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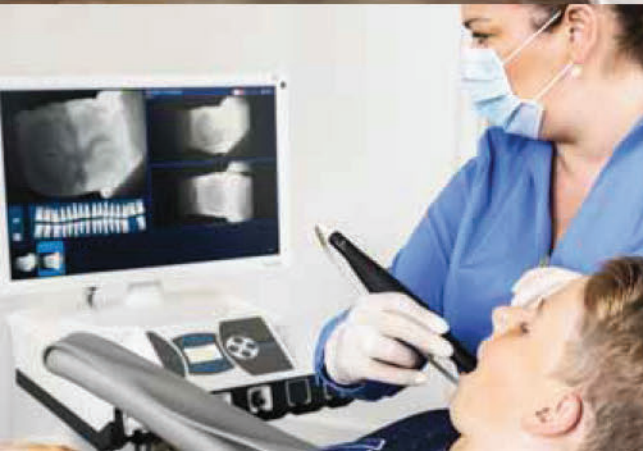
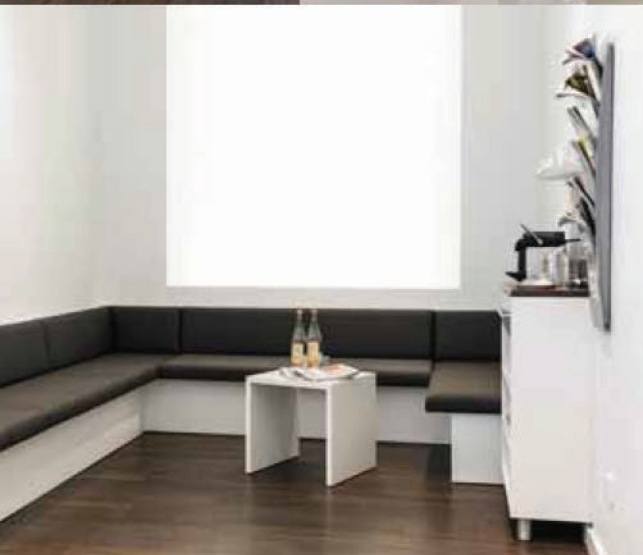
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PLAN AHEAD

By Katie Wells



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BAVARIA

Der Drachenstich, Fürth im Wald | Aug. 8 – 17, 2026

Tradinno, a four-legged, fire-breathing dragon, still holds the Guinness World Record as the “Largest Walking Robot,” and Drachenstich in Fürth im Wald is an over 500-year-old festival all about him. Visitors can enjoy the main event, which is a historical pageant about the return of the banished dragon. There is also a medieval market, where you can sample roasted pig, stews and Cave-Gladium Beer, a specialty lager from the region. Kinderdrachenstich is a kid-friendly version of the pageant where they can participate and win prizes. Purchase tickets in advance. Drachenstich.de



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KAISERSLAUTERN

Metropolink Art Festival, Heidelberg | Aug. 5 – 8, 2026

A former U.S. military base turned urban art festival grounds is celebrating its 12th anniversary. Patrick Henry Village in Heidelberg transforms into an artist’s paradise for the Metropolink Festival. Visitors can admire large-scale murals and international street art, enjoy live music and creative workshops. The former commissary is the central hub for street art, food and music. Street art workshops are available for children to participate in. We recommend purchasing tickets in advance. Children aged 13 and under receive free entry. Metropolink.art/festival



SPANGDAHLEM

Säubrennerkirmes Wittlich | Aug. 14 – 18, 2026

Despite being a fun cultural festival, the *Säubrennerkirmes*, or Pig Burner Fair in Wittlich, has a slightly morbid history. One evening, during ancient times, when the city was threatened by enemy forces, a guard couldn’t find a peg to secure the gate, so he used a turnip. During the night, a pig ate it, making it easy for the invaders to sack the village. As a punishment for the pigs, the villagers roasted them. Today, the city ceremoniously roasts 100 pigs on a spit to open the four-day fair. Visitors can shop at a craft market, enjoy live entertainment and watch parades where participants dress in pig costumes. There will also be rides and Mosel wine. Wittlich.de



