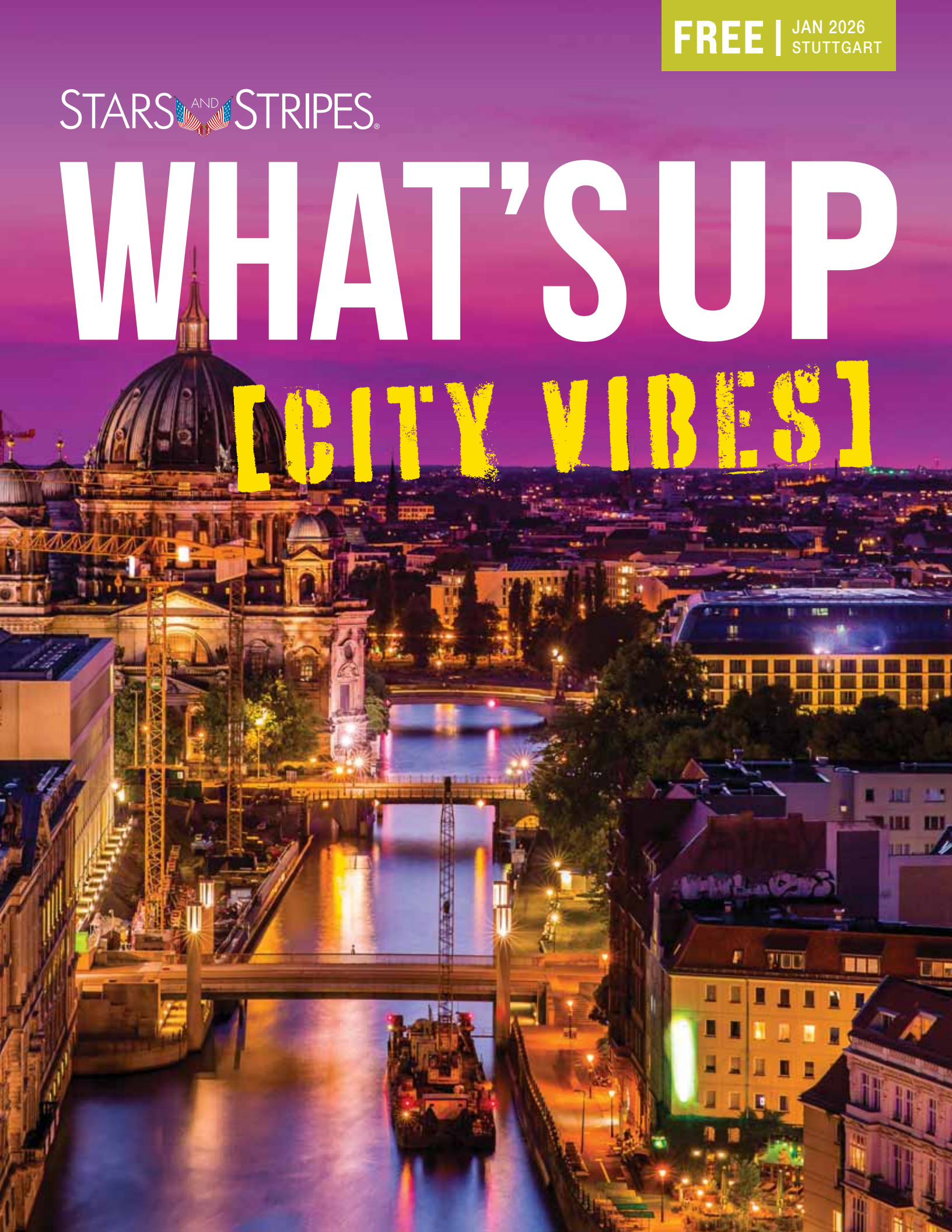


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PLAN AHEAD

By Katie Wells



BAVARIA

BavariaCon 2026, Munich | Feb 14–15, 2026

“Pack your dice bag, grab your little brother, and then it’s off to... **BavariaCon 2026!**” This event is for everyone: from those curious to learn more about tabletop gaming and role-playing games to serious gamers. Special role-playing sessions are held for kids. Visitors can explore Artist Alley, sign up for role-playing sessions led by game masters, shop plenty of vendors to stock up on loot and attend a workshop or reading from special guests. Last year’s event sold out, so be sure to secure your tickets early.



