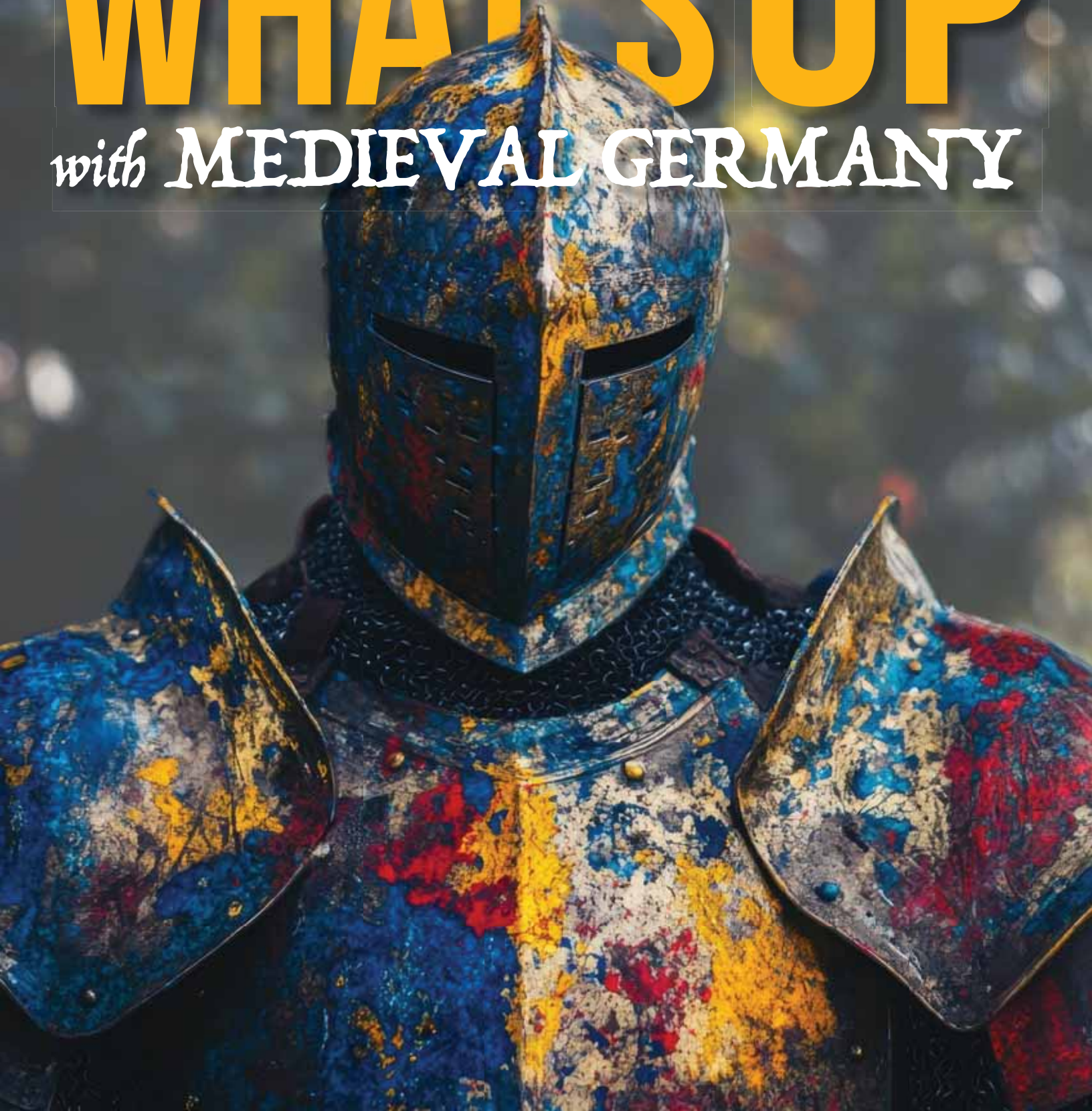


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PLAN AHEAD

By Katie Wells



BAVARIA

Michaelis-Kirchweih Fürth

OCT. 3 – 15, 2025

As declared by the mayor, “Our Michaelis Church Fair proudly and quite rightly bears the venerable title of ‘Queen of Franconian church fairs.’” And rightly so, as the over 900-year-old celebration attracts nearly 1.5 million visitors to the cloverleaf city every year. The stacked program includes many fun and cultural events for visitors of the fair; there will be folk dances, a trombone choir, the annual harvest festival parade (which spans through the entire Fürth city center), cannon fireworks and more. You can try Franconian-style food from the ox or herring roasters as well as the other 60-plus different snack bars. Of course, there are many rides to choose from for children and adults. Couples who are recently married or who plan to be married within the year can enter the Marriage Lottery and win prizes to help them start their married life. Keep an eye out for a very cute sheep mascot in a bright green dress.



