

Cologne

Overview

Sitting on the shores of the River Rhine is Cologne, Germany's fourth largest city with nearly one million inhabitants. Founded in 38 BC by the Romans it is also one of Germany's oldest cities and takes its name from the Roman settlement of Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium. Cologne is proud to be one of the top economic, cultural and tourism hotspots in the country and is considered to be Germany's "gay capital".

Thanks to the age of the city, Cologne has many and varied historic attractions for its visitors to see, some of which are described in more detail below. With over 30 museums and countless galleries, the city has an abundance of cultural delights on offer. Notable museums include the Kolumba which is built in accordance to the ancient foundations of the shrine of Mary, and the Chocolate Museum for those with a sweet tooth and a sense of humour. Art lovers will definitely not be disappointed with the world class exhibitions to explore; the galleries feature art from medieval times into the modern age. A MuseumsPass valid for two consecutive days can be bought that provides admission into all the municipal venues at discounted rates.

If you fancy a break from sightseeing why not head down to one of Cologne's beautiful city parks? The parks are packed with locals and visitors in the summer who come to relax and sunbathe, play games and feast on barbecues. Even in colder months a stroll through one of the city's outdoor spaces is a treat for the senses with the stunning reds and yellows of the trees in autumn. Many companies offer boat tours on the River Rhine during the milder months, and the sights of Cologne take on a different feel when viewed from the water. Walking tours are also available if you'd rather keep your feet on dry land!

For anyone feeling hungry after all the exploring there are loads of good and inexpensive places to fill up. Traditional Cologne cuisine tends to be quite simple but hearty and very filling and the best places to get an authentic taste experience are the independent breweries in out of the way locations. Full of atmosphere, unlike the larger more well known restaurant chains, the pubs provide good value for money with friendly service. International dishes can also be found in restaurants all over the city and the wide range of eateries (both traditional and international) means there is something available for every budget.

Beer is the drink of choice in Cologne with the local beer Kölsch being the most popular. It is served in small glasses of 0.2L so that it's always fresh but there is no need to keep going to the bar as the majority of pubs employ waiters who will keep you topped up for as long as you wish. Beer lovers should head to one of the traditional breweries in the Altstadt around the Dom for the evening for the huge range of different ales on offer. For a more modern experience Zülpicher Straße or the bohemian quarter of Agnesviertel is where most locals can be found on a busy Saturday night. The bars and pubs often have live music and the atmosphere is always buzzing.