STUTTGART

ESTIVAL Esslingen | Aug. 1 – 13, 2026

This free summer fest spreads around the market square and lasts for two weeks. Guests can enjoy live music, creative street art and plenty of specialty Esslingen wine. Guided tours and wine tastings are available with tickets. There will be a children’s day on Aug. 3, which includes a play paradise in the pagoda, giant Jenga and ice cream. For those feeling lucky, enter a drawing with the tourist information office July 1 – Aug. 7 to win a hot air balloon ride at the castle on Aug. 10. Estival-esslingen.de



WIESBADEN

Mainfest, Frankfurt | July 31 – Aug. 3, 2026

The Main Festival in Frankfurt takes place right on the banks of the Main River. The festival reflects the blended culture and liveliness of the city. Traditionally, it was a fishing festival that “paid homage to the river and its bounty.” Today, there are rides, regional food and cultural programs. Additionally, there is a fishermen’s joust where courageous participants dressed in historical costumes compete against one another while balancing in boats. Try “Ox on the Spit” (a specialty roasted ox) and sip wine from the fountain of justice. You can also shop from the many market stalls. Visitfrankfurt.travel ■



Scan to find out what else is going on in Your Community.

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SIX-WEEK BOOTCAMP

Start your summer with an intensive six-week fitness bootcamp every Monday and Wednesday beginning Jun. 1. Lunch classes are 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and evening classes are 6–7 p.m. Fees are \$205. Please register at the Fitness Center.

PLAY IN THE PLAYGROUND

Join the ACS New Parent Support Program for a fun playdate at the Wiesbaden Community Spouses Club Playground on Hainerberg on Jun. 3 & 24. Please contact ACS to register.

TRIER EXPRESS

Join Outdoor Recreation on a trip to Germany's oldest city on Jun. 6. Explore the ancient streets and discover magnificent Roman ruins such as the Porta Nigra, the Roman Amphitheater and the Imperial Baths. Fees are \$79 for adults and \$69 for children 15 & under. Please visit our website or call civ (0)611-143-548-9801 for more details.

EUROPA PARK

Visit one of the best theme parks that Germany has to offer! Outdoor Recreation invites you to a day trip to Europa Park on Jun. 13. Fees are \$119 for adults and \$99 for children 15 & under. Please visit our website or call civ (0)611-143-548-9801 for more details.

SUMMER READING PROGRAM KICK-OFF

Plant a Seed, Read! Celebrate the start of the Summer Reading Program with an all-day kick-off event on Jun. 14. Then, participate in the challenge for a chance to win cool prizes all summer long. The program runs through Aug. 6. Register online at usagwiesbaden.beanstack.org/reader365.



SUMMER READING SPECIAL PROGRAMMING

Plant a Seed, Read! The Wiesbaden Library will host several weekly programs between Jun. 14–Aug. 6. Programs include: Silent Book Club, Tabletop Tuesdays, Craft Buffet, STEM Sundays and Plant Your Own Story. Register for the challenge online at usagwiesbaden.beanstack.org/reader365.

ARMY BIRTHDAY CAR SMASH

The Auto Skills Center offers a car smash vehicle to customers in celebration of the Army Birthday on Jun. 14. First come first serve, starts at noon.

PRAGUE EXPRESS

Join Outdoor Recreation on a trip to the "City of a Hundred Spires" on Jun. 20. Wander across the iconic Charles Bridge, explore the sprawling Prague Castle and watch the famous Astronomical Clock chime in the Old Town Square. Passports are required for this trip. Fees are \$199 for adults and \$179 for children 15 & under. Please visit our website or call civ (0)611-143-548-9801 for more details.



BREASTFEEDING BASICS

Join the ACS New Parent Support Program for a breastfeeding basics class on Jun. 23. The class is geared towards first-time parents, but any expecting mothers are welcome! Learn more about the benefits of breastmilk and how to get your feeding journey off to the right start. Please contact ACS to register.

RHEIN RIVER CRUISE & CASTLE

Experience the heart of the countryside with a scenic river cruise that glides past rolling vineyards and the beautiful Rheinstein castle. Fees are \$69 for adults and \$59 for children 15 & under.

MICHEAL B. RILEY HERO DAY

The Wiesbaden Sports & Fitness Center honors the life of MSG Micheal B. Riley with an all-day workout event on Jun. 27. This event also kicks off America's 250th Birthday Celebration.



