

Fairy Tale Castles and Palaces for Kings and Queens

The Free State of Bavaria is not only the largest federal state of Germany (70,548 km², 12.5 million inhabitants) and one of the oldest states in Europe (history from a 6th century duchy to 19th/20th century kingdom), but it is also the most prosperous and attractive German territory. This has doubled since 1806, when the Holy Roman Empire ended and the regions of Franconia and Swabia were integrated. Since then Bavaria extends from the Alps to the river Main as a link between northwestern and southeastern Europe.



Known for its world renowned manufacturing (MAN, BMW, Audi, Siemens etc), Bavaria is also Germany's leading tourism magnet, pulled off by great sceneries and historic monuments. Amongst them are 45 major castles, palaces, fortresses and residences standing against an Alpine background or being embedded by marvelous gardens, lakes and woodlands.

At the southern terminus of the Romantic Road towers up Neuschwanstein castle. Germany's leading landmark, standing next to Alpine lakes and Hohenschwangau castle, is the romantic interpretation of a fairy-tale like middle-age knight's castle that was copied for Disneyland's Sleeping Beauty Castle. Built by unfortunate King Ludwig II (1845–1886) at the foothill of southern Bavaria's border with Austria in mid 19th century, the castle turned out just as a tourism hotspot immediately after the king's mysterious death. Today, an annual stream of 1.3 million visitors pours in to get a glimpse of some few exotically decorated rooms (Throne Room, Royal Suite, Singers' Hall, Grotto) and paintings paying homage to Richard Wagner.

Another royal castle is the secluded rococo villa Linderhof (1870–1874). Cloistered within prealpine mountains and wooded hunting grounds, a peaceful garden delights with trick fountains, grottoes and Moorish pavilions.

Further east, on a Chiemsee island contrasts the impressive Herrenchiemsee castle. Ludwig II named his royal palace built in 1878 the "Temple of Fame", whose broad state staircase leads up to the Great Hall of Mirrors and large staterooms. Outside, the castle opens to a grandiose court garden that demonstrates the absolute power of the monarch – a true "New Versailles" after the example of the

French King Louis XIV.

A lot more modest, but not less flamboyant, appears the Royal Villa Königshaus am Schachen south of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, the king's hunting castle and mountain refuge. The Swiss-style chalet 1866 m high, enchanted by the Alpine backdrop, saw the eccentric king attracted by the illusion of a far-away orient, as he would dress up in Turkish costumes and lay down on carpets and pillows, while smoking water pipe and sipping on Mocha coffee with his servants disguised as Muslims.



Bavarian rulers have lived and reigned in the centrally located city castle of Munich. Today the Münchner Residenz ("residence") at the end of the old town's pedestrian zone is a complex of six courtyards and museum with 130 rooms. Once in 14th century just a small moated castle, it became in 1506 home of the Wittelsbach dynasty until the end of their reign in 1918.

In walking distance next to the famous Hofbräuhaus (state-court brewery) one arrives at the 750 years old former Imperial castle (alte Hofburg). It is one of Munich's oldest architectural monuments, where the house of Wittelsbach resided before their removal to the new residence on the nearby more open ground.

At the outskirts of old Munich flashes the amazing Nymphenburg castle, a royal summer and later subsidiary residence. Built between 17th and 19th century in Italian baroque style (Agostino Barelli) it has been surrounded by a captivating French style park with artificial canals and spring fountains. Highlights are therefore not only the massive Rococo-decorated Great Hall ("Steinerner Saal"), but also the small park castles hidden in wild forests.

Outside pre-Napoleonic Bavaria, Emperor Frederic Barbarossa (1122-1190) built an impressive castle on an isolated sandstone rock in Franconia. The striking landmark towers above Nürnberg, the modern center of Middle-Franconia and medieval melting pot of craftsmen, traders and inventors. The Imperial Castle has been entirely preserved, including the residential and state rooms in the Palas, the Sinwell ("round") Tower, and the 14th century 47 m Deep Well, which in times of siege was the most important source of water for the castle.

Two other outstanding castles mark the center of Lower-Franconia, the former bishopric town of Würzburg and northern terminus of the Romantic Road. On the site of a former Celtic refuge (ca 1000 BC), Franconian-Thuringian dukes had built a fortress (Festung) above the Main River in 8th century. 500 years later it was turned into a fortified refuge castle and in 17th century encircled with massive

bastions.



The habitual historic residence of the prince–bishop across the river (Residenz) is one of the most important baroque palaces in Europe (UNESCO World Heritage). It was equipped with an astounding staircase in the main entrance hall that shows gigantic frescoes (1752/53) by famous Venetian painter G. B. Tiepolo (the “four continents”). Other outstanding features are the Court Chapel, the State Gallery with Venetian art, and the Court Garden, one of the finest for nature lovers.

At the Austrian border of southeastern Bavaria there towers above the old town of Burghausen (historic landing site of salt boats arriving downstream the River Salzach from the Austrian Alps) one of the largest castle complexes in the world: the 1000 m long Burghausen Castle, built in 1025 by the Wittelsbach rulers on a rocky promontory. Modernized during the 16th century threat of Turkish Ottoman Empire, the mighty gothic fortress with a defiant Palas (ducal private rooms, chapel, knight’s hall) and six courtyards (stables, brewery, bakery, arsenal, Gunsmith Tower, Grain Tower, St. Hedwig Chapel, buildings for officials and craftsmen) was badly damaged during Napoleon wars. With them had come the end of a unique fortress that once served as Bavaria’s second capital and bursary (1504–1802) living from 12 market towns, 17 monasteries, 107 parishes, 252 castles, 1920 villages, 4509 solitude farms ... and thousands of craftsmen, who deserve the great honor of builders of all castle monuments we admire so much.

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