KAISERSLAUTERN

Oktoberkerwe

OCT. 17 – 27, 2025

Celebrate all the good things that have happened throughout the current year at a traditional Kerwe festival. Like its May counterpart, the Lautrer Kerwe, is one of Kaiserslautern’s premier annual events. The festival opens with an evening parade, ceremonial keg-tapping and vibrant fireworks. Enjoy festival rides ranging from the “White Wheel” Ferris wheel to more adrenaline-inducing ones like the “Avenger Royal,” which spins and swings riders around (in my opinion, ferociously). Feast on staples like pommes, bratwursts and crepes while shopping at handicraft stands and listening to live music. On Family Wednesday, rides and admission prices are half price and face painting is offered to children for free.



STUTTGART

Cannstatter Volksfest

SEPT. 26 – OCT. 12, 2025

This Autumn fun fair is often referred to as the “Oktoberfest of Stuttgart.” While there is plenty of beer and it is considered the second largest beer celebration in the world after the Munich Oktoberfest, it is historically a celebration of agriculture after the 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia caused a period of crop failure and famine in the area. The first Sunday of the festival kicks off with a 200-year-old tradition, the annual Volksfest Parade. It now spans over four kilometers and is watched by over 250,000 spectators. There will be a variety of traditional carnival rides and festival food staples like beer and brats. Matching the Spring Volksfest, the official mascot of the event, Wasenhasi the rabbit will be hopping around to take pictures with visitors.



WIESBADEN

Autumn Dippemess, Frankfurt

SEPT. 12 – 28, 2025

Send off festival season at this grand finale of a folk festival which dates all the way back to the Middle Ages. Rooted in the same history as Frankfurt’s Spring Dippemess, the fair began as a market for household goods or “*Maamess*” with the focus being earthenware pots or, *Dippe* in Hessian. It eventually inspired the name, “*Dippemess*.” It was once a traveling market until finding its home in Frankfurt in 1968. Try some regional apple wine for liquid courage before hopping on one of many rides like the rollercoasters. If the rides aren’t your speed, enjoy some traditional snacks, while staying firmly on the ground, like warm roasted almonds and candy floss. You can join the crowd gathered around the center festival pavilion and soak in the live music and cozy vibes of the approaching fall. ■

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SPOT
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ON...

Parzival, Germany's Medieval Hero

By Kat Nickola

The Middle Ages wasn't just full of jousting knights and hard-working peasants, there were also artists and poets like Wolfram von Eschenbach.

Wolfram wrote the epic poem of "Parzival," or Percival in English. Yes, that Percival. Sir Percival of round table fame. In this German version of the Arthurian legend, Parzival is a flawed figure who eventually goes on a successful quest for the Holy Grail. Written in the early 1200s, it's one of the numerous expanded-Arthur-universe stories popular in the Middle Ages. There are over 80 original manuscripts of "Parzival" in existence today, and the center four pages have illustrations depicting scenes from the story. ■