RECURRING EVENTS:

Mondays: Host Nation Orientation
Tuesdays: Preschool Storytime
Wednesdays: Improv Comedy Class
Thursdays: Baby Storytime
Thursdays: Thirsty Thursday Karaoke
Sundays: Chess Club

Jun. 1, 15: Sit & Stitch
Jun. 2, 16: German Conversation Meetup
Jun. 5, 19: Friday Night Scrambles
Jun. 6, 20: Commissary/PX Shuttle
Jun. 6: Picture Framing 101
Jun. 4, 18: Wood Shop Safety Class
Jun. 8, 22: Dad Talk
Jun. 9: Military Appreciation Meal
Jun. 9: Kitchen Chronicles
Jun. 10, 24: Trivia Spring League
Jun. 11, 25: Sponsorship Training
Jun. 14, 28: Wiesbaden Writer's Club
Jun. 16: Life Here 101
Jun. 28: Welcome to Your Book Club
Jun. 29: Brick Builders





SPOT
LIGHT
ON...

Spielplätze

By Kat Nickola

As you explore Germany with your kids, you are sure to notice the wide variety of playgrounds, or *Spielplätze*. Some are simple monkey-bars; others are wooden structures. Some are in the forests; others are surrounded by urban graffiti. What they all have in common, however, is a German mindset about what makes play worthwhile that is different than what is typically seen in the U.S.

First and foremost, German playgrounds encourage children to be out-of-doors, in any kind of weather, getting fresh air and a touch of nature. It's not necessarily about 'burning energy' but more about simply being outside. Next, there is a certain amount of calculated risk built into playground creation. You won't find rubber ground covering and excessive railings. Instead, the mentality leans more into allowing kids to assess risk on their own to build resilience. Parents accept that kids learn from accidents and a playground for the proper age group allows for minor injuries. For this reason, most parents are content to chill on a bench while their kids play, fall and problem solve on their own. There are no strict rules about how kids should play on the playground, either. Going up the slide, climbing on the roof and digging outside of the pit are all fair game, as long as you aren't harming someone else. This is a playground after all, a space for kids to be kids.

Playgrounds in Germany must be inspected regularly by the Technischer Überwachungsverein, or TÜV, who verify structural integrity, safety compliance and analyze the level of risk. ■

GERMAN WORD OF THE MONTH

Weichei (noun) *Vike-eye*
Literal translation: Soft egg
Meaning: A teasingly insulting name to call your friend, typically a male, who is giving in too easily or wimping out too quickly.



Ready for an easy family break somewhere with plenty of kid-friendly activities? Scan here to read about vacationing in a European holiday village.



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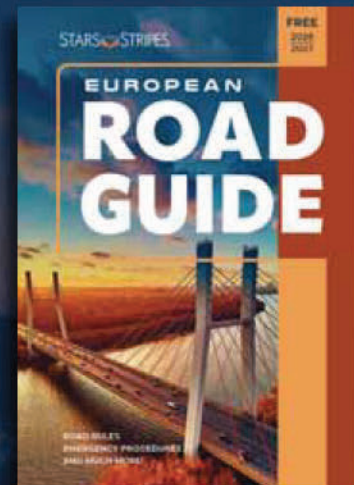
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A DAY AT EIFELPARK

