

Cologne, Germany

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## A city that's risen from the ashes

Cologne is Germany's fourth-largest city (after Berlin, Hamburg and Munich) and one of the oldest cities in the country, having been founded by the Romans in the year 38 BC.

History, culture, entertainment, shopping, great places to eat and drink, comfortable hotels in which to stay and affordable air fares to get you there – those are all key elements in the making of a great short break destination and Cologne puts ticks in all the right places.

Cologne is sited on the banks of the mighty River Rhine, a waterway that has served as the country's key commercial artery since Roman times.

This is a truly cosmopolitan metropolis and, with its easy-going, sociable manner, it is often called *the Most Northern Latin City* – yet it manages to remain quintessentially German at the same time.

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Alliance member Roger St. Pierre takes you to Cologne.



### Cologne reborn

Cologne is, of course, now a very different place from what it was 70 years ago when, in the darkest days of World War Two, a British thousand-bomber raid plastered it with incendiary bombs that turned the city into a raging inferno, killing thousands and razing 80 per cent of the buildings to smouldering rubble.

Just like St. Paul's in London, Cologne's massive and truly magnificent cathedral, with its two massive lattice-work spires, survived the destruction and in post war years became a beacon for Cologne's phoenix-like rise from the ashes.



## A personal perspective

# Soak up culture and turn shopping pain to pleasure

By Roger St. Pierre

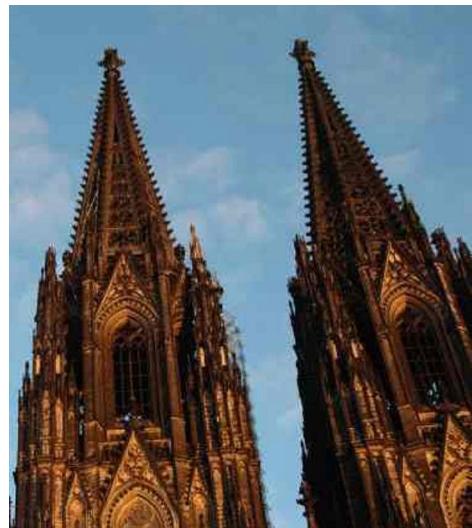


Though the face of the city had changed forever, all the bombs in the world could not destroy the living heartbeat of Cologne, a vibrant city that is now once again among Europe's most popular short break destinations.

Perhaps this desire to shake off the sadder memories of its past explains why Cologne's carnival procession, staged each February, is so unreservedly ebullient and uninhibited – in a wholly untypical manner for the normally rather staid people of North Germany.

## The Köln Dom

Declared a World Heritage Site in 1998, Cologne's High Gothic cathedral (the Köln Dom) draws more than six million visitors a year, making it Germany's premier tourism attraction.



Most of these tourists come to see the magnificent golden shrine of the Three Magi and the cathedral's other precious reliquaries.

Work on building the cathedral commenced in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, but the soaring twin spires that have become Cologne's trademark were not added until the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, to make this the world's third tallest cathedral.

Climb breathlessly to the top of one of the towers for sweeping vistas across the city and its broad river.

## The facts

### Cologne



### Getting to Cologne

#### By air

Frankfurt is Germany's most important international air travel hub.

It is just 50 minutes from Cologne by ICE high-speed train.

Cologne/Bonn Airport (Europe's busiest low-cost air travel hub) is 14.8 km (9.2 mi) southeast of Cologne city centre and 16 km (9.9 mi) northeast of Bonn, the former West German capital.

There are two terminals and Lufthansa's low-cost Germanwings operation uses this as its hub, with flights to 64 European destinations, including Manchester and London Stansted.

Air Berlin also operates many flights in and out of Cologne/Bonn but these are mainly seasonal, catering to the outbound holiday market.

[www.germanwings.com](http://www.germanwings.com)  
[www.airberlin.com](http://www.airberlin.com)

#### By road

Cologne is strategically sited on the German autobahn network and its central location in Europe places it within two to four hours drive of a host of major cities, including Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Prague and Berlin. Highly affordable Eurolines coach services serve the city.

## Cologne Carnival



Cologne Carnival's origins are lost in the proverbial mists of time but what we do know is that on February 10, 1823, the city celebrated the first officially recognised Rose Monday ("Rosenmontag") with the motto "The Enthronement of the Carnival Hero".

What are now strongly entrenched traditions and customs emerged over the years to forge the hallmark of the traditional Cologne Carnival.

The key elements are the indoor festivities (sessions and balls) and, of course, the street carnival.

This takes place in the grand parade on Rose Monday, draws tens of thousands of participants and several hundred thousand onlookers, many of these sporting fancy dress for the occasion.

It is the task of the Festive Committee, the umbrella organisation representing well over 100 Cologne carnival associations, to coordinate, set common standards, and preserve the tradition of the aptly nicknamed 'Fifth Season'.

Undoubtedly, the Cologne 'Karneval' plays in the Champions League of carnivals, together with the Carnaval in Rio de Janeiro, Carnival in Venice and Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

### The Carnival Season

Given its Christian roots, the date of Rose Monday is determined by the ecclesiastical calendar.

It is celebrated on the Monday before Ash Wednesday, a date that in turn marks the beginning of Lent and leads up to Good Friday and Easter.

Traditionally, the 'Fifth Season' is declared open at 11 minutes past 11 on the 11th of November.

The Carnival spirit is then temporarily suspended by the Advent and Christmas period, and picks up again in earnest in the New Year.

