

# The Rhine Valley

## One of the Most Beautiful Cultivated Landscapes in Germany

By Johannes Bardong from Mainz

In 2002, the valley between the towns of Bingen and Koblenz, through which the Rhine River meanders, was named a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The criterion for being included in this illustrious list is a unique environment, the loss of which would be irreplaceable for all mankind. Being one of Germany's outstanding cultural landscapes, it is one of the favorite destinations for tourists. No where are so many medieval castles and fortresses found close together.



Burg Rheinfels near St. Goar

قلعة راين فيلز قرب سانت غور

Forty fortresses and castles crown the peaks of the hills that surround the Rhine Valley and make such a lasting impression through their medieval architecture. When one reaches the hill tops, the view and the splendid peace

can be enjoyed, along with the pleasant humming sounds of the engines of passing ships. And in addition to history and nature, the old fishing villages and sanatoriums exude a charm that cannot be ignored.

### Romantic Rhine – A Natural Destination For Tourists

The craggy cliffs reaching out above the restored castles and the fortresses that ➤



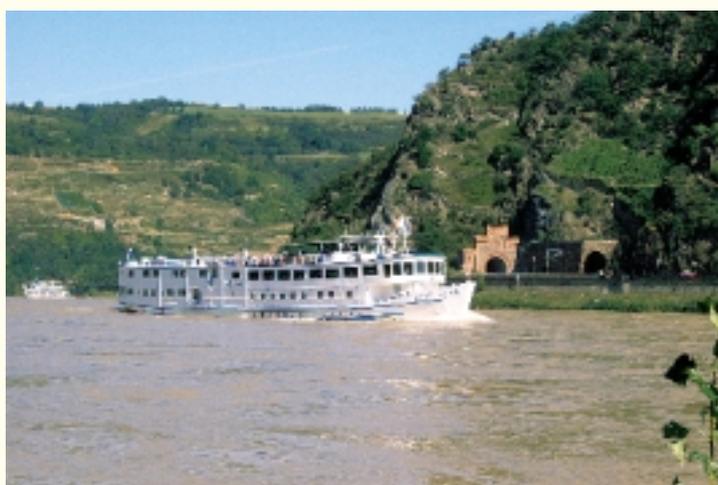
Loreley in the fog

اللورلي في الضباب



Loreley open air theater

مسرح في الفضاء الطلق في لورلي



Seeing the valley on a boat trip

جولة في الوادي بواسطة المركب



Hotel and Fortress in the village of Kaub

فندق وقلعة في قرية كوب

have fallen to ruin appear to be part and parcel of one landscape. Those drawn to romantic surroundings will find exactly what they are looking for in the evidence of a glorious past. Artists, poets, authors and composers made pilgrimages to the hard-to-reach valley with its ruined fortresses. Fascinated by the past, they drew tourists to the valley through their writings and music. The northern border of the Roman Empire in the first centuries of the Common Era became a site of battles in the Middle Ages and in modern times the border between Germany and France. Thus, history was not normally peaceful but it produced its own tourist attractions. After Germany's victory over France in 1871, a statue of Germania, 38 meters tall, a symbol of the newly reestablished German Kaiserreich and an attempt to find a national identity, was

placed on a hill near Rudesheim. A cable car was soon installed, and more than 20 million people from all over the world have reached the monument in this way.

### Power and Property – Fortresses

The many fortresses are evidence of the historical struggles for power and the resulting wars. The earls and dukes of the fortresses, in the Middle Ages owners of the Rhine Valley, were not as interested in experiencing the cultural landscape as in the strategic importance of the area; this included exacting customs from passing ships. Seeped in mythology and history are the many monuments, including the outstanding Burg Pfalzgrafenstein, constructed in the 14th century on a rock island near the city of Kaub in the middle of

the Rhine. There are more than a dozen further positions between Bingen and Koblenz where customs were exacted. Positioned as it was, it was impossible for a ship to slip by unnoticed.

When the fortresses served as fortifications and refuges for the population, profits were made by collecting customs, and by the robber barons attacking passing travelers. Today it is possible to imagine what life was like: the clinking of the coats of armor, the pounding of horses' hooves, the songs of the minstrels.

The fortress Burg Rheinfels towering over St. Goar is the biggest fortress of the Middle Rhine Valley and has many underground tunnels and cellars. Two of the most famous fortresses are the pair Katz and Maus, or Cat and Mouse, in St. Goarshausen. The lords of Burg Katz looked down scornfully upon ➤

the later-built, smaller fortress in their vicinity and came up with the nickname "mouse". Today you will find eagles and falcons being bred and trained in Burg Maus with daily performances for tourists.

## The Rhine – Waterway & Myth

Mainly a transport path for passengers and goods – but in its depths, the Rhine is a place of myths and old wives' tales. According to legend, the daughters of Father Rhine are at the bottom of the river, guarding the Rheingold treasure. Since the mid-19th century, it has been possible to go by ship and later by train back to the Middle Ages. Where the Rhine has dug its way through narrow windings, one comes upon a cliff – the Loreley one of the most visited attractions. Here the valley is a mere 150 meters wide and the canyon-like character of the valley is particularly easy to recognize. A maelstrom, inexplicably deep waters, eddies at this bend made traveling extremely dangerous. Even though the dangerous hurdles of unseen rocks and the treacherous undercurrents

have been done away with, the location has lost none of its magical attraction.

The story goes that a gorgeous woman with long curly blonde hair sat at the top of the cliff combing her hair. The youths in their boats were so stricken by her sight that they lost control of their boats and sank, never to be seen again. Heinrich Heine, a German 19th century poet wrote a poem about Lorely that was put to music by many composers. The legend continues that the beauty, so shaken by her power over the young men, jumped to her death from the peak.

At the top of the cliff there is a visitors' center, an outdoor theater where concerts and plays are presented, amid a fantastic view of the area.

## Hiking – Experiencing Nature The Rheinsteig

A serious hiker has the possibility of a 300-kilometer hike along well-marked paths from Wiesbaden to Bonn. In addition to the possibility of physical activity, the paths take you along the most beautiful and interesting sites and offer rest and recreation, fresh air peace and quiet. Along

narrow and rocky paths, the hiker will be led to unique vantage points and will pass through forests and vineyards.

The Hiking Path is easily accessible by car, train, and bus. There are parking lots for cars along the way and ships bring passengers to starting points. Frankfurt, Hahn and Bonn are three nearby airports. There are numerous possibilities for reaching different points of the Rheinsteig and they are well-signposted. Thus, a short walk or a one-day hike or a longer hike is easily arranged. Local travel offices can be of help in booking overnight accommodation.

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