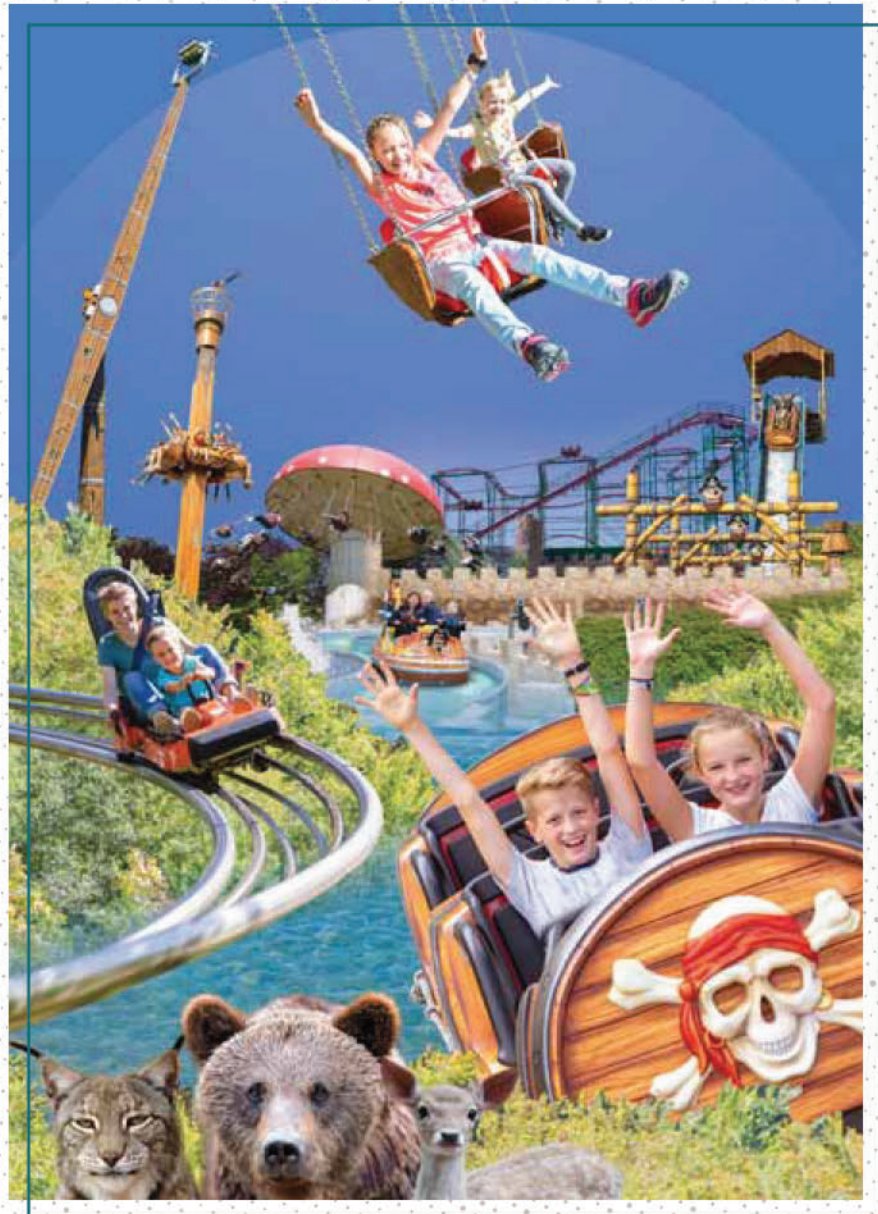
By Tamala Malerk

When someone thinks of German theme parks, the mind immediately goes to LEGOLAND® or Europa-Park, or maybe even Playmobil® FunPark, but there are theme parks all over Germany. One that may have flown under your radar is much closer than you think. A 13-minute drive from Spangdahlem Air Base, 90 minutes from Ramstein Air Base and two hours from USAG Wiesbaden is Eifelpark.

Featuring over 200 animals and 60 attractions, this park has something for everyone in your family. If, like me, you don't enjoy free falls and going upside down, there are funhouse attractions, bumper cars, the Eifel-Coaster Summer Toboggan Run and my personal favorite ride, the Gondorf Pirate Battle, where you ride in a bumper boat and shoot water at other ships and unlucky passersby.



© EIFELPARK



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For the more adventurous readers who don't freak out about plummeting to their doom, there is the Top Dog, which uses centrifugal force to loop you around 50 meters up in the air and the Pirate Island Whitewater Railway with not one, but two rapid 14-meter drops.

What I love about Eifelpark is that it combines the thrills of a theme park with the exotic and wild animals of a zoo. Not only can you see the animals, but there is also Eifel Farm inside the park, where you can pet and feed the goats. While you cannot pet the bear, you can watch the bear and the lynxes get fed every day at 2 p.m.

If you get hungry during your time at the park, they have food from all over the world to satiate you: Mexican, Italian, burgers, chicken nuggets, schnitzel, steak, bratwursts, poke bowls and a variety of desserts to satisfy any sweet tooth.

During more popular times such as public holidays, weekends and school breaks, there are also a variety of shows onsite to entertain you. I always recommend timing meals around show-times: Ride some rides, eat and then check out a show so lunch doesn't make an unexpected return as you go upside down on Top Dog. Characters named FiLu and Mr. Baldo bring you "The Pirates are Loose" comedy show, Sandro the dog trainer and his amazing hounds put on a performance, and, from June 4-7, 2026, there will be acrobatic stunts and aerial artists from the visiting Purzel's Circus Show.

While you want to visit when the weather is nice, you may also want to return later this year for Eifelpark's seasonal events.



