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# WHAT'S UP

KAISERSLAUTERN

## EUROPE'S LARGEST ANIMAL SANCTUARY

Spotlight on  
Parc Zoologique  
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## DALMATIAN PELICANS AND METEORA MONASTERIES PHOTO TOUR

### GERMANY

**Hannover Adventure Zoo Christmas Garden** | Hannover | Nov. 21, 2024–Jan. 5, 2025

**Gut Auderbichl Free-Roaming Animal Christmas Market** | Henndorf | Nov. 15, 2024–Jan. 6, 2025

**Christmas Garden Stuttgart 2024 at Wilhelma-Zoologisch-Botanischer Garten** | Stuttgart | Nov. 15, 2024–Jan. 12, 2025

**Gut Aiderbichl Free-Roaming Animal Advent Market** | Iffeldorf, Deggendorf | Nov. 30, 2024–Jan. 6, 2025

**Bear Christmas** | Bad Rippoldsau-Shapbach | Dec. 14

At the Alternative Wolf and Bear Park in the heart of the Black Forest, you can enjoy a cozy Christmas market, participate in a tombola or raffle for a good cause, enjoy a unique theater experience and go on a torchlit hike through the wildlife refuge.

**Winter at the Zoo Christmas Walk** | Kaiserslautern | Dec. 26

**Neunkirchen Zoo Christmas Market** | Neunkirchen | Dec. 12–22

**Neunkirchen Zoo Up-Close Animal Feeding Experiences** | Neunkirchen | Year round

**Llama Hike in the Palatinate Forest** | Annweiler and Völkersweiler | Year round

### FINLAND

**World Dog Show** | Helsinki | Aug. 8–10, 2025

A huge event for dog lovers! The FCI has chosen Helsinki to host their annual dog show in 2025, where 356 breeds will be showcased and celebrated. Watch dogs from all over the world navigate obstacles and sit pretty to find out which fluffy friend will win “Best in Show.”

**Baltic Herring Market** | Helsinki | Oct. 2025

**Reindeer Day** | Saariselka | Nov. 24, 2024–April 9, 2025

### GREECE

**Dalmatian Pelicans and Meteora Monasteries Photo Tour** | Thessaloniki | Jan. 17–27, 2025

Combining ancient birds and ancient landscapes, this photography tour in north central Greece, features the wintering sites of Dalmatian Pelicans whose origins date back to nearly 30 million years. The pelicans like to perch on the stone monasteries of Meteora, making for incredible photo opportunities and traveling experiences.

**Valley of the Butterflies** | Rhodes | Year round

**National Marine Park of Alonissos** | Sporades | Year round

### SPAIN

**Poema del Mar Aquarium** | Las Palmas de Gran Canaria | Open year round

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**Running of the Bulls** | Pamplona | July 6–14, 2025

**Dolphin Watching Adventure** | Estepona Bay | March–Oct. annually

**Cantabrian Brown Bear Watching** | Cantabria | May–Sept. annually

**Madrid Zoo: Sea Lion Educational Activity** | Madrid | Daily, year round

### THE NETHERLANDS

**Camel Dairy Smits Camel Safari** | Berlicum | Year round

In this unique experience, you can learn about camels, the origins of camel dairy and benefits of drinking camel milk. You can ride, pet and cuddle the camels after the safari and also feed the calves. For even more adventure, you can try your hand at baking camel milk waffles in the farm restaurant. There are safaris offered in English.