KAISERSLAUTERN

Gimmeldinger Almond Blossom Festival | Feb. 21–April 6, 2026

Every year, the soft pink *Pfälzer Mandelblüte*, or Palatinate almond blossoms, line the German Wine Street. You can take a self-guided stroll or bike ride along the route, which is 100 kilometers from Bockenheim through the wineries in the Palatinate to Schweigen Rechtenbach. The main event is the Gimmeldinger Almond Blossom Festival, where visitors are invited to walk along the pink trail of more than 2,000 trees. Winegrowers, restaurateurs and other vendors set up stalls to offer regional wines like fitting pink Rosé and almond-inspired delicacies.



SPANGDAHLEM

Cologne Carnival | Feb. 12–18, 2026

This week-long event is a staple in German culture. For six days before Lent, there will be parades, parties and balls. While all the days are packed with costumes and fun, the highlight is the **Rose Monday Parade** on Feb. 16, which has been one of the largest parades in Germany since 1823. Enjoy watching miles of dance performances, foot groups and decorated floats. Listen to music by the “*Blaue Funken*” while trying to catch sweets and flowers thrown by the parade members.



STUTTGART

Stuttgart International Bach Festival | March 13–28, 2026

This annual festival of classical music is presented by the International Bach Academy. Famous Baroque composer, Johann Sebastian Bach was a German musician. The 15-day event showcases aspiring and seasoned musicians from around the world performing Bach’s music along with the works that inspired him. There will be soloists and ensembles. In 2025, the theme was “Bach and Latin America.” 2026’s theme is yet to be determined; however, it is recommended to purchase your tickets in advanced.



WIESBADEN

23rd Wiesbaden Easter Market | March 20–22, 2026

The Hesse region is known for its Batik eggs, where beeswax is used to resist the dyes to create interesting patterns and designs. At the Easter market, you can enjoy shopping from 70 stalls for hand-painted eggs and Easter decorations. There is also a craft and fabric market to explore. Stilt walkers and Easter bunnies will hand out candy, and kids can ride the carousel, get their faces painted or participate in crafting activities. Frankfurt will also have an Easter market around this time, located at the Dominican Monastery. ■



To see what is happening near you, check out the Your Community section on our website by scanning the QR code.

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©FESTKOMITEE KÖLNER KARNEVAL

SPOT
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ON...

Köln Karneval

By Kat Nickola

Around the world, Christians of various traditions party hard before the somber period of Lent. It may be called Carnival in Rio or Mardi Gras in New Orleans, but in the Rhineland of Germany it is called *Karneval*, in Bavaria it is *Fasching* and in Baden-Württemberg this celebration is known as *Fastnacht*.

The city of Köln (Cologne), however, hosts the biggest Karneval in Germany, and this place does not hold back. It is a must to be dressed up in some kind of crazy costume, especially for the biggest event: the *Rosenmontag* (Rose Monday) parade, held this year on Feb. 16, 2026.

In Köln, the Karneval cheer is “Alaaf!” It is short for “All af Kölle,” which means everything (all) below Cologne. Yell this at floats as they pass by and you can expect candy, or maybe even a rose, to be thrown in your direction. ■

GERMAN WORD OF THE MONTH

Schnapsidee (noun) *shnawps-i-deh*
Literal translation: Schnapps idea
Meaning: A crazy idea that seems like something you would come up with after drinking way too much alcohol. It seemed great at the time; now, not so much.

Germany’s biggest Karneval and Fasching celebrations





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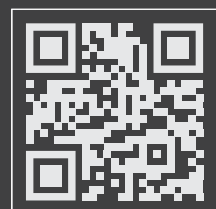
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WANDERING IN WÜRZBURG

By Katie Wells

Baroque architecture, rooms draped in royal adornment, a wine bridge and a historical fortress. All of this can be found in Würzburg, Germany, a charming Bavarian city with a dynamic buzz. It is an emblem of history, having a Celtic origin, briefly serving as the unofficial capital of the Holy Roman Empire and surviving extensive bombing during World War II.