© EIFELPARK

As the sun begins to set earlier in the day in September and October, you can enjoy **Eifelpark Lights**. Scenes, trails, projections and more come to life with the illumination of thousands of colorful lights. For family-friendly spooky fun this October, come out for **Hallownights** featuring fire shows, children's mazes, open-late rides and Halloween-themed lights. They also have five horror mazes for "hardcore" horror fans that are not recommended for children (16+). I, a certified Scaredy Cat™, will also skip out on these horror mazes, but I encourage those of you with a backbone to check them out. Both Hallownights and Eifelpark Lights are separately ticketed events but can be purchased at a discount if bought with a park entrance ticket.

To plan your trip and for more information about Eifelpark, go to eifelpark.de. ■

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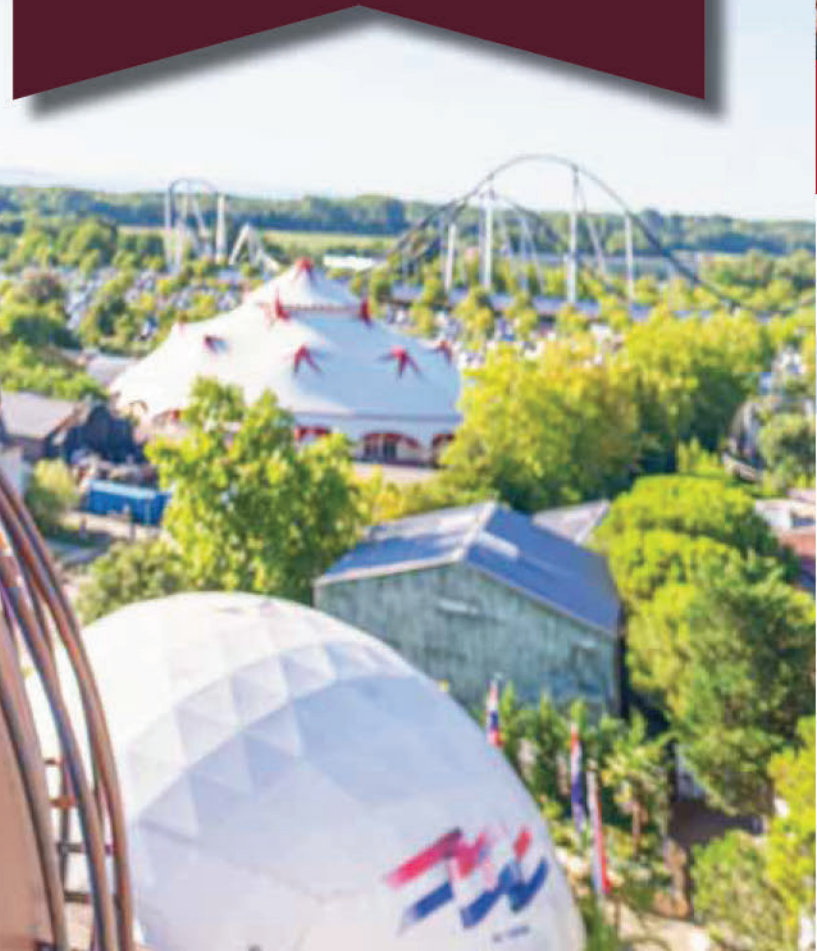


GERMANY'S

BEST THEME PARKS

By Kat Nickola

Sure, everyone has heard of Disneyland Paris, but if you are looking for a park with the same kind of immersive theming, much better rides, reasonable rates and closer proximity, my advice is to visit one of these three stand-out German amusement parks.





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EUROPA-PARK

Europa-Park is, hands-down, the best theme park in Germany. But you don't need to take my word for it; military families have also voted it as the "Best Amusement Park" in the Stars and Stripes "Best of Germany" poll for over a decade. The park has won numerous accolades for their coasters, performances, theming, family-friendliness and is a 10-time winner of the Golden Ticket Award for "Best Theme Park Worldwide."

There are 20 themed worlds at Europa-Park, with each highlighting multiple dimensions of a particular culture or country. The Icelandic area (my favorite) has the geothermal-themed Blue Fire Megacoaster, a cute downtown seaport with water rides and the incredible WODAN—a Viking mythology-themed wooden coaster. The park does an amazing job of combining high-thrill rides with calm slower rides for small kids and pretty playgrounds tucked into the tree-filled grounds. Shows are also top notch and my parents (yes, I dragged them along) loved the horse spectacle in the Spanish Arena. This year, Europa-Park is opening a brand-new Monaco world with Formula 1 Grand Prix coaster, yacht marina and a cirque show.