**Blijdorp Zoo** | Rotterdam | Open year round

**Slagharen Wild West Theme Park and Resort** | Slagharen | Open year round

**Release Rehabilitated Seals into the Wadden Sea** | Pieterburen and Lauwersoog | Select dates throughout the year.

### AUSTRIA

**House of the Sea** | Vienna | Open year round

### BELGIUM

**Brussels Dog Show** | Brussels | Dec. 14–15

**Carnival of Bears** | Benelux | March 26, 2025

**Elephant Keeper Talks: Antwerp Zoo** | Antwerp | Daily, year round

### CZECHIA

**House of the Falconer Exhibit** | Prague Castle | Year round

**Euro Dog Show** | Brno | April 10–13, 2025

### FRANCE

**Horse in Majesty Exhibit** | Palace of Versailles | July 2–Nov. 3

**Breakfast with the Monkeys** | Kintzheim | Through Nov. 11, 2024

**ZooParc de Beauval** | St. Aignan | Open year round

**Parc de la Tête** | Lyon | Open year round

**Du Prem Alpaca Farm** | Maleville | Open year round (closed on Sundays)

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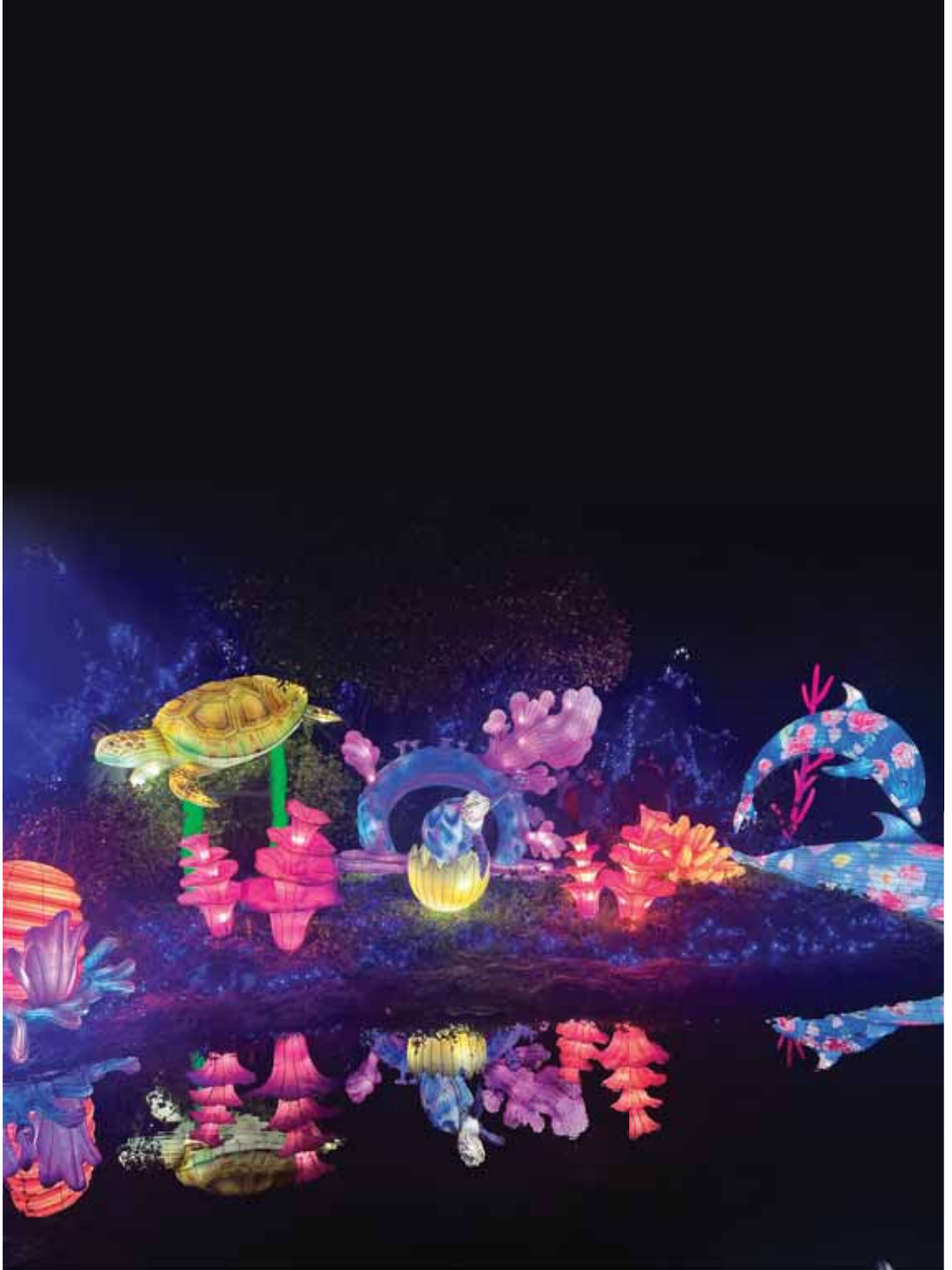