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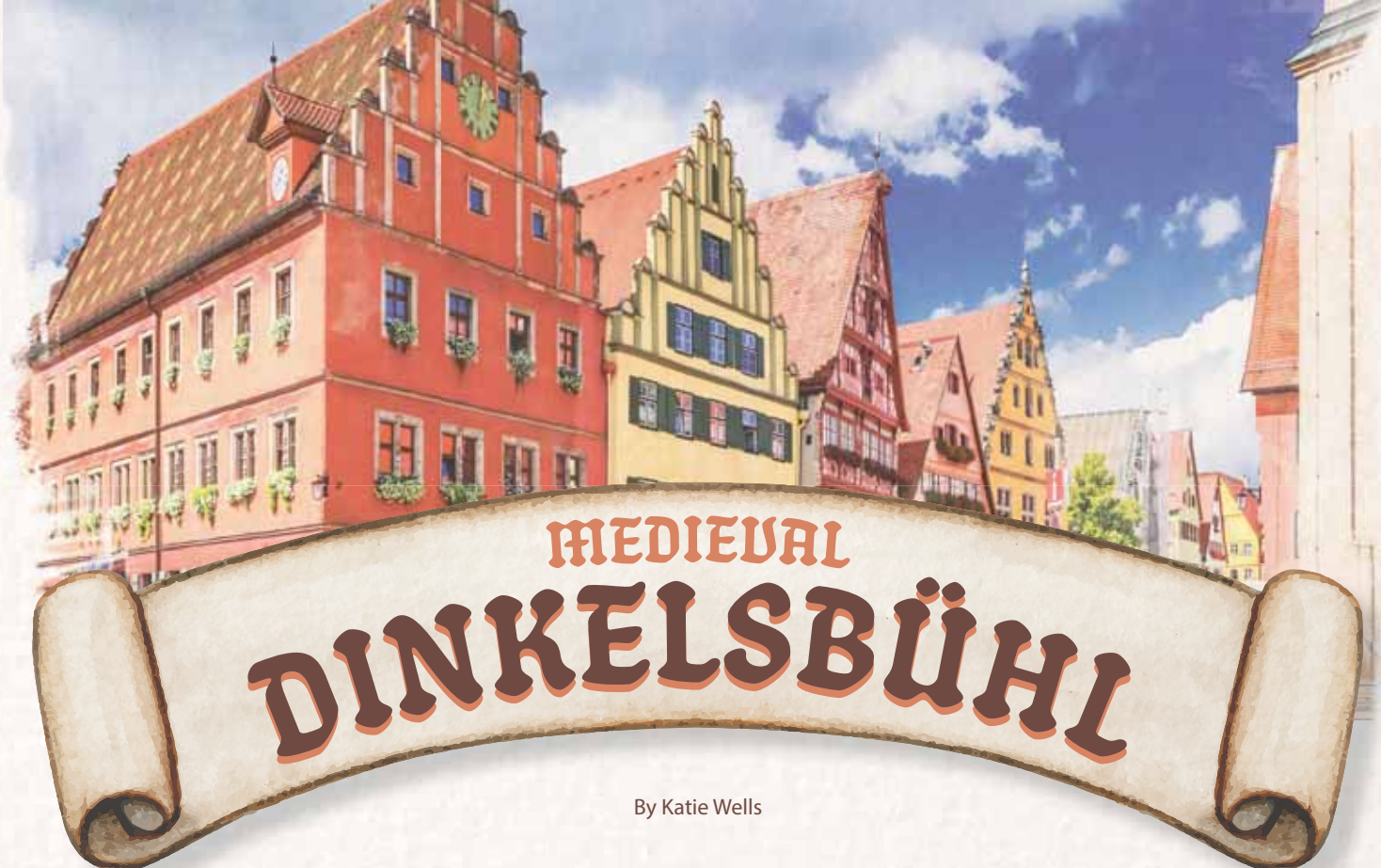
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Sylvia Holzapfel





By Katie Wells

A PRESERVED MEDIEVAL TOWN

The charming medieval town of Dinkelsbühl is tougher than it may appear. While it is highlighted on the **German Romantic Road** and deemed one of the prettiest towns in Bavaria, it has also survived several sieges during the Thirty Years War and the bombings of World War II, coming out nearly unscathed. Because of this, Dinkelsbühl is a historical hidden gem.

Here, you will find a well-preserved town wall, built in 1440, surrounding buildings, patrician houses and half-timbered homes that are 200–600 years old. Signs and business names written in old German script and colorful architecture makes it easy to get a fairytale-esque feel for what living in the Middle Ages may have been like as well as for scenic photos. You can even rent a horse for the day to get around, very medieval indeed.

THE LOCAL LEGEND OF KINDERZECHÉ

July is a wonderful time to visit Dinkelsbühl as the town will be celebrating its premier event, the **Kinderzeche** (children's feast). It is a nearly 400-year-old tradition deriving from the Thirty Years War. Through a town-wide reenactment, Dinkelsbühl celebrates its 1632 surrender to Swedish troops. Children dressed in traditional costumes gather to witness the event and are gifted chocolates and candy. The name "Kinderzeche" pays homage to the child who stood up to the Swedish troops who were threatening to burn the city to the ground.