Rust, Germany hosts Europa-Park and is surprisingly well stocked for such a tiny town. It is full of apartment rentals (*ferienwohnung*) and small hotels. We've always found a place within walking distance of the park entrance. Europa-Park also offers six hotels and a campground, whose patrons get benefits like pre-opening hours and a dedicated entrance.



© EUROPA-PARK GMBH & CO MACK KG



PHOTO BY KAT NICKOLA



KAT'S TIPS FOR YOUR VISITS

Europa-Park

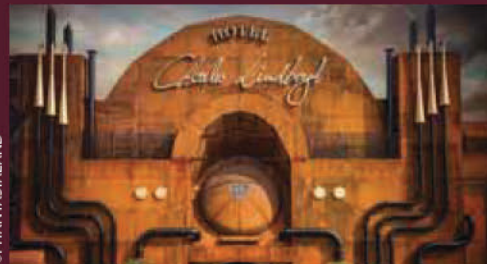
Book tickets ahead of time at www.europapark.de, and consider a second day to spend at the affiliated Rulantica water park. I highly recommend downloading the app to store tickets, see line times, shows and to queue virtually for some of the larger rides.



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Phantasialand

Book tickets and hotels at www.phantasialand.de, and download the Phantasialand app to see waiting times and show details live in the park.



© PHANTASIALAND



PHANTASIALAND

My colleague here at Stars and Stripes disagrees on my rankings and thinks Phantasialand should be #1 in Germany. Her reasoning is justified. This place is incredible if you are happy to have fewer rides in exchange for fully-immersive theming. Spread across six distinctive fantastical worlds, Phantasialand takes scenic storytelling to the next level. It won the "Most Immersive Theme Park in Europe" award from Parkscout in addition to honors for rides, events, coasters and hotels.

The worlds in Phantasialand lean into the imaginary and fanciful. This is especially true in the park's newest area: Rookburgh. Contained within a steam-punk town of floating dirigibles and 1800s-esque travel trunks is the world's longest flying coaster: F.L.Y. It is a super smooth ride even with two high-speed launches and a fun transition from sitting to flying. Each world at the park



© LEGOLAND DEUTSCHLAND



©PHANTASIALAND

has at least one major ride to keep adventure-seekers happy. There are also plenty of places for low-stakes thrills, especially in the fantasy world. My favorite area is the Africa region with its Black Mamba coaster snaking around the walkways and the Adventure Trail my family loves to race through.

Phantasialand is located in Brühl, tucked in the countryside between Köln and Bonn with convenient public transit connections, meaning it can be a day trip from either city. However, if you can splurge for one of the on-site hotels, do it. They are highly themed and integrated into the park. The Hotel Charles Lindbergh won "Europe's Best Theme Hotel," jumping into the deep end of steampunk even on the booking page where you reserve aeronaut cabins and become members of the Explorers Society.



LEGOLAND® Deutschland

Get tickets and resort reservations for LEGOLAND® Deutschland at www.legoland.de, and download the app for ticket storage, wait times, shows and an augmented reality game to find hidden creatures in the Mythica land.

©LEGOLAND DEUTSCHLAND



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LEGOLAND® DEUTSCHLAND

If you want a park tied to recognizable characters, shows and products, LEGOLAND® Deutschland is for you. Part of the LEGOLAND® chain of parks, the German location sets itself apart with its massive Miniland that includes many of the world's biggest LEGO® builds. This is the perfect park for a family of brick builders.

LEGOLAND® is unique on this list in offering a family-focused amusement park. All the staples: coasters, rides, shows and restaurants are designed for a variety of ages, and there are a lot of places to play and explore in 11 themed zones. If your kids make you watch every single episode of NINJAGO® like mine, be sure to go meet La-Lloyd and your other favorite characters in their ninja world. LEGOLAND® Deutschland's newest ride is the Maximus family coaster, built for brave kids as young as 6 years old who are ready to take on some speed and corkscrews. The park also recently announced that an entirely new Harry Potter-themed area and hotel are in the works.