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# Spotlight On



## Parc Zoologique d'Amnéville

By Kat Nickola

The Amnéville Zoo in France hosts an annual Luminescences festival during the winter months. This beautiful nighttime display features thousands of light installations and lanterns along a 1.4km trail. Stars and Stripes reader Janine Rodriguez visited the display last year and sent us this incredible image.

Roughly 1½ hours from the KMC area and two hours from Spangdahlem, the Amnéville Zoo features over 1,500 animals in habitats from around the world. There are also immersive experiences like farm animal visits, raptor shows and wallaby feeding. ■

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# Neunkirchen Zoo

By Tamala Malerk

Home to over 600 animals and a quaint Christmas market in December, Neunkirchen Zoo is a fun time for all, when properly dressed.



**EAT** After racing back to my car to put on a second pair of socks, I quickly realized that it was a ridiculously cold winter day and that I needed something to warm myself up. Back in the zoo, I found a stand that specialized in crepes. My Nutella crepe warmed not only my body, but also my soul as soon as the hot chocolatey filling hit my taste buds. For those who wish to brave eating ice cream in already chilly winter temps, **Bistro Adebar** in the center of the zoo has 17 different flavors for you to choose from.

If you are in the mood for something savory, there are options on-site for that as well. **Imbiss am Affenhaus** (Snack at the Monkey House) offers you the chance to marvel at the monkeys while munching on German favorites such as schnitzel and currywurst. **Snack Falknereischänke** (Falconry Snack Tavern) offers burgers, chicken and rösti options.







# STAY

For extra fun and convenience, the hotel on-site, **Hotel Am Zoo** includes admission to the zoo. There are a variety of rooms to choose from whether you are staying solo or with the entire family (including the dog!). Rooms are tastefully decorated with animal and underwater scenes. You can also compete against your partner or kids on the miniature golf course located right across the street.

After walking around the zoo and Christmas market all day, you can relax in the Finnish sauna located on the top floor to warm up and soothe those tired feet- the sauna session is included in the price of the hotel. Book your stay at [hotelamzoo.de](http://hotelamzoo.de).



“In 2024, the Christmas Market will be held on December 19.”



# LOVE

**Neunkirchen Zoo** is fun no matter what time of the year, but when you are looking for that “out-of-the-ordinary” Christmas market experience, it is especially cool (pun intended). As you can probably guess, I visited on a particularly cold day: 10 degrees Fahrenheit (-12 degrees Celsius)!

Because of the cooler weather, many of the animals chose (wisely I might add) to stay indoors with the heaters. There were a few that roamed around in the cold, but one seemed to thrive: Olaf the snow leopard. He was absolutely in love with the weather. From his makeshift fort under some snow-covered stones, he enjoyed just watching the world go by.

I enjoyed meandering around and looking at the different animals. Because of the cold, the zoo cancelled many of the animal feedings that I hope to go back in the spring to see. However, the snow on the ground made the animals that wandered around stand out, especially the woolly black alpacas and striped zebras.

What I missed in animal encounters was made up for with the enhanced experience of the Christmas market. It was not a large market, but I was still able to purchase a unique light-up Christmas ornament and had fun browsing at the different stalls. In 2024, the Christmas Market will be held on December 19.