ROYALTY AND GARDENS

I began my day by parking in front of the **Würzburg Residence**, one of Bavaria's most extravagant palaces. Before I reached the entrance, I was drawn to an open gate, leading into an extensive garden that was free to enter. Along the sculpted paths, I found hidden artworks—fantastical stone-carved characters like a faun playing a pan flute at the base of dense, manicured hedges. I spied a row of benches under some shady trees and sat for a while admiring the flowers and views of the Baroque facade of the residence. Behind the residence, the garden expanded into a labyrinth of pathways, fountains, groves and stairs. I could have spent my entire day amongst the lush greenery, but alas, I still wanted to view inside and later, get a sense of the city.

I paid my 10€ entry fee and ascended a grand staircase where a fresco of horses and chariots danced across the ceiling. It was painted by Venetian artist Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and is considered the largest fresco in the world. Each room in the residence had lavish decor. Some included: impressive murals stretched across the walls, marble columns with designs dripping down to the floors and one Southern Imperial apartment was nearly entirely adorned with mirrors trimmed in gold. One of my favorite rooms, a Northern Imperial apartment, was coated in a rich green lacquer. The residence oozed royalty—a perfect accumulation of Baroque, Rococo and Neoclassical design.

KAFFEE, BRÖTCHEN AND BRIDGE PUB

After touring the residence, I made my way through the city for a coffee break. There were plenty of cafés and cute shops. I settled on **Brötzeitbar**, where instead of the traditional *Kaffee und Kuchen*, coffee with spreads on bread like an open-faced sandwich were served. The shop owner did have a couple of pastry selections, which is what I was craving. I tried a gluten-free lemon almond cake. The lemon frosting paired perfectly with the latte I ordered. As I continued my journey, I saw another café offering *Brötchen und Kaffee*, perhaps a new tradition in Würzburg. About a 20-minute walk from the residence, I climbed some steps leading to the **Alte Mainbrücke** (Old Main Bridge) and the **Brückenschoppen** (Bridge pub). To me, this felt like the heart of the city—a place where locals and tourists gathered, enjoying the views over the Main River, sipping on the specialty bridge wine and soaking up some sunshine.

THE MARIENBERG FORTRESS

The bridge leads to the **Marienberg Fortress**, a quaint castle perched atop a hill of vineyards. A symbol of Würzburg, it was the original castle on the Marienberg settled during Bronze Age. Prince-bishops resided there prior to the Würzburg Residence. Short on time, I admired the fortress from the bridge. If I had been able to, I would have hiked up the hill to visit the **Museum of Franconia** to see impressive artworks such as the world's largest collection of Riemenschneider sculptures, the bronze cult chariot from Acholshausen and paintings by masters like Tiepolo. Then, I might have ended the day with a coffee or Bavarian-style beer at the cafe at the top. This might be the best spot for panoramic views of the river and the entire city. I imagine at sunset it would be especially beautiful to look out at all the rich history and culture you experienced that day. ■



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Sylvia Holzapfel



Meet Germany's CITIES

With distinct personalities, each urban center has a different vibe.

By Kat Nickola

Let's say you just moved to Germany and were invited to a house party. It's time to get to know the locals and find out where you fit in, and Germany's most approachable cities have stopped by to introduce themselves. Perhaps you'll talk shop all evening with Stuttgart, reminisce alongside Nuremberg or dance the night away with Berlin. Grab a drink and mingle! You may just find a city that speaks to you.

BERLIN

Your edgy, cool older cousin that you hope will invite you to come along anywhere anytime, ever.

Berlin has a storied past and isn't ashamed to recognize it, but that isn't what defines this city. This place is all about being intensely authentic and moving forward. It's the metropolis that embraces some of Germany's most distinctive restaurants and shopping, art and night-clubs, with special venues for any subculture imaginable. It is also full of evocative historical WWII sites that can leave you feeling ruefully reflective. There are over 200 museums in Berlin, each telling a unique story as varied as the city itself.

Tourism: www.visitberlin.de

Transit: BVG www.bvg.de



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HAMBURG

That creative, sophisticated musician acquaintance who only travels the world by boat.