Super unique to the Germany LEGOLAND® is the extensive Holiday Village that makes it a true resort destination. I highly recommend staying at the village, giving your family the chance to explore its 16 playgrounds, especially the massive pirate ship. There are themed hotel, cabin or camping options.

For families with toddlers, it's good to know that adjacent to LEGOLAND® is the Peppa Pig Park. This place is ideal for little Peppa fans. All the attractions are sized for kids aged from 2 to 5 years old, with solo and parent-child rides. It is not affiliated with LEGOLAND®, but they do offer a "Brick and Pig Adventure" discounted two-day ticket for both parks. ■



10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT ROAD TRIPPING WITH KIDS

By Tamala Malerk

Driving to your theme park destination or your next vacation? [Here are 10 things to keep kids occupied on the ride.](#)



1. START SMALL

If all your kids are used to is a neighborhood trip to the store, try branching out on two to three-hour trips and then maybe an overnight trip before venturing out on a long-distance trip.

2. GIVE THE KIDS TASKS

Before you go, give each kid an age-appropriate checklist to get them more involved with the whole experience. For example, put one kid in charge of making sure everyone has underwear. (Also, double-check everyone's checklist before final takeoff).

3. SNACKS

Pack finger-friendly snacks that are a mix of healthy items and treats. Have the kids help you pick out what snacks you pack so they feel more in control. Make a "road trip" trail mix with the kids that is a blend of healthy and sweet that will make even the pickiest eaters smile.

4. TRAVEL AT NIGHT

If you've got really small children, traveling after bedtime can help kids sleep along the way. Eat a nice hearty dinner and pack their favorite movie to watch before they fall asleep.

5. CHANGE UP THE ENTERTAINMENT

Movies and shows can get old quickly for short attention spans. Bring along travel-friendly games and activities such as crossword puzzles or word searches. Have the kids pick out books from the library before you go.

6. ROAD TRIP BINGO

Find or create some road trip Bingo cards of things and places everyone might see on the drive (i.e., dog in another vehicle, a McDonalds, etc.). Also, teach kids the license plate game (the international version is fun over here in Europe).

7. HOPE FOR THE BEST; PREPARE FOR THE WORST

Pack plenty of sanitation wipes, rubber gloves, hand sanitizer, sickness bags and towels. Older kids (and adults unfamiliar with where the nearest rest stop is) might appreciate a portable potty kit like the one from GoGirl or even a small portable toilet.

8. PLAN YOUR STOPS

Is the world's largest twine ball five minutes off your route? Why not stop, stretch your legs, eat a sandwich and take a pic for the Gram (or Grandma)? Educate kids about the places you'll stop along the way to ramp up the excitement.

9. VARY UP THE ACCOMMODATIONS

Stay at a cabin in a campground one night and maybe the next night stay at a hotel with a pool. Make the overnight just as exciting (if not more) than daytime travel stops.

10. CREATE A REWARD SYSTEM

Did the kids go three hours without fighting? Reward them with a pre-planned toy, a small activity of their choice or maybe a candy or popcorn snack to go with their next movie. ■

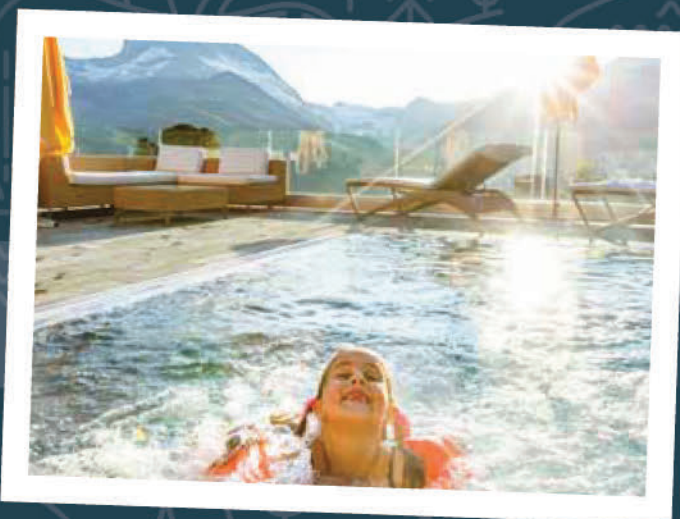




PHOTO BY Stephanie Logue



Photographer Stephanie Logue took the thrill and adventure of theme parks to new heights by jumping out of a plane and sailing over the Swiss Alps. This daring photo captures the moment her parachute opened.

