

# Wish upon a Star in Rothenburg

The dreamy town of Rothenburg ob der Tauber ('red fort on the River Tauber'), remotely tucked away in an inviting blanket of earthly glory, has over a thousand years of history packed between its cobbles. Germany's best-preserved medieval town is the very epitome of mythical beauty.

words // Punita Malhotra

There are three Rothenburgs in Germany, but only one Rothenburg ob der Tauber, so a double-check comes in handy before planning a trip. Two train changes from Munich or Nuremberg lead to a deserted little station in the middle of nowhere, just five minutes away from the formidable fortress walls of a delightful doll-house town. Interestingly, this used to be Germany's second largest city during the middle ages, with 6,000 residents then.







The Gerlachtschmiede building at Rothenburg ob der Tauber is an instantly identifiable landmark

**The charm quotient skyrockets at Gerlachtschmiede, an iconic pitstop, thanks to a crooked, ochre-hued, half-timbered building sitting on the fork of Plönlein (Little Square).**

#### **SENSORY DELIGHT**

No surprise that Walt Disney's Geppetto village in Pinocchio was inspired by this little wonderland. It's eye-candy overload...a maze of narrow twisting alleys dripping old-world charm, stuffed with misaligned gabled houses in pretty pastels, red slanting roofs, wooden plank facades and vibrantly flower-bunched windows sills. Each fine detail begging to be captured in the pages of memory.

The charm quotient skyrockets at Gerlachtschmiede, an iconic

pitstop, thanks to a crooked, ochre-hued, half-timbered building sitting on the fork of Plönlein (Little Square). This most photographed location in Rothenburg was reconstructed in 1951, after the original building was destroyed in 1945. Its unique position by the Kobolzell Gate and Siebers Tower, marks the entrance to the town.

Speciality shops and traditional hotels converted out of old houses tempt with their hand-painted signages, ornate iron door knockers, unusual porch

#### **ESSENTIALS**

**COUNTRY**  
Germany

**LANGUAGE**  
German

**CURRENCY**  
Euro

**TEMPERATURE**  
20°C (max), 10°C (min)



Colorful smokers and nutcrackers at a traditional Christmas market in Rothenburg, Germany

adornments, rare oak floor, ceiling beams, ancient doors, creaky stairs and exposed old stone-work. It is easy to be transported into the past at Herrengasse, the popular shopping street, where a cattle market flourished once. Upper floor have bars sticking out with pulleys, used to hoist sacks of grain up and stock food supplies during war or siege. At Käthe Wohlfahrt's flagship store, Christmas Village and Museum, one can learn about the many age old Christmas traditions followed worldwide that originated in Germany, including decorating of Christmas trees.

The ultimate way to soak the senses in the town's thousand-year past is by indulging in a walk along the 12<sup>th</sup> century, 3-km long wall. What a showcase with roof-level views of the jumble of houses, pierced by wooden gables and steeples towering over the streets. Along the wall, several stone plaques memorise donations of people who sponsored its restoration after the tragic WW II bombing. Those seeking a special flashback can hunt out the famous blacksmith shop (now a private residence) near the Woodsman Tower. Dating from second part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it proudly displays a coat of arms made up of blacksmith tools.

## Local INSIGHTS



### A NIGHT TOUR AROUND TOWN

Opt for the Night Watchman Tour that takes you through the dark streets of the walled village. The entertaining guide dons a swirling cloaked costume, black tricorn hat and armed with staff and torch, enacts with gusto, the many salacious and often hilarious stories of Bavarian history.



### LOCAL AND SEASONAL DELICACIES

An organic culinary initiative titled 'Taste of the Tauber', named after the region's primary river, has been launched by many restaurants. Most menus now have a section dedicated to special wines, desserts and food created using fresh seasonal produce from the region.





**During the Imperial City Festival, thousands of costumed locals, parade through the cobbled streets, singing, chanting and playing musical instruments.**



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#### **HISTORIC ENIGMA**

The modest Franciscan Church at Herrengasse is one of the oldest basilicas in Rothenburg, dating back to 1309. Pristine interiors and wooden-slat ceiling, excellent acoustics and an original, wooden rood screen, used to separate the monks from the people back then. A few steps away is the entry gate to the imperial family castle complex of the Hohenstaufens. Only expansive English-style gardens and grey stone ruins survive from the 1356 earthquake destruction. But the highlight is the vantage points with 'pinch-me-is-it-real' views of the green valley, river Tauber weaving through and

the entire townscape with all its red-roofed houses, steeples, towers and turrets. The Rathaus (Town Hall), a grand Gothic-Renaissance styled building and the yellow coloured Clock Tower with its unfailing daily Glockenspiel show have drawn throngs since forever.

The 14<sup>th</sup> century St Jakobskirche (St. Jakob's Church) has fascinating attractions like the Altar of the Holy Blood, Twelve Apostles Altar and 700-year-old stained glass in the East Choir. Outside, people pull the extended left index finger of the statue of James, official saint of the town, to ensure good luck and protection. The finger seems

polished to a gold with endless touches. The scene is enlivened with a spattering of souvenir shops, open-air cafes, gelateries shops and typical German taverns.

#### **ETERNAL TIME TRAP**

Rothenburg takes retro to its chimerical climax during the first weekend of September each year, with the three day long Imperial City Festival. This huge medieval camp features thousands of costumed locals (knights on horseback, masked warriors, monks, kings and queens), carrying torchlights parade through the cobbled streets, singing, chanting and playing musical instruments. Spectacular firework displays, historical plays, night concerts, coin pressing sessions, rope weaving lessons, food and crafts stalls at the medieval market, make it a living time-capsule of history to experience hands-on. ✿