Hamburg has made dockside warehouses into heritage sites and old brick offices into architectural marvels. This port city has water everywhere, from canals and lakes to a riverfront harbor town, you can't visit without taking a boat of some kind. The port still connects Germany to the world with container ships plying up and down the Elbe River. Hamburg is also the hub for musicals, with a vibrant theater scene offering everything from big glitzy productions to tiny experimental stages.

Tourism: www.hamburg-travel.com
Transit: HVV www.hvv.de



COLOGNE

A quiet, nice professor who you've heard is secretly notorious for uninhibited partying once a year.

Cologne, *Köln* in German, still has the half-circle shape of its original Roman walls. Nestled against the Rhine River, there is history galore and a true commitment to maintaining the medieval tradition of partying hard. Visitors are in for a good time during those dark months between Christmas and Ash Wednesday during Cologne's fifth season: Karneval. Sure, the cathedral looms large (it is a must-see), but just around the corner you'll find an old town full of cozy pubs where you can drink a Kölsch with your newest friend.

Tourism: www.cologne-tourism.com
Transit: KVB www.kvb.koeln



FRANKFURT

Your banker buddy who gets tickets to the best concerts and seats at the best restaurants.

Frankfurt is often the first German city newcomers encounter, but this place is more than just an airport. Surrounded by steel and glass skyscrapers full of busy people, this place has a modern vibe and all the urban perks you want like a constant flow of musical acts, incredible restaurant options, big festivals and museums of all kinds.

Tourism: www.visitfrankfurt.travel
Transit: RMV www.rmv.de



STUTT GART

This factory manager friend will talk cars all night, but don't worry, he'll make sure your wine gets topped off.

Stuttgart is off the rails with manufacturing, making it a super cool place to nerd out on everything from car engines to luxury vehicles. Both Mercedes and Porsche are vying for your attention, and a factory tour here is really a walk through the ultra-modern world of robots and technology. It's not all hard work, though. Stuttgart's financial success translates into a vibrant downtown and a city that throws some of Germany's biggest parties, with folk festivals that bring the region's outstanding beer and wine to the masses.

Tourism: www.stuttgart-tourist.de
Transit: VVS www.vvs.de



NUREMBERG

The older librarian neighbor who loves yapping about history and antiques to anyone who listens.

Nuremberg, *Nürnberg* in German, is one of Germany's travel hotspots. However, outside of prime summer tourist season or peak Christmas market time, a slower pace makes wandering the medieval city walls, stone castle and cute old town a pleasant, nostalgic experience. It's not all gingerbread, though. The city saw huge Nazi rallies and propaganda campaigns, and the many WWII historical sites have been preserved to acknowledge and inform.

Tourism: tourismus.nuernberg.de
Transit: VGN www.vgn.de



MUNICH

Your loud IT tech friend who is constantly at conferences, football matches and beer fests.

Munich goes BIG. Their football club, FC Bayern, is a top-tier record holder. The world's largest beer festival, Oktoberfest, brings millions of visitors yearly. And, Munich, *München* in German, has huge museums of science and technology, art and history, that attract thinkers of all kinds. But under all that massive reputation is a clean, comfortable, city that makes way for pedestrians and bikes and offers small-town vibes in pocket neighborhoods full of cafes and parks.

