to me and my wife. Every event KMC Pride has, we have people coming up to us telling us how important it is, or how much it means

to them that we have these types of events because they’ve never been to a base that has these kinds of ‘safe space’ events.”

When asked about the most fulfilling aspects of working with KMC Pride, Natalie responded “Being able to provide those ‘safe spaces’ ...to have that community ... where you can feel like you can just be yourself ... that is why I keep volunteering.”

KMC Pride holds social, community and educational events. They work with the schools and host arts-and-crafts events and youth programs. They host “Lunch and Learn” events around awareness days. They have quarterly socials and monthly social hour on the second Friday of every month. They hold dances for members of the community who may not have gotten to be their true selves or taken who they wanted to take at their first prom. Starting next year, the Baumholder chapter will hosts a monthly story time and an LGBT+ parent support group.

Those who want to volunteer must be 18 years of age or older. KMC Pride is registered with the Volunteer Management Information System (VMIS) so volunteers can register their hours. Most of the volunteer work is setting up events and if you volunteer with the set-up, you can attend the event itself for free. You do not have to

be a member of the LGBT+ community to volunteer or attend events. Natalie stated, “We encourage everyone to attend all of our events. We cannot make any change without our allies.” You can join their Facebook group, KMC Pride, to learn more about volunteering. ■

KMC Pride is a private organization. It is not a part of the Department of Defense or any of its components and it has no governmental status.

YOUR NEXT FAVORITE SOUVENIR:

Ohrid Pearls

Kat Nickola

There is a small town in North Macedonia vying for the next top spot in your jewelry box. European queens and princesses have been seen wearing pearls from Ohrid in the last decades, but only recently have they become popular with mainstream tourists (not that North Macedonia is a conventional destination).

The pearls' unique structure is a well-kept secret. They are created by forming a small ball with mother-of-pearl from local shells, then coating it with multiple layers of a mysterious emulsion. Only one ingredient of the emulsion has been divulged: scales from the plasica fish (or Ohrid trout), which is only found in Lake Ohrid and only harvested in the winter.

To add to the mystique, two Ohrid families have maintained the secret for the last 100 years. With four shops in Ohrid and unique pieces that incorporate pearls into silver settings, the Filevi family workshop offers a wide variety of jewelry styles. The Talevi family has a small workshop focusing on traditional single pearl drop and strand necklaces. Their store is along the Old Bazaar Street where you can shop for other traditional souvenirs like pottery, woodcarvings and religious icons.

Prices are based on the size and number of the pearls. Macedonian Denar (MKD or ден) is the currency in North Macedonia. Expect to pay about 800ден (\$15) for a lovely, small single drop pearl necklace, 2,500ден (\$45) for a pearl pendant with silver filigree, and 5,500ден (\$100) for a nice strand of small pearls. Large intricate pearl strands can be in the hundreds. ■



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both families have online shops:



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