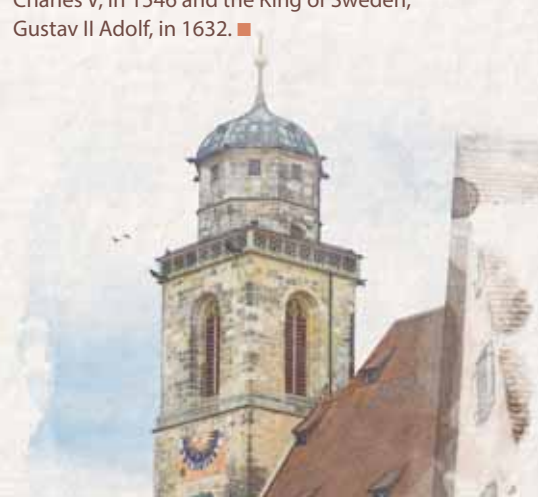
Local legend claims that it was a child who saved the town. The gatekeeper of Dinkelsbühl's daughter, Lore, learned that the Swedish army commander, Colonel Klaus Dietrich was grieving his youngest son's death. Lore bravely gathered a group of children and blocked the Swedish charge. To the Swedes surprise, one boy stood out and approached Dietrich. The boy resembled Dietrich's lost son so strikingly, he decided to spare the town saying, "Your children are the rescuers of Dinkelsbühl. Always remember the debt of thanks you owe them." Thus, the Kinderzeche was born.

In 2025, the festival is occurring July 18–27. Along with the re-enactment, for two weeks, there will be plenty of rides, festival foods and market stalls. For more information, visit [Kinderzeche.de](https://www.kinderzeche.de).

CAN'T MISS SITES

Whether you rent a horse for the day, cycle the length of the city wall or simply stroll along the cobblestone streets, there are plenty of sites to take in. Visitors can climb 222 steps up the tower of the **Church of Saint George** for a panoramic view of the town. The construction of the late gothic church was complete in 1499 and is in the heart of the city. For history buffs, peruse through the **Haus der Geschichte** (House of History) which covers the town's over 800-year-history extensively.

The Weinmarkt (Wine Market) in Dinkelsbühl is unique in that it is not in a central commercial square or rectangle like other cities in Germany, the streets where goods were sold make a funnel shape. Along the Weinmarkt, visitors can admire the different styles of historical houses and the former council tavern that provided accommodations to royal guests like the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, in 1546 and the King of Sweden, Gustav II Adolf, in 1632. ■





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Medieval Germany

Castles and Commoners

©KAT NICKOLA



By Kat Nickola

What is medieval?

Anything having to do with the Middle Ages can be called medieval, and in Germany that translates to a millennium of history. Following the withdrawal of Roman occupiers in 476 AD, central Europe was settled by Germanic tribal groups. It became a time of slow change, with daily life shifting over a thousand years from small village farming to large feudal estates and then the development of towns and cities.

Fragmented states led by local nobility came under varying control of empirical domains like those of Charlemagne and the Holy Roman Empire. Castles were built for protection, knights enlisted for defense and peasants were required to work the land.

It was a fascinating time and it's fun to experience both sides of life: from the castles of nobility to the daily grind of the lowly commoner.



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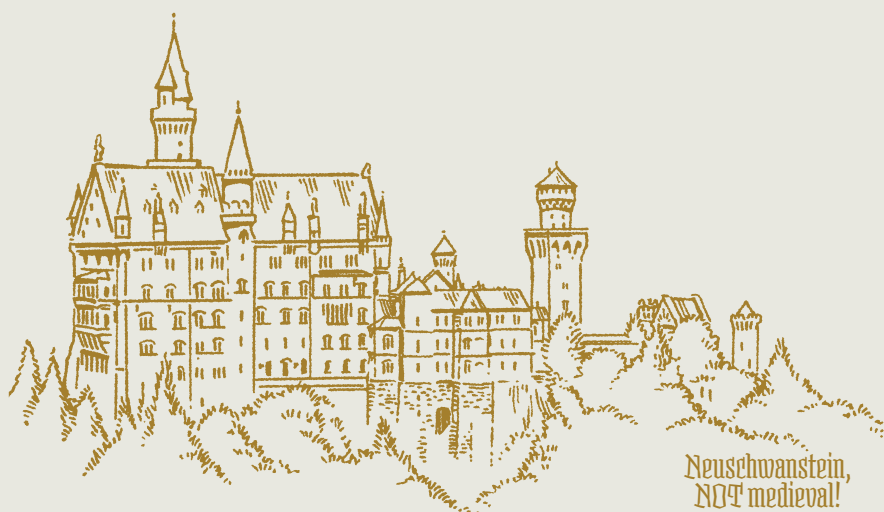


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Neuschwanstein,
NOT medieval!