It is easy to park at Neunkirchen Zoo, though it is a five-minute walk from the parking lot to the entrance. Shoppers beware: The entrance (and exit) to the zoo is a gift shop. I was tempted to buy all of the souvenirs on my way in and out.

To learn more about the zoo, shows and daily feeding times, meet-and-greet add-ons, as well as fun events like Dream-night, Boo at the Zoo and the Children’s Festival, go to [neunkircherzoo.de](http://neunkircherzoo.de). ■



## My Top 5 Favorite Animals at the Zoo:

1. Olaf, the snow leopard
2. White-tailed porcupine
3. Yaks
4. Zebras
5. Kangaroo



# EUROPE'S LARGEST ANIMAL SANCTUARY

By Kat Nickola

## ANTON'S STORY

Anton, the Bactrian camel, was seized from a situation where he was not provided the legal basics of care. He was moved to a cushy new home on a farm in Iffeldorf, near Munich, Germany where he met another camel, a Dromedary named Franziska. She had been surrendered by a circus 12 years prior and was lovingly helped through the loss of her small foal, Hensi. The two became joyful companions until she passed away in 2023. Recently, Anton found a new friend in Kasper, a fellow Bactrian camel, who was rescued from a cycle of constant re-selling.

## THESE CAMELS NOW LIVE AT EUROPE'S LARGEST ANIMAL SANCTUARY: GUT AIDERBICHL.

If you are an animal lover, but not a fan of zoos, try visiting one of the Gut Aiderbichl animal visitor centers. Your entrance fee will help rescue and rehabilitate animals from across Europe and provide them with access to a lifelong home.

The organization's policy is: **"All animals are welcome at Gut Aiderbichl and may stay with us until the natural end of their lives."**

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## STAR'S STORY


As a baby in 1973, Star was removed from the wild in Africa and taken to Austria to live in an animal testing lab. She was kept there in a small space out of contact with other chimps until the practice was banned in 1997. Now, she lives at the Gut Aiderbichl Monkey Sanctuary where she has been able to go outside for the first time in decades and has learned how to socialize. She is friends with fellow chimps, Spätzle and Benjamin.

The Monkey Sanctuary was added to the Aiderbichl Sanctuary collection in 2009. Chimpanzees from Austrian labs were taken to a safari park where the pharmaceutical company financed a large facility for them. When the safari park filed for bankruptcy, Gut Aiderbichl took over. With the help of leading veterinarians and primatologists, Aiderbichl built a large outdoor enclosure. Jane Goodall attended the grand opening of this space in 2011 when the chimps tentatively experienced the sun and wind for the first time.

The Monkey Sanctuary is only available to visit by those who financially support the chimpanzee effort. It is open to these guests by appointment on Saturdays in the warm seasons.

## BARICELLO'S STORY

Baricello was one of the first horses to be rescued by Gut Aiderbichl. As a four-month-old foal, he was intended to be sent from Poland to a slaughterhouse in Italy, but the organization purchased him instead. He seemed grief-stricken and unhealthy. Later, they were able to track down his mother Chatleen working as a carriage horse in a city. The two were happily reunited at Gut Aiderbichl, and Baricello has grown into a healthy, mature 23-year-old horse.



Gut Aiderbichl had recently been opened in 2001 when Baricello came to stay. It was founded by German actor and animal rights activist, Michael Aufhauser. He began with a farm built in Henndorf, Austria, where animals could be removed from situations that did not provide them with humane husbandry practices. Aufhauser also established the first off-leash dog parks in Austria.

**IF YOU ARE AN ANIMAL LOVER, BUT NOT A FAN OF ZOOS, TRY VISITING ONE OF THE GUT AIDERBICHL ANIMAL VISITOR CENTERS.**



In 2006, a large farm in **Deggendorf**, near Passau was added. Soon other large estates, farms and homes were being donated or left to the organization, including the large farm in **Iffeldorf** where the camels now live. Since then, Gut Aiderbichl has grown to include sanctuary lands in Germany, Austria, France, Switzerland, Romania and Hungary. The website, [www.gut-aiderbichl.com](http://www.gut-aiderbichl.com), features a story or video for nearly every animal at the sanctuary, including touching obituaries.