Tourism: www.munich.travel
Transit: MVV www.mvv-muenchen.de



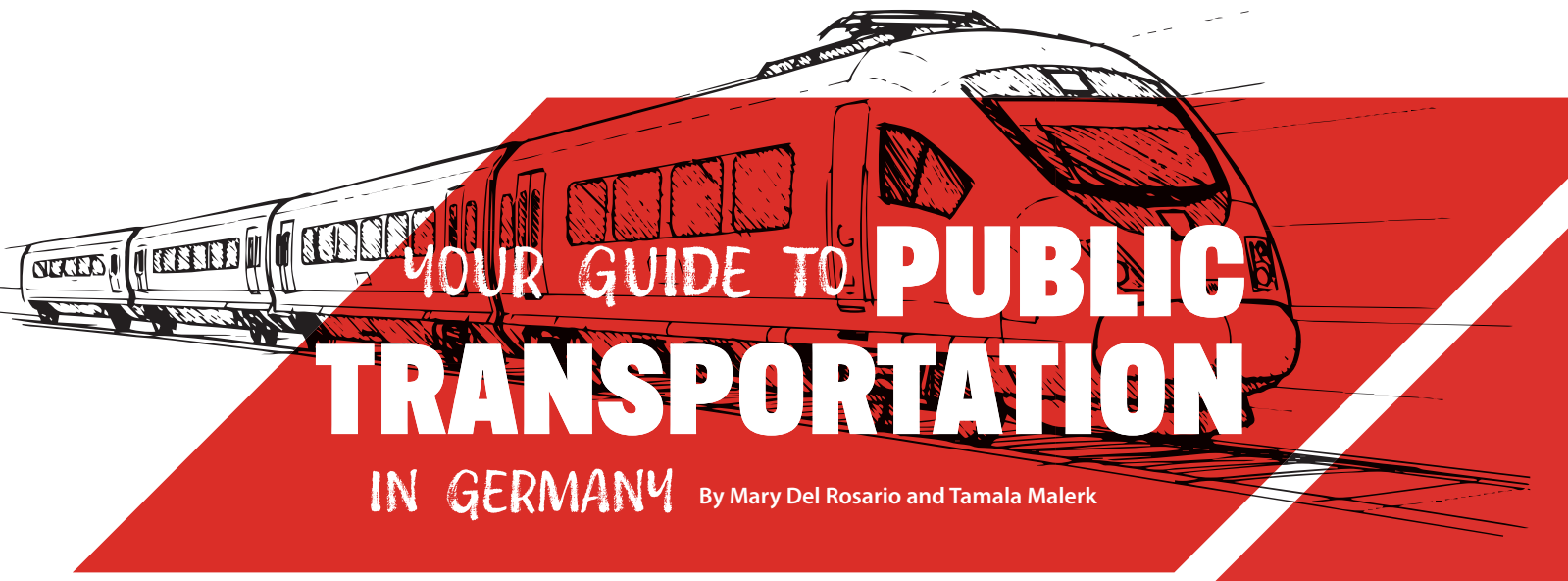
TAKE THE TRAIN

It may be tempting to drive to your new favorite city, but taking the train is often the best way to experience urban life. Many German cities have air quality restrictions requiring you to have a green low-emission vehicle compliance sticker in the *Umweltzone*. In addition, city parking is expensive and can be stressful with busy streets and underground parking lots designed for small cars.

The Deutsche Bahn (int.bahn.de) often offers ticket rates comparable to fuel and parking fees and eliminates concerns about traffic congestion. Kids up to the age of 14 are typically free when their tickets are booked with an adult, and young adults travel at discounted rates. The earlier you book, the cheaper your train fare will be.

For large groups, driving and parking outside the city may be the most cost-effective way to arrive. Using the local transit network can then be quite easy as most cities offer day passes and ticket kiosks in many languages. ■





YOUR GUIDE TO PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IN GERMANY

By Mary Del Rosario and Tamala Malerk

Tired of driving on unfamiliar roads? Planning your next three-day weekend getaway? Relax and soak up the views of Europe as a passenger on the bus, train, trolley and tram.