In parts of Germany, it seems like there is a castle on every hilltop. That is because wealthy landowners began fortifying their estates as their power developed into a ruling noble class. This was especially needed during periods of unrest like the 9th and 10th centuries as the Carolingian Empire crumbled.

Most medieval German castles now lie in ruins. **Burg Eltz**, near the Mosel River, is one of very few that have remained intact since the Middle Ages. Other incredible medieval fortifications like **Heidelberg Castle** or **Nuremberg Castle** have been rebuilt after falling into ruin. Though they appear old, many fancy castles like **Neuschwanstein** and **Lichtenstein Castle** are not medieval; they are from the 1800s when castle creation was all the rage for rich Germans who romanticized the Middle Ages.

But let's get back to the ruins! As an archaeologist, nothing could be more fun to me than a sunny day out traipsing over fallen blocks and exploring 800-year-old tunnels, for free.

South of the KMC is one of my favorite ruins to visit. Above the town of **Dahn**, three subsequent castles were built atop a cliff. They blend together like one giant fortification. With lots of stairs and secret passageways, it is fun (even for my teens) to imagine life for the nobles who called this castle home.

We like to visit the site from west to east, which begins with the oldest castle: **Tanstein**. The entire complex has fascinating spaces carved right out of the rock that are perfect for storytelling. The center castle, **Grafendahn**, appears to emerge from its sandstone cliff base requiring a stair climb up into it. Lastly, we walk along the plateau's edge and up to the roof of **Altdahn** for an impressive view across the forest. In the warm months, we cool off with an ice cream or beverage from the small biergarten nestled near the entrance.

Free castle ruins
(*Burgruine*)
to explore

Schmidtburg

A great day trip from Spangdahlem, Wiesbaden or the KMC area, Schmidtburg is a large ruin perched atop a cliff and secreted away in a river valley. As a bonus, you can camp in the ruins by booking a site at www.soonwaldsteig.de.

Waldeck Castle

About a half hour north of Grafenwöhr, Waldeck is an extensive ruin with a special chapel area. It is also perfectly positioned on the hill for an amazing 360 degree view of the region.

Reußenstein

East of Stuttgart, this picturesque ruin still has walls nearly four floors high, interesting rooms to explore and views down the valley. Plus, there is a nearby waterfall that is easy to hike to.



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Altdahn

Grafendahn

Tanstein

“IT IS FUN (EVEN FOR MY TEENS) TO IMAGINE LIFE FOR THE NOBLES WHO CALLED THIS CASTLE HOME.”

Other Open-Air Museums

Campus Galli

Visit this medieval monastery village south of Stuttgart to see workers actively building using technology from the Middle Ages.

Fränkisches Freilandmuseum

North of Ansbach, this large museum has a special mini medieval village in addition to other historical hamlets from the area.

Ukränenland

Focusing on the very early Middle Ages, this museum in the north of Germany recreates a pre-Christian waterside tribal village.

While life for the nobility is fascinating, let's be real and assume that most of us would have been, at best, medieval commoners. We would have farmed the land and paid our lord in produce or meat; after all, it is his land.

To get a taste for what this life may have been like, I visited the **Hessentpark** north of Frankfurt. This open-air, living-history museum has authentic historical buildings from across Hesse, many of which were built in the later Middle Ages. My family wandered in and out of traditional half-timbered farmhouse, while I marveled at the

