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The Family Adventure Project's guide to

Castle Hostels of Germany

48 hours around **Burg Stahleck** and the **Middle Rhine**

Castle Hostels of Germany

How would you like to spend a night in a castle?

Or take a road trip combining castles, palaces and forts? There are more historic hilltop residences offering beds to travellers in Germany than you might imagine, thanks to the extensive network of **Jugendherberge** hostels. We had no idea when we set out on our road trip of German Castle Hostels how much choice we would have, how many faraway hills we would sleep on, and how magical the hostels would be – thanks in part to the number of Harry Potter conventions we ran into. Well, what better place than a castle?

For the last century the German Youth Hostel Association has been refurbishing former grand or royal buildings specifically for families and groups. We set out to explore five of them to produce this series of guides which we hope will help you to do the same. We chose a range of different locations with ideally no more than three hours drive between them. We stayed for 48 hours in each and explored as much of the area as we could. In the pages that follow we describe the unique character of the hostel, profile what there is to do and give you the low down on why we think each one is worth a visit.

From a peaceful weekend escape into a national park to an overnight in a notorious prison, this action packed road trip put us right at the heart of many local stories and histories. It also offered a great night's sleep and an action packed adventure for our family. Of course, we only sampled what's on offer and welcome your ideas and feedback. Share your thoughts on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram using the hashtag **#CastleHostels**.

Kirstie Pelling and Stuart Wickes, The Family Adventure Project



The Family Adventure Project *biography*

Kirstie Pelling and Stuart Wickes are co-founders of **The Family Adventure Project**, an award winning blog that's ten years into its mission to inspire others to get out, get active and adventure together. They work as a writer/journalist and photographer/videographer team to research and share ideas that encourage families to reap the benefits of doing something new and different together.

They have worked with dozens of leading travel brands all around the world. In 2016 the British Guild of Travel Writers recognised them as Travel Bloggers of the Year, commending their use of blogging, YouTube and social media as a "glorious celebration of adventurous life and the ups and downs of family travel."

You can follow their adventures on their blog at www.familyadventureproject.org or **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Instagram** or **YouTube**.

Castle Hostels Road Trip



Thanks to DJH, Romatischer Rhein Tourismus, Koblenz Touristik and DFDS Seaways for support in the production of this ebook.

Welcome to the Romantic Rhine

Beyond Romance

The **Romantic Rhine** is the setting for our 48 hour stay at **Burg Stahleck** in Bacharach. The Rhine is Germany's biggest river and since the Romantic era has inspired artists of all kinds as one of the world's great river landscapes. Since 2002 the Upper Middle Rhine Valley has been recognised as a UNESCO site of World Heritage significance. But it's more than recognised and romantic; it's magical. This is a land of castles; on the 65km stretch of the Rhine between Koblenz and Bingen there are more than 40 unique defences and sixty small towns. The castles are high on the hill as we turn a corner. They are the focal point to a town. They are deep in forest. One or two are even on islands in the middle of the river. So far so Disney. But castles aren't the only thing on offer in this silver and green slice of Germany.

During our 48 hour stay on the Middle Rhine we learn the legends of the river. We enjoy outdoor activities including boating and bob sleigh riding. We wander through timber framed old towns. We have tea in the gardens of palaces and castles. We blow giant bubbles and watch the tallest cold water geyser on earth reach for the sky. But we begin our stay at Bacharach's impressive castle hostel, Burg Stahleck, in a crenelated bunk bed. What could possibly be more magical than that?