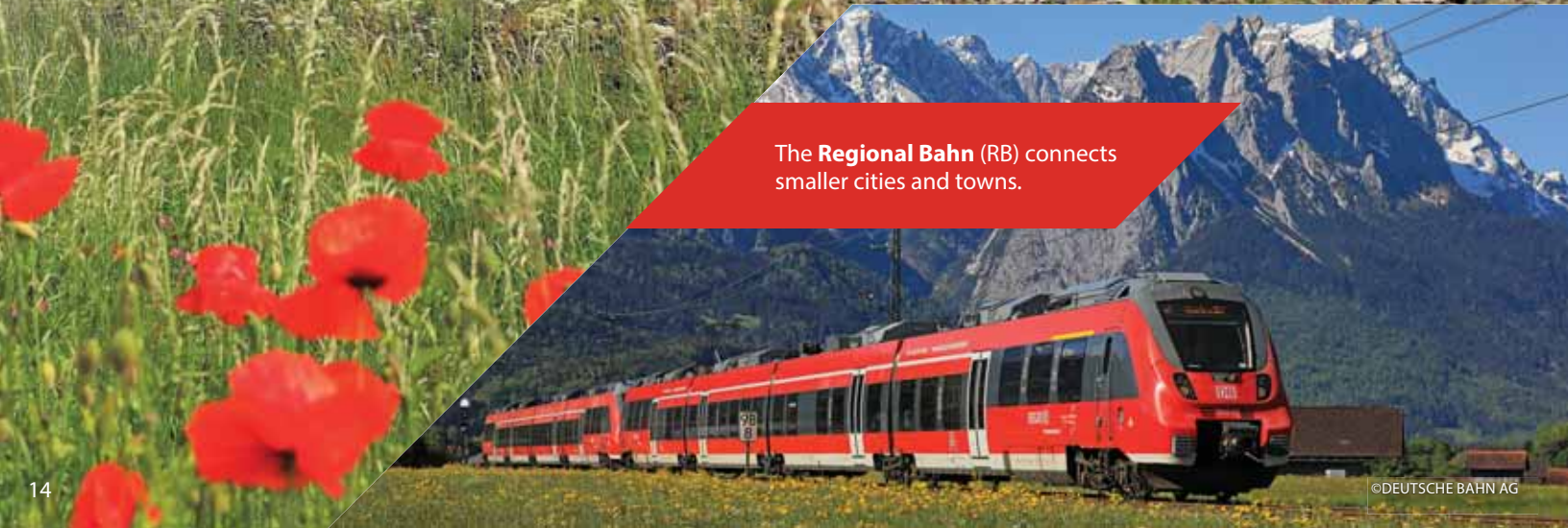
TAKING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ACROSS GERMANY

TRAINS: Germany's rail systems are efficient, comfortable and affordable. You can go to Paris for as little as €44 if you remember to book in advance. The **Deutsche Bahn (DB)** railway system is first-rate, and you can choose from four types of trains depending on your destination, schedule and budget.

The **Inter City Express (ICE)** connects to major European cities, such as Munich, Hamburg and Paris. It is usually the quickest way to get from point A to point B, but it can be expensive. I took the ICE from Mannheim to Berlin, and it cut the commute from a seven-hour drive to a five-hour train ride.



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BUSES: Buses can be an efficient way to get around in the bigger cities. One-way trips can be as cheap as two euros within cities. I discovered it was quicker than driving to use the bus while in Frankfurt.

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The **Regional Express (RE)** connects regional destinations with larger cities.

HELPFUL TIPS: If you are skeptical about public transportation, check out these apps and websites to make your travels in Germany a piece of cake.

DB Navigator is a free app where you can book tickets, get up-to-date information concerning delays/canceled trains, and, best of all, use the fare saver finder to look for the cheapest fares available.

VRN Ticket is a free app for the Rhein-Neckar region which gives real-time schedules for regional buses, pedestrian routes, ticket prices and local traffic. You can find out which bus number to take, when it departs and where to get on/off.

TaxiFareFinder.com is a website that helps those who want to calculate taxi fares between two destinations. For example, the estimated fare from Ramstein Air Base to Kaiserslautern is €30.69.

Purchase rail tickets for long-distance travel at your local station and use a value-added tax (VAT) form to save a percentage on fares within Germany. If you have travel flexibility, check out the last-minute deal section of the Deutsche Bahn website (www.bahn.de).

Google Maps has been indispensable for me when navigating public transportation across Europe. Whether I am on a bus, train or tram, this app informs which routes I can choose from and how many stops will be made. You can even search in advance to plan out the route for the day. If cell service could be an issue, download a local area map prior to travel.

Always carry cash, including small bills. Some buses or trains let you use a credit or debit card to board; however, sometimes only cash is accepted aboard busses and at ticket stands. Often machines will only accept small euro or local bills. ■



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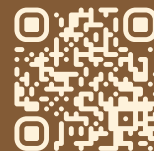
Photo by Lillian Chekouras



Sometimes, the most enriching part of travel is being a quiet observer of small moments. It is easy to forget that the places we visit, rich with must-sees and must-dos, are also someone's home: where they work, grocery shop and go about their day like we do in our own respective places of residence. Thank you to photographer Lillian Chekouras for showing us a simpler side of the Black Forest in **Simmozheim, Germany**, by capturing this quiet moment and the mundanity that connects us all. ■

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