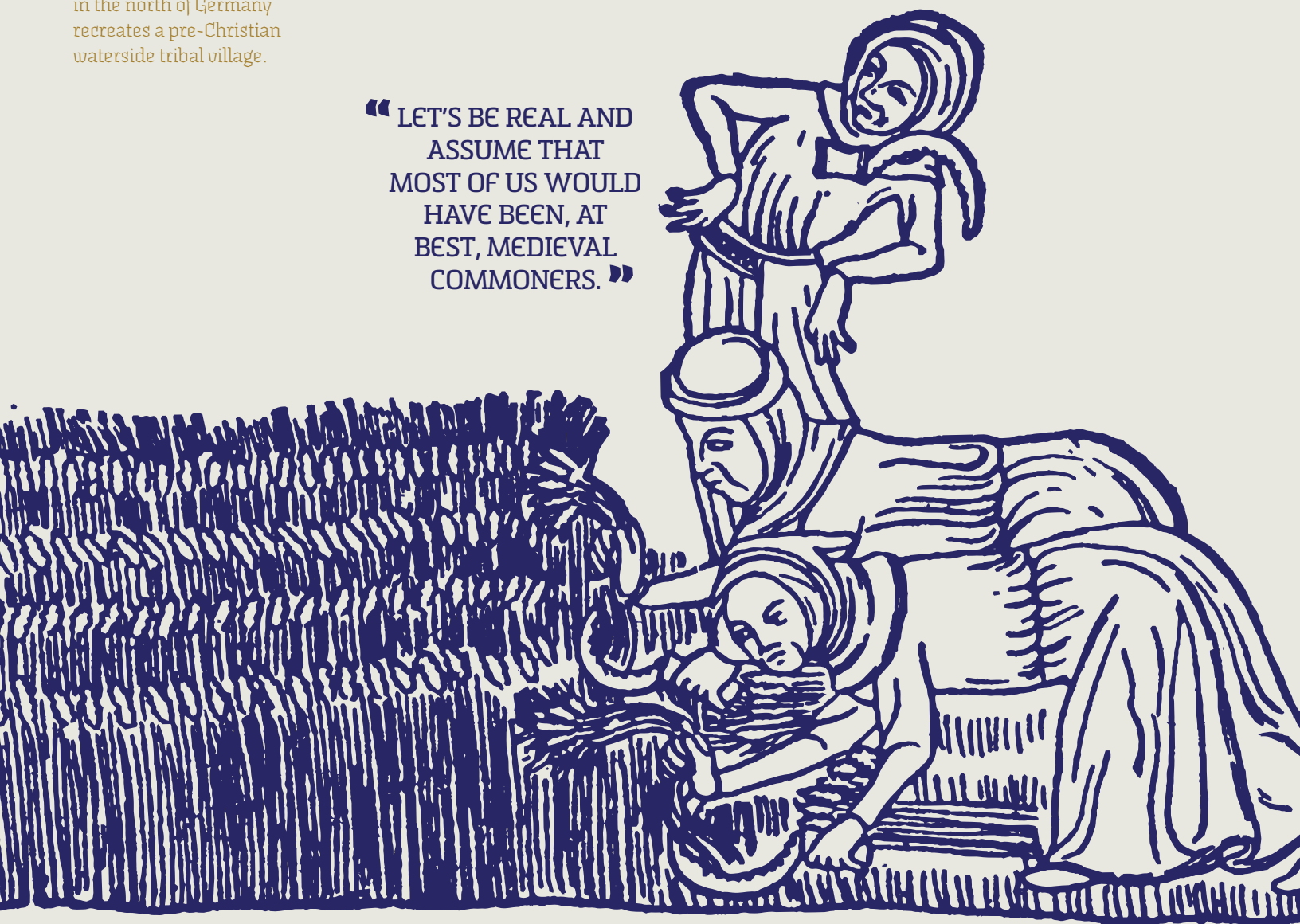
kitchens with their massive open fireplaces and hanging cauldrons.

There are displays that explain agricultural practices, plus heritage species of farm animals like geese, massive pigs, goats, sheep and donkeys. We watched as a weaver crafted baskets and chatted with a washerwoman as she hung out her laundry.

From the agricultural area, we made our way to the market square to grab a snack from the little bakery. It was market villages like these that developed into the colorful, scenic towns and cities of the 17 and 1800s. That medieval heritage is still tangible in modern quaint walled towns like **Rothenburg ab der Tauber** in northern Bavaria, **Bacharach** along the Rhine River or **Esslingen** near Stuttgart. ■

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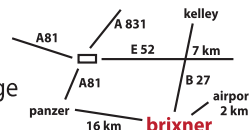
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The Best Medieval Festivals in Germany

