



Cologne was built by the ancient Romans in 38AD at a point where the Rhine River crossed a major east-west trade route. It was an ideal spot for commercial development and by the Middle Ages, Cologne had become the largest and one of the richest towns in northern Europe.

In 1388, Cologne founded the first city university in Europe. Today, it is home to the largest university in Germany with more than 60,000 students living and, from time to time, even studying in the city.

In general, the citizens of Cologne have done a good job of preserving and honoring their art and architecture. It is an unusual mixture of the very old next to the very new. A thousand-year-old Romanesque church in the middle of a shopping street that was put up in the 1980s.

COLOGNE CATHEDRAL

Since the Middle Ages, Cologne has been a religious center and a destination for pilgrims. Pilgrims came from all over Europe to visit "Holy Cologne", and the city's great pilgrimage site was its Gothic cathedral. Even today, over five million visitors come here each year, which has made the Cologne Cathedral Germany's main tourist attraction.

These days, more and more people are using their vacation time to make a pilgrimage, but a pilgrimage is really designed for more than just holiday travel. A pilgrimage is also a sacred journey; it can help you understand your spiritual beliefs. It's a way to heal yourself, to find your true path. Physically you travel to a new place, but the big voyage is the one you make inside, the one that might



transform you.

You arrive in a place that is unknown to you. The people do not speak your language. You must listen carefully if you are going to understand what is happening. Because everything is so unfamiliar, you are forced to confront the reality of your situation.

If you are going to bring some kind of meaning to your trip, you must pay attention. These are the perfect conditions for anyone who wants to understand the significance of their existence. A pilgrimage involves a visit to a shrine, but the physical shrine is always a metaphor for something else.

The door to a shrine has the function of keeping out the wind, and the rain and the snow and the mud. It stands as a barrier to the destructive elements in nature. But that door is also a symbolic barrier keeping you outside, holding you in your day-to-day world.

It pushes you back into the space of your body and away from the world of your spirit. To pass over that threshold is to enter a place where you might reconnect with your soul.

Construction of Cologne's Cathedral began during the 1200s and did not finish up until 1880, a time span of over 600 years. It's the largest Cathedral in northern Europe and when it was completed it was the tallest building in the world. The towers go up 515 feet. The architecture style is Gothic in imitation of the great Cathedrals of France. The stained-glass windows date to the 1300s and are considered to be some of the finest in the world. The choir was carved in 1322. The Gero Cross that hangs in a chapel on the north side of the choir was carved in Cologne during the 900s and is considered to be the oldest large-scale crucifix



in the Western world. The Cathedral's greatest attraction for pilgrims is the gold shrine, said to contain the remains of the Three Kings.

THE THREE KINGS

Christmas is celebrated over twelve days and ends with the "Feast of the Epiphany", which is also known as "The Adoration of the Magi", or the "Day of the Three Kings". The legend of the Three Kings, which is based on a story in the Bible, tells of three wise men, Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar who, on the night Christ was born, saw a bright star in the sky and followed it to Bethlehem where they discovered the Christ child and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.



Frankincense and myrrh are both aromatic gum resins that were highly valued in ancient times and used as incense in religious ceremonies. They were taken from trees and bushes that grew along the Arabian coast, particularly in Yemen. They are still used in the manufacture of some perfumes but are no longer considered as being valuable. On the other hand, gold has held up pretty well.



In 1164, the Emperor Barbarossa, who was living in Milan, gave the remains of the Three Kings to the Archbishop of Cologne who brought them home. As soon as he got them back to Cologne, work began on a golden shrine to hold the relics. The shrine ended up as the largest and most famous reliquary of its kind in the western world.

EXCELSIOR HOTEL ERNST

The Excelsior Hotel Ernst was built in 1863. The owner was part of Cologne's high society and the hotel became a favorite hangout for the rich and royal. In 1908, it was refurbished with the latest in advanced technology. The sleeping and living rooms were equipped with private bathrooms that had hot and cold running water, which was rather amazing for the time.



Today it is a prestigious residence for tourists and business travelers, the hotel is within walking distance of theaters, museums, concert halls and

the opera. The hotel offers superb service and a high degree of individual attention with multiple Presidential suites. I always wondered who stayed in these Presidential suites since most traveling Presidents stay in their embassies. I was recently reminded that corporations also have Presidents and many have bigger expense accounts than small nations.



There are two things about the hotel that were of particular interest to me. First is the location. It is directly in front of the Cathedral which is, for me, the city's major attraction. It's also at the very center of the city's most interesting area, surrounded by the best museums and shops.

Secondly, the hotel is home to two of the best restaurants in the city. The food at the *Hanse Stube* restaurant has an upper class French accent and has been awarded 16 points by the Gault Millau food guide. Truly, praise from Caesar.

The Hotel Excelsior Ernst is also home to an Asian restaurant called *Taku*.

WHERE TO STAY



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Cologne, Germany

Taku is one restaurant but it has four kitchen teams. One prepares Japanese dishes, another is Chinese, the third is Thai, and the fourth Vietnamese. And all the dishes are on the same menu and you can order from all four kitchens at the same time.

CHOCOLATE MUSEUM

Besides being a religious center, Cologne has been a cultural focal point for hundreds of years. Today, it has 118 galleries and 36 museums. And the sweetest of all is the chocolate museum. Built in the shape of a futuristic ship sitting on the banks of the Rhine, the three-story museum presents the history and technology of chocolate.