*"The air is cool, night is sinking
And quietly's flowing the Rhine,
The tops of the mountains are blinking,
In purple-red sun-setting shine."
Extract from The Loreley by Heinrich Heine*

Burg Stahleck



Fairy tale magic

The DJH Youth Hostel at Bacharach (also called **Burg Stahleck**) is a classic castle hostel. Its name literally means 'impregnable castle on a crag' and it is one of the most famous hostels in Germany. It's about as fairy tale a setting as we've ever experienced. Sitting amongst the vineyards high above the timber framed old town of Bacharach, Burg Stahleck literally stands tall over the Rhine. It has towers. It has turrets. It has a partial moat. And when the sun goes down it has princess pink sunsets. People come for all of this, especially in the summer months. But they stay for the views. From the terrace you have a prime view of the Rhine as it curls and bends its way through the landscape. The best time to sit out is at sundown when you can buy a cold beer from the bistro and watch the day fold into gold. And if you lie on one of the benches once the sun has gone to bed you can imagine yourself looking up at the stars at any time from the medieval period to infinity. Then it's time to go to bed. And what a treat that can be...



Sunrise at the Burg



The Round Tower



Views over the Rhine



The Courtyard

Inside the Burg



A castle themed room adds a touch of fairy tale fun to bedtime

A thoroughly modern castle

While some castles are all draughts and hard surfaces, **Burg Bacharach** has a homely, quirky feel. There are lots of comfortable places to sit including a lounge and terrace and a family games room packed with toys. The breakfast room (which serves a free buffet breakfast) doubles as a bistro at night. If you like retro gaming, you'll also find a room full of pinball machines.

There's a wide range of sleeping options too, some 168 beds in total. You can book one of the towers which are pleasingly round or hope for a secure night bunkered down in one of the castle themed bunk rooms. Ours had eight crenelated 'feature' wooden bunks in red, white and brown.

Don't worry, facilities aren't medieval; you'll get a light, charge point and shelf near your pillow, and some rooms have ensuite toilet and shower.



Burg Stahleck
A Look Around a German Castle Hostel

Watch the video - click to play

TIP For a good value dinner option, try the bistro at the hostel. On a hot night, try slush and pizza on the terrace. There's a choice of good beers for adults too. If you're feeling chilly the nachos should warm you up.



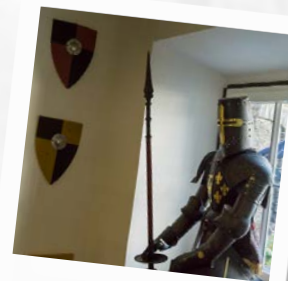
Medieval themed meeting rooms

TIP

Rooms are allocated close to the time depending on group size so don't promise the kids the turret bed of their dreams, but do book in advance; the hostel can book up for a whole year ahead in peak times.



Tower table tennis

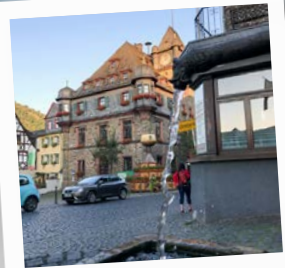


A friendly welcome



Breakfast buffet served in the bistro dining area

Explore Bacharach



Fountain in Bacharach



The Alles Haus



The Wernerkapelle

TIP

You can walk up to the Youth Hostel following the path beside St Peter's Church in the centre of town. On your way check out the ruins of the Gothic **Wernerkapelle**.

A walk back in time

It's a short walk downhill from the hostel to the pretty market town of **Bacharach**. It's classic Romantic Rhine, dominated by colourful half timbered houses and with town walls and fortifications that are some of the best preserved in all of Rhineland-Palatinate. We wandered around exploring the ancient courtyards and alleys before stopping for refreshments in one of the many cafes, wine bars and restaurants around town.

If you like old houses, don't miss the famous 1368 Altes Haus and the **Kurpfälzische Münze** - both historical inns on the main street. Kurpfälzische Münze is the "old mint" where gold coins were produced in the middle ages by permission of the Holy Roman Emperor. Today it serves food and drinks and makes a great historic refreshment stop. The barman tells great stories too.

You can reach the Rhine through the town walls for a nice riverside walk or, if you fancy going further afield, for boat trips to visit other towns and castles along the Bacharach valley. Boppard, St Goarshausen, Oberwesel and the Loreley rock are an easy half day excursion.