## NEEMA'S STORY

As a puppy in Romania, Neema was likely hit by a car, which paralyzed her rear legs. At Gut Aiderbichl she was fitted with a wheelchair and now loves to go on long walks and runs in the field. She is one of the many happy, special needs dogs the organization has rehabilitated. While all the animals are welcome to stay at Gut Aiderbichl for the rest of their lives, they recognize that some dogs and cats are better suited for adoption into family homes.

Since 2022, the organization has been actively involved in saving domestic pets from the war in Ukraine and reuniting them with owners when possible. In addition, they have become a safe haven for former racing dogs and hoarded cats.

## YOUR STORY

While the Gut Aiderbichl organization manages 30 estates across six countries in Europe, there are only three you can visit. If you have a pup of your own, you can bring them along. Each center has an off-leash dog run and they are welcome around the rest of the farm on a leash.

### **GUT AIDERBICHL HENNDORF**

*20km east of Salzburg*

*Hours: Wednesday – Sunday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.*

This is the original Gut Aiderbichl Farm and houses 1,000 animals. Vegetarian fare is offered at the café and hourly guided tours can show you the whole estate. There is also a special dog path and dog pool if you bring your pup to visit. A small passenger train takes visitors on a 30-minute ride to see the seven surrounding properties. Visit the Christmas market and Europe's largest live-animal nativity from Nov. 15, 2024 to Jan. 6, 2025.

### **GUT AIDERBICHL IFFELDORF**

*On the Ostersee, south of Munich*

*Hours: Wednesday – Sunday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.*

The Iffeldorf Farm is home to 300 animals, primarily dogs, cats, horses, donkeys and cows. They offer a few guided tours daily (in German) and there is a café that serves vegetarian meals and snacks. Check out the weekend advent market on from Nov. 30, 2024 to Jan. 6, 2025.

### **GUT AIDERBICHL DEGGENDORF**

*90km east of Regensburg*

*Hours: Wednesday – Sunday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.*

The Deggendorf Estate is home to roughly 300 animals, mostly farmyard animals, dogs and cats. There is a café and visitor center, plus a new circular path to get close to the animals. Cat lovers will also enjoy the large cat sanctuary complex with a special barn, field and "katzen-villa." From Nov. 30, 2024 to Jan. 6, 2025, there is an advent market on weekends and holidays. ■



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# Critter Spotting in Worms

By Karen Bradbury

A typical kid might find traipsing through a city to look at architecture a pretty boring proposition. But tell that young person that you're heading to an ancient and magical city full of animals and you may capture their attention. It even has an animal name: Worms!

To turn eyeing ancient artifacts into a wonderful adventure, frame your trip as a safari to see the **Worms Big Five**.

**Dragons:** Worms is known as a "Nibelungenstadt," a title given to more than 20 cities mentioned in the **Song of the Nibelungs**, an epic tale dating back to the 13th century. Much of the action in this Middle Ages saga starring **Siegfried the Dragon Slayer** unfolds in Worms, where you'll find more dragons than you can wave a magic wand at. They frolic on water fountains, skulk behind the cathedral, and congregate on the façade of the Town Hall.

**Dachshund:** **Worms Cathedral** is the place to spot enough creatures to fill an ark. As you enter through its main portal, look up and to the left. You'll see the face of what's unmistakably a wiener dog. This charming pup is the creation of **Philipp Brand**, an architect who carried out renovations to the church back in the 1920s. According to one story, as Brand stood on some scaffolding, the feisty dog nipped Steiner's leg, prompting him to move just before a stone element came loose from above and crashed down on the very place he'd just been standing.