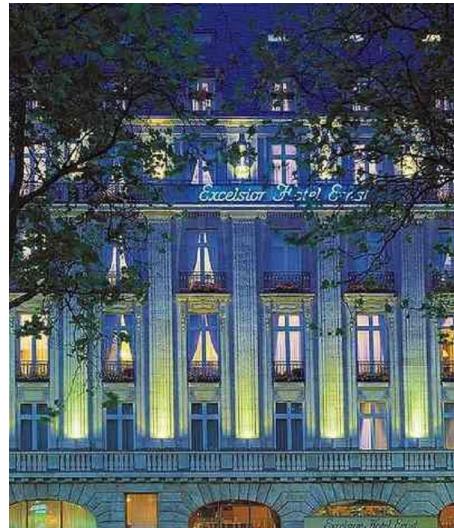
Street carnival – fondly known to visitors and locals alike as "the crazy days" – takes place between the Thursday before Rose Monday, which is known as Women's Carnival Day, and its climax on Ash Wednesday.

One of Germany's largest and most popular cities, Cologne today attracts around 115 million visitors a year.

### By train

From the UK, Eurostar has connecting services to the German ICE high-speed rail network. There are fast services from Brussels, Paris and other Continental metropolises. In December, the travelling time from Paris was slashed from four hours to 3 hrs 14 mins while it takes just two hours to come from Brussels.

### Somewhere to stay



Set right opposite the cathedral, the Excelsior Hotel Ernst could not have a finer location. Lovingly refurbished, this grand hotel in the old tradition is still independent and family owned.

The original Excelsior Hotel Ernst was constructed in 1863.

When the property was rebuilt, between 1908 and 1910, guests were greeted with a radical new luxury: 100 of the 250 bedrooms had their own bathrooms, replete with hot and cold running water.

The hotel was rebuilt a second time after having been largely destroyed during the bombing raids of World War Two.

[www.excelsiorhotelernst.com](http://www.excelsiorhotelernst.com)

### Take to the water



Cologne is the starting point for a wide range of luxury riverboat cruises.

## A year-round festival of shopping

Cologne has seen a healthy upsurge in visitor numbers, especially in the festive period when it hosts seven spectacular Christmas markets.



But it doesn't all grind to a halt when the seasonal market stalls are dismantled and the traders retire to count their takings.



Shopping in Cologne is a year-round attraction. The Schildegasse and Hohe Strasse are among Europe's busiest shop-till-you-drop thoroughfares.

Tourist trail staples are the trendy little boutiques dotted round the so-called Belgian Quarter – which is titled thus because its streets take their names from towns in Belgium.

Designer labels or inexpensive bargains – the choice is huge and there are plenty of bars and cafés around so you can rest your weary feet and take a break before your plastic bursts into flame.

Walking is the answer because all of Cologne's attractions, and its best shopping too, are contained in a relatively compact area.

## Sweet smelling Cologne

Accompanied by a guide in 17<sup>th</sup> Century costume, you can discover the story of eau de cologne and of Giovanni Maria Farina, the Italian *parfumier* who in 1709 brought this familiar, subtle-smelling essence onto the market.

It's an original, is still the best and the Farina House, with its shop and museum, can be found at Obenmarspforten 21, close by the old town hall, on one of whose niches stands a statue of Giovanni Farina himself.

[www.Farina-Haus.de](http://www.Farina-Haus.de)

## A dozen Romanesque churches

Despite the ravages of World War II, Cologne can still boast 12 Romanesque churches, outstanding examples of mediaeval church architecture and some 36 museums, as well as more than 120 different galleries, displaying a kaleidoscope of different styles.

## The mediaeval Jewish quarter

Currently the foundations of the city's mediaeval Jewish quarter are being carefully excavated.

## Home of the nations

Determinedly cosmopolitan and refreshingly outward looking despite its at times conservative face, Cologne is home to immigrants from 181 countries and 250 diverse cultures and 70,000 university students.

And it has 15 twin cities in Europe and 23 more around the rest of the globe.

Picasso, Dali and Magritte are among the great artists featured on the walls of the four floors of the spacious modern Museum Ludwig.

## Art Cologne



The annual Art Cologne festival (the 44<sup>th</sup> edition of which is set for April 21-25, 2010) is the largest art event in the world.

## Music lovers delight

Cologne is a joy for lovers of all kinds of music.

There are music clubs and bars aplenty and world-class concert venues such as the Philharmonie, the Opera House, and the Musical Dome.

## Bottoms up!

Cologne has its own distinctive locally-brewed top-fermented beer.



The traditional kölsch, of which there are some 24 variants, is available at brewpubs across the city.

It is served in small glasses (holding about a third of a pint).

Your waiter will assume you want another refill until you signal, by the simple measure of placing a beer mat over the top of the glass, that you've had enough, thanks.

Cologne has, incidentally, more than 3,300 gastronomic establishments.

As well as abundant street carts, many of which purvey the ubiquitous bratwurst sausage, eaten in a soft roll with lashings of sweet German mustard and maybe a dollop of ketchup.

## Best address in town

Look to the right of its main entrance door and you will be surprised to find that Cologne's mighty cathedral actually has a street number (Domkloster 3)!

This was one of the world's first cities to number its buildings and even church premises were included.

The cathedral is the reputed last resting place of the Maggi, the Three Wise Men from the East who figure in St. Matthew's Biblical account of the virgin birth.

The bones supposed to be theirs are contained in a monumental gold casket.

## More information



[www.koelntourismus.com](http://www.koelntourismus.com)

## The International Travel Writers Alliance



### AllWays

AllWays is the consumer travel service from the International Travel Writers Alliance.

### The International Travel Writers Alliance



The International Travel Writers Alliance represents travel writers, editors, broadcasters and photographers worldwide

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## Roger St Pierre



Roger is one of the UK's most experienced travel writers and photographers, Roger has visited 125 countries on five continents and 47 US states.

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