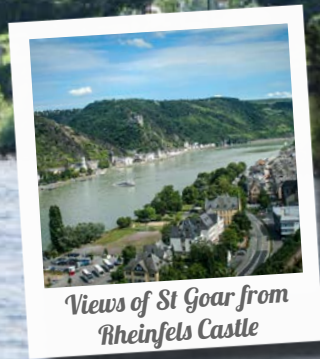
Up and Down the Rhine



Pfalzgrafenstein Castle



Ferry across the Rhine



*Views of St Goar from
Rheinfels Castle*

**Don't
Miss**

The island castle Pfalzgrafenstein near Kraub. Built to take tolls from passing ships, a chain across the river used to force ships to stop and pay. Best seen from the Kraub ferry.

Exploring the Middle Rhine

One of the joys of this stretch of the Rhine is exploring the string of villages that line both sides of the river. Head north from Bacharach on the west bank to find Oberwesel, St. Goar and Boppard. The city of Koblenz is just 50km from Bacharach.

We found part of the fun of exploring was crossing the river by ferry to sample life on the other side. You can also get river buses between towns, to see life from the river or to get to attractions like the famous **Andernach Geysir**, 20km north of Koblenz

If you have children you'll find lots of playgrounds by the river and plenty of riverside cafes for snacks, meals or ice cream.

If you want to get active, there's great cycling routes throughout the area. The **Rhine Cycle Route** offers 322km of trail from Speyer in the south as far as Remagen in the north.

If you prefer **hiking**, there are two long-distance paths here too. The 320km **Rheinsteig** heads up and down the hills on the east bank of the Rhine, through forests and vineyards with spectacular views to reward efforts in climbing. On the west side the **RheinBurgenWeg** offers 200km of trail on what is said to be one of most beautiful walks in Germany. Of course you don't have to walk it all!

The Andernach Geyser



You can get up close to the geyser after the initial eruption



Up close with a geyser



Up close with CO2 in the visitor centre



The boat trip to the Geyser is part of the experience

TIP

The boat to the geyser serves up drinks and snacks. You can have a coffee and pastry inside or on deck as you travel to or from the geyser. There are also riverside restaurants in Andernach if you prefer to relax and have lunch by the Rhine before or after.

Natural wonder

It was something of a surprise to learn that the world's tallest cold water geyser isn't in Iceland or somewhere even chillier, but in Andernach, 70km from Burg Bacharach. If you like blowing bubbles you'll love **Geysir Andernach**. A visit here is three experiences for the price of one. You get to explore a great, hands-on educational exhibition where you learn about the origin of the geyser by following trails of bubbles of carbon dioxide. Then you get a boat trip along the Rhine to the reserve where you can watch the Andernach geyser explode 60 metres into the air, powered by volcanic carbon dioxide. It's a great combination and highly recommended.

*“There’s a man in his boat on the river,
He cannot but listen and stare,
A longing is making him shiver,
Look out, the rock’s ledge, Oh beware!”*

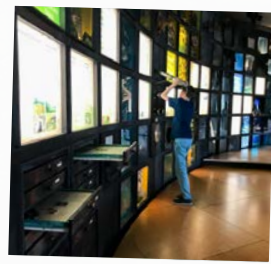
The Legend of Loreley



Loreley Bob



Check out the views



Loreley Exhibition

Call of the siren

The Loreley rock sits above one of the narrowest and deepest parts of the Rhine, where currents get strong and navigation hard. It’s named after a legendary maiden, Loreley, who used to sit on the rock, combing her golden hair and singing, distracting sailors and causing shipwrecks below.

The best views of the towering Loreley are from the St Goar side of the Rhine. But access to the **Loreley Visitor Centre** on top of the Loreley plateau is from the other side. Fortunately ferries ply the river, giving you the opportunity to feel for yourself the currents that make this stretch of river so dangerous.