There is a small garden in which you can see a cacao tree growing and get a sense of the extraordinarily uncomfortable, hot and humid environment in which the chocolate bean is cultivated.

There's a small chocolate factory where you can see how the cacao bean is processed into chocolate and how the liquid chocolate is formed into finished products. The factory actually produces about 1000 pounds of chocolate a day, and you take part in the process--experts will teach you how to make your



own truffles, or fill, cover and decorate you own pralines.

And if that is too much work, you can just have a taste at the chocolate fountain.

There's a replica of an old grocery shop that would have been selling chocolate about 100 years ago.



There's also an interesting collection of posters. And the entire place is in keeping with Cologne's ecclesiastical history. The scientific name for chocolate is "Theobroma cacao", which means "Food of the Gods".

WHERE TO EAT



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CHEERS

The local beer in Cologne is known as Kölsch. By law it can only be brewed in and around Cologne and must conform to a specific recipe. It has three percent alcohol content and is served in small thin glasses that hold about 8 ounces. If you finish your Kölsch and leave it as is, the waiter will bring you a fresh one. And he will continue bringing a fresh one until you cover your glass with a coaster.



One of the more unusual places to do your drinking is Haxenhaus, home to the Kölsch lovers "Wheel of Fortune". Many of the drinking establishments in Cologne have much in common with the English pub tradition...a place where you can gather with your friends and just "hang out". Cologne also has a number of places that are well-known for offering the traditional dishes of the city.

ST. URSULA

During the 400s, the Emperor Charlemagne made Cologne an archbishopric and since then, the city has been an important religious center. It has 12 Romanesque churches that were built on the graves of martyrs and early bishops. One of the most interesting churches is St. Ursula's.



The story of St. Ursula goes like this — Ursula was a British princess who lived during the 4th century. Accompanied by a group of virgins, she made a pilgrimage to Rome. On her way back to England, she passed through Cologne, where she and the other virgins were killed by a gang of nomadic invaders and generally unpleasant people, known as the Huns.

The story is based on a stone that was found in an ancient church. The stone was marked with the letters VIMV, which are the Roman numerals for eleven followed by the letters MV which everyone took to mean martyred virgins. OK, Ursula and the eleven martyred virgins...got it. But the legend comes up again, only this time they read the inscription as VIM...the Roman numeral for eleven thousand and the V for virgins.



In 1155, an ancient Roman burial ground was discovered and was designated as the spot that contained the relics of the legend.

Ursula was elevated to sainthood and became the patroness of the *Ursulines*, a congregation of nuns dedicated to educating young girls.

But wait there's more. When Christopher Columbus was sailing in the Caribbean, he came to an area with so many islands that he figured there must be at least 11,000, so he named them the Virgin Islands.



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RHINE CRUISE

The Rhine river may not be the primary commercial highway it was a thousand years ago but it's still an important part of Cologne. The best way for tourists to appreciate the beauty of the area is to take a trip on one of the boats that cruise along the river.



The Köln Düsseldorf Line, know by its initials KD has been carrying passengers on the river for almost 200 years.

The Rhine River was the reason that the ancient Romans settled in Cologne and for the past 2000 years the city's history has been bound together with Rome.

EAU DE COLOGNE

Even before I knew there was a city named Cologne I knew the word Cologne from the bottle of Eau de Cologne on my mother's dresser.

Eau de Cologne is French for *water of Cologne* which is a form of light perfume. Its primary ingredient is alcohol which is mixed with citrus oils and herbs. The objective was to make a perfume that smelled like a spring morning in Italy, after a rain. Napoleon was a big fan of the perfume.

In 1794, a French army under Napoleon occupied Cologne. At the time, houses were not marked with numbers, which was



a constant source of frustration for the French General in charge of the city. So he sent his troops out to mark each building with a number. The number 4711 was assigned to a house where the Muelhens family were making their own version of Eau de Cologne which has become a world-wide brand.

The manufacturing process consists of mixing a series of scented oils into alcohol and letting the blend steep for a least three months. The actual proportions and the method of mixing is a secret and kept in a vault by one member of



the family. For over 200 years the secret formula has been known to only one person in each generation and upon his or her death, retirement or removal to a home for the terminally forgetful, the formula is taken from the safe and passed on.

I am always fascinated by the idea of a secret formula. The secret gives the holder a way of controlling the forces of destiny. It saves him from his fate. It's like taking a sip of love potion number nine, or a \$300 bottle of anti-wrinkle cream. It's magic. And when you consider that Eau de Cologne was originally sold as a medicine that would cure every known illness, a secret formula makes perfectly good sense.

Now if I could only remember where I put the bottle.

THE FIFTH SEASON

For almost 2000 years, Cologne has been celebrating the Feast of Saturn in one form or another. Cologne's Carnival is known as the "Fifth Season", and has become world famous



for the "three mad days" at the height of the celebration. Every year on Rose Monday more than a million people watch the Rose Monday Parade as it works its way through the streets of the city. Carnival is always chaotic: it turns life upside-down. It destroys the recognizable structure of daily life---people are encouraged to cross over barriers, break rules and violate customs---Carnival demands excess. Famous people, respected cultural symbols and traditional social events are ridiculed. It is a time to satirize everything the society values.

But the festivities only last for a short time. To a certain extent, Carnival is designed to show people that rebellion, disorder, and general chaos are not what they want to live with on a regular basis. Order and organization are essential for the survival of the community, and these are always re-established at the end.

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