**Creepy crawlies:** Remaining in the cathedral, check out the statue of a woman known as **Frau Welt**. From the front, she's the medieval personification of worldly sensual joy and happiness. But take a gander at the poor woman's backside, where she is being devoured by toads, snakes and other hideous vermin. The statue's sculptor impresses upon us the dangers of succumbing to temptation in a way we won't soon forget!

**Wild bird:** Outside the cathedral, make your way along the city walls to the entrance of the **Museum Heylshof**. This museum contains one of the largest privately-owned collections of late 19th-century art in all of Germany. By the gate, you'll see a rather disheveled, large-beaked bird keeping watch over the place. This whimsical creation is the work of local artist **Eckard Schembs**.

**Lions:** Head to **Ludwigsplatz**, a pleasant square just off the main shopping area. Here you will find a memorial obelisk commemorating the military achievements of Ludwig IV, Grand Duke of Hesse. With the Congress of Vienna, Worms and the surrounding region was passed to the Grand Duchy of Hesse in 1815. You don't need eagle eyes to spot the two large lions with flowing manes flanking the inscription. But what's that beast just below the writing? Inside the cathedral, another lion paces behind the pews. Make it a contest to see who spots this ancient stone beast first.

Don't forget a pair of binoculars to scope out architectural details towering several stories high above you. ■





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# Alpine Cattle Drives

By Stacy Roman

**C**attle drives evoke images harkening back to the Old West. A lone rancher sporting a 10-gallon Stetson attempting to lasso a stray cow while riding a trusty steed across vast miles of arid, cacti-riddled landscape like John Wayne, or the less-glamorous “City Slickers.” However, if you ask your friendly German neighbor about cattle drives, you’ll likely get a much different answer. The “Almabtrieb” or “Viehscheid” is the annual Alpine cattle drive which takes place in the high altitudes of the Bavarian mountains. It’s an event you won’t want to miss.

## WHAT EXACTLY IS “ALMABTRIEB” AND “VIEHSCHIED?”

“Almabtrieb” and “Viehscheid” are basically the same thing — an Alpine cattle drive. In the Allgäu region of Bavaria, it’s referred to as “Viehscheid,” or cattle separation. Near Berchtesgaden as well as in Austria and Switzerland, it’s more commonly known as “Almabtrieb.” Dating back to the Bronze Age, this time-honored tradition is engrained in German culture. Each spring, farmers and ranchers lead their branded cattle up to the higher pastures in the Alps. During the summer, the cows munch and graze their way around these green meadows. Not only does this help feed the cattle, but also helps reduce mountain erosion.

As the leaves begin to change and fall rears its head toward the end of September, it’s time to bring the cattle back down the mountains. Farmers dressed in traditional Bavarian garb (think lederhosen, dirndls and fedoras) lead their herd back to town. To celebrate, the cattle are often adorned with stunning floral headdresses, wreaths and gigantic metal bells which clang incessantly as they make their way home. Once the cows make it to the final destination, it’s time to start the party. Festivals with

local fare, plenty of frosty beverages and traditional music are held. It’s quite similar to Oktoberfest, only a little rowdier.

## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

“Almabtrieb” and “Viehscheid” are subject to changes and cancellations, so you’ll want to check the visitor websites to be sure of the dates and details. Also, if even just one cow meets an untimely demise or is severely injured during the summer months while up in the mountains, the procession is usually held without the fanfare and festival out of respect. If the cattle drive takes place, it usually occurs mid to late September. Most popular in the Tyrol, Allgäu and Berchtesgaden regions, each “Almabtrieb” carries its own distinct flare. In Schönau, the cows are herded onto a boat which takes them across the crystal-clear waters of Königsee. In some areas, other animals like goats or sheep may join in the long walk home.

While the notion of cattle drives is considerably different from what we’re used to in the States, it’s no less spectacular to witness at least once while you’re stationed in Germany. They don’t party until the cows come home — they party because they came home. ■





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