We spent an hour in the Visitor Centre learning about the legend of the rock and the challenges of navigating the Rhine. Out at the viewpoint we got great views down onto the Rhine and the endless procession of freight and passenger boats cruising for pleasure and trade, much as they have for hundreds of years.

It’s not just good views at Loreley though. The **Loreley Bob**, a summer toboggan, lets you ride at speed down the plateau. The ride down by bobsleigh adds a touch of adrenaline to our visit, with descents at up to 40km/hr. If you’re there with friends or family buy a multi-ride ticket and you can save money and share the rides between you. You’ll want to do it more than once!

TIP

On the **Loreley Bob**, check the screen at the bottom to find out your descent speed and compare against friends and family. And don’t forget to smile..there’s a camera recording your fastest moves!

Marksburg Magic

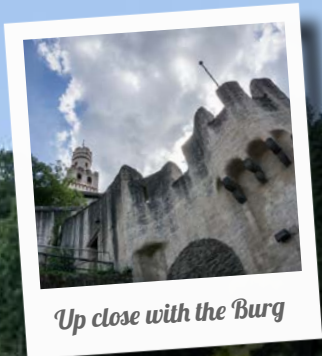
Hilltop time travel

With a castle nestling in a vineyard every 2.5km along the Middle Rhine, it can be hard to choose which to visit. Once built to help defend river trade, today the only thing some need to defend themselves from is tourists. Castles can get busy here, especially the more unique or popular ones.

We visited **Marksburg Castle**, above Braubach, the only Rhine medieval hilltop castle that has never been destroyed. A visit to Marksburg is a journey back to the Middle Ages, into a complete and original medieval fortress. Access was not designed to be easy, but once up the hill and through the impressive stronghold a visit here is a great history lesson.

Our guided tour (the only way to visit the castle) took us through keep, kitchen, great hall, bedchamber, chapel, armoury, wine cellar and battlements before finishing off in the torture chamber. Fortunately, we were allowed to escape.

But only as far as the **Marksburgschänke**, a restaurant on the castle terrace which proved a great lunch stop. If you've brought your own food, there's also a free to use picnic terrace next to the castle.



Up close with the Burg



Roses, thorns and towers



Touring the castle



Views over the Rhine



Princess in the tower



Where Father Rhine meets Mother Moselle

The city of Koblenz is about 50km north of Bacharach Hostel and is definitely worth a day trip. Set on the confluence of two rivers the city's layout, history and life is shaped by water. You can spot where the rivers meet from the **Ehrenbreitstein Fortress** that overlooks the city, or by taking a walk down to **Deutches Eck** (the German Corner) where you can stand between Father Rhine and Mother Moselle. While you're there, why not climb up the giant equestrian statue of Kaiser Wilhelm I for a better view of the confluence.

There are lots of festivals in Koblenz. The most famous is **Rhine in Flames** when lights and fireworks illuminate river and fortress for an audience watching from Deutches Eck and from 75 ships that take up prime positions in the river beneath the fortress. It's quite a spectacle and quite a feat of parking for all the ship's captains.

Rhein in Flammen events take place in different towns along the Rhine Valley between May and September. We just missed the Koblenz fireworks but did catch the after party including an open air concert by the Philharmonic orchestra on Deutches Eck and rock bands performing along the river front.

The City of Koblenz

A History of Romance

TIP

While in the Forum Confluentes, ride the glass elevator up to the roof to check out the unique views from the Forum's rooftop terrace.