By Kat Nickola

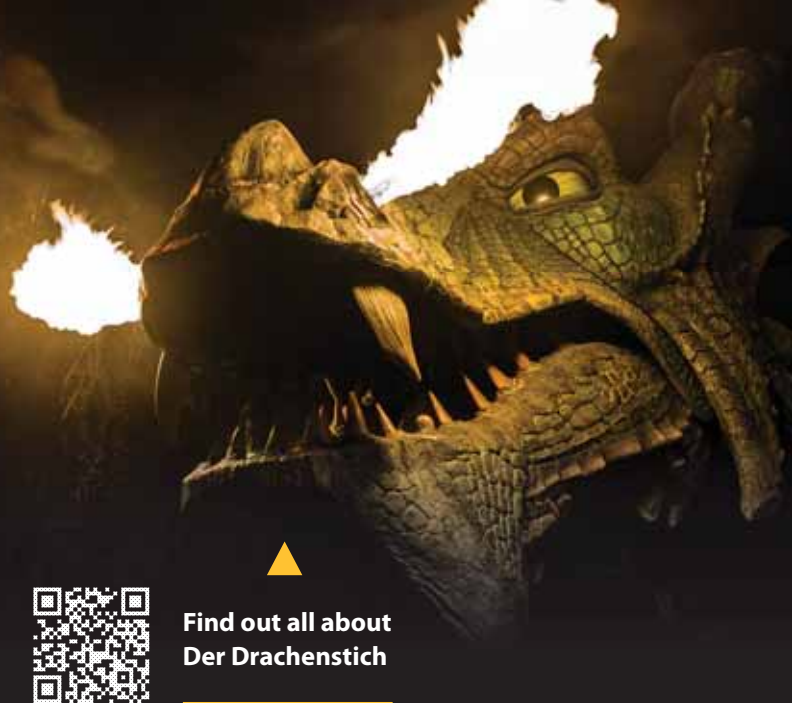


Historically themed festivals are popular in Germany and can replace Christmas markets as a source for weekend fun, food and craft shopping for the rest of the year.

It's not necessary to dress the part for these festivals, but it can be exciting and often brings a discount at entry. Check festival websites to plan costumes for the appropriate time period.

Many European festivals are medieval themed while others are Renaissance based. While these are often grouped together at fairs in the U.S., in Europe the historical difference is recognized. Medieval fairs tend to generally reflect the high to late medieval period (1000–1500s) as a whole with markets, shows, crafts and food. Renaissance fairs will often be a celebration of a particular local battle won in the 1400s–1700s and tend to have more scheduled reenactments.

Most festivals have a camp where reenactment clubs purchase parcels year after year and people come to relive medieval camp life. It's a family affair, and you'll see folks from all walks of life spending their summer holidays dressed as peasants or blacksmiths and even paupers begging for coins. These areas are considered private property and will be roped off to give day-trippers a boundary line for their gawking.



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Niche Festivals

Some festivals have very specific theming; they focus on a single person, group or a unique historical event. At these, you can expect participants to really lean into the historical (or fantastical) accuracy. For example:

- **Elfia** is a fantasy festival of fairies and magic that takes place in the fanciful Kingdom of Elfia. Sept. 20–21, 2025 in Haarzuilens, The Netherlands.
- **Drachenstich** is Germany's oldest festival and pageant. Don't miss tickets to the evening performance of the towns' defeat of the local dragon (played by a world-record-holding robot). August 1–17, 2025 in Furth im Wald, Germany.

Local Festivals

Smaller, local festivals are very fun for day trips. Many castles and villages will have a single weekend fair in the summer. You can buy drinking horns, wooden swords, costumes and all things made of leather and bone at these quaint medieval markets. There is also the chance to drink some mead and get lunch at a food stall before finding a spot to watch a falconry or battle demonstration.

Visit the www.mittelalterkalender.info (German) for an extensive list of festivals in Germany and many surrounding countries.

Big Festivals

There are some massive world-renowned festivals as well. These multi-day events take more planning, and often tickets need to be purchased in advance. They offer numerous markets, performances on multiple stages and huge camps or medieval villages. The **Medieval Fantasy Spectaculum** (spectaculum.de) is a fantasy medieval fair and folk music festival. There are eight locations and dates throughout Germany, with events from April to August 2025.

Whether you choose to dress up, shop the market or just sit back and enjoy the jousting, a visit to a medieval festival is a must-do German adventure. ■



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PHOTO BY

Robert A. Ortiz



The **Reichsburg** (Imperial Castle) at Cochem is over 1,000 years old. It fell into ruin after French invasions in the 1600s but was rebuilt in the 1870s when it was popular for wealthy Germans to own romanticized medieval castles. ■



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