Interlaken, Switzerland is known for skydiving and paragliding. Not only does it have breathtaking geography to behold on the way down, but it also has ideal conditions for aerial activities. The mountain peaks provide a protected microclimate that creates abundant and predictable thermals (rising columns of warm air), allowing for smooth flights. ■



We're curious about spooky local haunts and scares you've experienced in Europe. Bonus points if there is a ghost story behind your photo. Send us Your Snapshot for a chance to be featured in a "What's Up" magazine!



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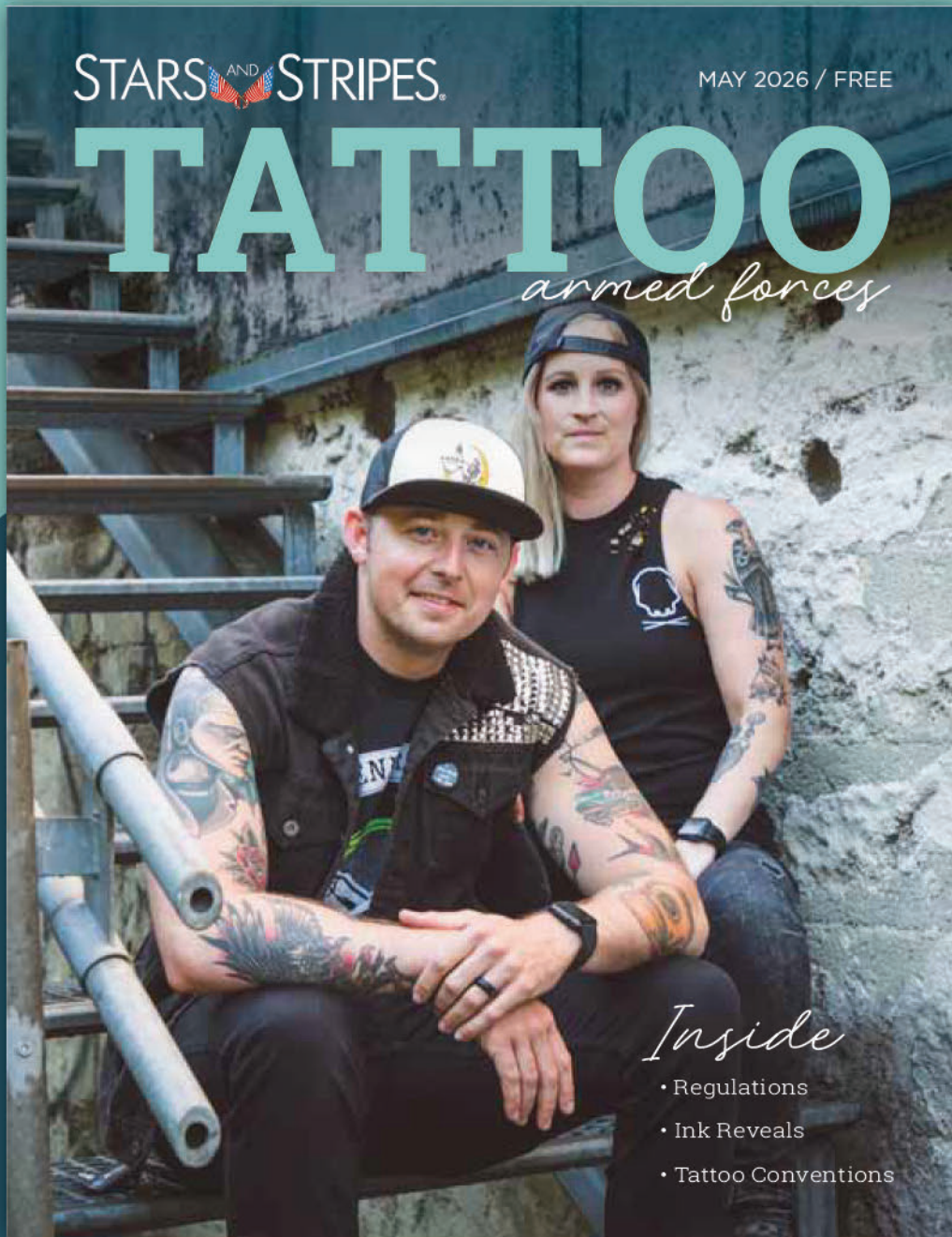
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