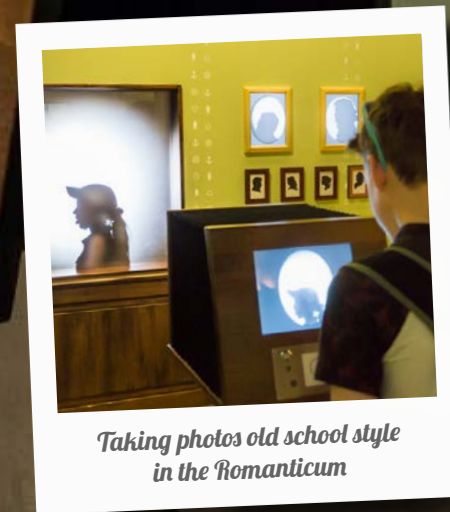
A thoroughly modern history lesson

There's a long history of tourism on the Rhine and the kid-friendly **Romanticum** exhibition at the **Forum Confluentes** in Koblenz has a thoroughly modern way of explaining it. A special electronic entrance ticket allows you to board a virtual cruise ship for an interactive journey through the history of the Middle Rhine Valley. You can learn about how the Rhine developed as a way of transporting goods, how artists have portrayed it and how tourists use it.

Interactive stations along an audio trail allowed us to see Rhine landmarks come to life, take silhouette photographs old school style, sing karaoke versions of the Loreley song and save the results of our creations onto our entrance tickets (along with information about the exhibits). We left with all this available for us to view on our mobile devices or via the internet at home, including our unique karaoke version of the Loreley song. Very cool. Although, surprisingly, no one in our family wants to hear that ever again!



City history lesson on Tourist Information touch screen



Taking photos old school style in the Romanticum



All aboard the Romanticum exhibition at Forum Confluentes

Fortress Fun

Look out over Koblenz

From near Deutes Eck, we caught the **Koblenz Cable Car** across the Rhine. Its special cabins have panoramic views and make access to the **Ehrenbreitstein Fortress** quick and easy. The fortress looks over Koblenz and houses several museums, exhibitions and places to drink or dine. It also houses the **Koblenz Youth Hostel**.

Entrance to fortress grounds and restaurants is free but admission is charged for the fortress itself which also hosts open air concerts, plays and events. It's an atmospheric venue so worth checking out what's on. Some events are free and there is always at least one exhibition on designed to appeal to kids. From the cable car and fortress grounds you can also access a large climbing playground suitable for older children with timber, rope and rock climbing activities.



Cable Car ride to the Castle



Inside the fortress



Views over the Rhine



Up on the roof



Fortress roof top garden

TIP

Buy a combined ticket for cable car and fortress and make a day of it. There's lots to see. For even better value check for free cultural events on at the fortress and time your visit to catch one.

Don't Miss

The roof top gardens that cleverly show how crops were grown in the fortress in different centuries.

Eating and Drinking



Tea in Electoral Palace Gardens

Tea at the Palace

Koblenz Electoral Palace was built as a royal residence and city palace back in the 18th century but it was in 2011 that the German Federal Horticultural Show opened up the area around it for tourists with sculptured flowers, pools, fountains and lawns. The garden behind the palace has terraces to the river. We ordered coffee and ice creams from the Grand Cafe and sat out enjoying the Sunday afternoon river vibe.

Ice Cream in Koblenz

While in Koblenz make sure not to pass **Egolosia**, one of the best ice cream outlets in town. It's so good you need to be prepared to queue to try one. But it's worth it. They make their ice cream on the premises. Look round the side of the shop and you can see into their ice cream lab.



Egolosia Ice Cream Shop, Koblenz



The "Old Mint" Inn in Bacharach

Antique Coins and Wine

After wandering the alleys and old houses of Bacharach, we stopped off at **Kurpfälzische Münze**, a historical inn dating back to 1356. The owner told us it is the oldest place in town, "Older than the United States. Older than Christopher Columbus. Older even than his parent's meeting." The beer is fresh though and you can do a decent wine tasting accompanied by small dishes made by the chef, the owner's wife. A proper family business.

Burger at the Burg

It's hungry work visiting castles. After visiting **Marksburg** we enjoyed great burgers in the **Marksburgschänke**, an affordable café on the castle terrace. We ate outside while waiting for our tour to leave. I mean who wouldn't want to eat a burger in a burg?



A burgers at the Burg

Our Awards

On our Castle Hostel tour we've been awarding shields for excellence. Here's how Burg Stahleck fared in the battle of the Castle Hostels. Shield scores out of 5.

Classic Castle Setting



Sunset Terrace with Views over the Rhine



Access to Rhine Valley Towns and Activities

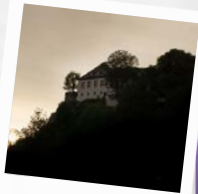


Fun Castle Themed Bedrooms



Our German Castle Hostel Guides

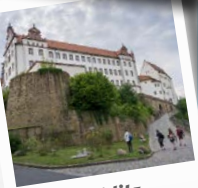
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Bilstein

Burg Bilstein - The Character Castle

Burg Bilstein is set on a hill above the town of Lennestadt. There are plenty of walks from the door or you can take off in many different directions enjoying what the region has to offer. Western Germany's Sauerland is liberally populated by hills, forests and valleys. Hikers and bikers alike come to enjoy the scenery. We loved messing about by the water at the Bigge dam and reservoir, where we hired a pedalo and played mini golf. We also enjoyed visiting the ski resort of Winterberg where there's tobogganing, barefoot walking and one of the best bike parks around. But the real fun began back at the imaginative youth hostel where you're as likely to bump into a knight as kiss a frog. Read more in our [Burg Bilstein blog post](#).



Colditz

Schloss Colditz- The Prison Hostel

People don't come to **Schloss Colditz** for the hospitality. They come for the escape stories, the museum and the TV and film nostalgia. But within the imposing looking gates, you will find a comfortable, simply furnished hostel. The real treat comes in the morning with a tour. There are different lengths of tour - long and even longer- but our guide kept the whole family captivated. After all that information about how to escape, you'll want to head off and enjoy the surrounding area. We had strawberry pizza in the Colditz village centre, visited an aquapark with crazy and lazy rivers and then took a canoeing day trip in nearby Leipzig. Read more in our [Schloss Colditz blog post](#).



Nuremberg

Nuremberg - A Modern City Break

The modern city hostel in **Nuremberg** is situated in the old stables of Imperial Castle of Nuremberg and one of the joys is being so close to the old town action. Any tour surely starts on the doorstep where you can view the gardens and palace, gaze down into the darkness of the well or climb the circular Sinwell tower and see for miles. But there's a lot to do in Nuremberg that doesn't involve royalty. Turn the bronze ring in the famous fountain, visit the delightful toy museum, sample the famous sausages and see how they make the gingerbread that goes down a storm at the Christmas markets. Read more in our [Nuremberg City Hostel blog post](#).



Blankenheim

Burg Blankenheim - An Old World Escape

Burg Blankenheim is located in Germany's Eifel, a national park in western Germany near the border with Belgium. Don't come looking for night life - you're more likely to find bird life, country life and a quiet life. The baroque castle was built as a display of wealth rather than a defence and is thought to date back as far as Roman times. There are five apartments for families in the bastionhaus and simple pleasures on the doorstep range from hiring a bike (or e-bike) and pedalling around the Eifel to eating After Eight ice cream in a family run gelato shop and then visiting Roman ruins. If it's all too slow you can head to the infamous Nürburgring for motor racing action. Read more in our [Burg Blankenheim blog post](#).



Stahleck

Burg Stahleck - The Fairytale on the River

Bacharach hostel, known as **Burg Stahleck**, is all about location, location, location. Set on a hill on a bend of the middle Rhine, the view is either sparkling in the sunlight or moody in the mist. There's nothing as pleasurable as enjoying board games and a drink on the terrace at sunset, especially if you are one of the lucky families to be returning to a castle themed bedroom. There are dozens of castles packed into a small section of river here including a floating one. Check it out on the way to the famous Lorelei rock with its summer toboggan run. Further afield, Koblenz provides a fortress tour, city attractions and opportunities for tea on the palace lawn. Read more in our [Burg Stahleck blog post](#).

