

Peddalling off the Sausages and Beer on Germany's Romantic Road

by Carolyne Kauser-Abbott

With visions of sausage, sauerkraut, and artisan beers (my husband's vision) dancing in our heads, we eagerly agreed to cycle the Romantic Road in Germany with friends last September.

Our drive to the starting point of **Würzburg** involved an overnight stay and local brew sampling in **Colmar**, the Alsatian town that flaunts its charm with hundreds of candy-coloured hanging flower baskets.

The next morning we headed to Germany, passing hillsides covered with flawless rows of grapevines and seemingly endless fields of cabbage awaiting fermentation. A lunch of sauerkraut, bratwurst and mustard on paper plates was delicious, if not fine dining, before our visit to the magnificent, gilded **Würzburg Residence**, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The **Weinstuben Juliusspital** restaurant at the Juliusspital vineyards in Würzburg offers wood-panelled warmth and a lively atmosphere. It's an inviting choice for dinner to indulge in the region's "Franconian" fare – plates of steaming red cabbage and juicy roasted pork. Wines from the 177-hectare vineyards are bottled in stubby, flattened vessels called *bocksbeutel*.

The next morning, it was time to start pedalling the Romantic Road – *Romantische Strasse* – knowing we had some 440 kilometres to cover between the vineyards and the Bavarian Alps. Established in the 1950s for tourists, the Romantic Road officially stretches from Würzburg to Füssen through beautiful, historic country and towns. However, trade routes, including the Roman Via Claudia Augusta, have existed for centuries in this region.

Our first stop was the spa town of **Bad Mergentheim**, known for its mineral waters. Despite instructions, maps, and at least one functional GPS, our collective navigational skills resulted in a late lunch in **Tauberbischofsheim**, still 25 km from our destination. Cycling had made us hungry, and the Bavarian sausages with sauerkraut, lentil soup with cocktail wieners and beef goulash filled all the crevices in our growling stomachs.

The cobbled streets of historical **Rothenburg ob der Tauber** are teeth jarring on a bicycle. Our shakedown was soon eclipsed by the fairytale setting and peaked red roofs of this hilltop hamlet surrounded by 1.5 km of ramparts. Meals can be tricky in a tourist town like this one, where menus and service often compete for a barely average rating. Our hotel suggested that we dine at the **herrnschlösschen**, a boutique hotel and restaurant in a converted 11th-century residence. The restaurant has a contemporary feel with subdued lighting and crisp linens; our crowd favourite was veal filet with apple horseradish crust and rösti potatoes.

During our stay in Rothenburg, we discovered **schneeballen**, German for snowballs, the baseball-sized pastries on display in every bakery window. They're made with plain short-crust pastry that's rolled flat, then cut into pieces and woven together into a sphere. The baker then uses a *schneeballeneisen* (special



Sausage and Potatoes



Pumpkin Soup



Sausage and Sauerkraut



Schneeballen



Würzburg churches



Rothenburg view



Romantic Road Green

holder) to deep-fry the snowball before dusting it with confectioner's sugar or dipping it in chocolate. Our group determined that *schneeballen* were a lot of effort for not so much reward.

Leaving the hilltop town behind, we headed toward **Dinkelsbühl**, a "short" 60 km ride. On the way, the Romantic Road followed the Tauber River, highlighted by views of a pastoral patchwork quilt of yellow mustard seed, late season sunflowers, shimmering green meadows and parcels of dark brown just-tilled soil. The manure-scented air along the route confirmed why everything was so lush.

The charming town of **Feuchtwangen** was our lunch stop for pumpkin soup, bratwurst and sauerkraut on a sun-drenched terrace. This soup was the best that I tasted on the whole trip, possibly because we had passed so many pumpkin fields, but more likely because of the cream.

Dinkelsbühl is a compact medieval town, a walled city with several watchtowers and beautiful half-timbered buildings in the historical Weinmarkt (wine market). On a mission to rehydrate after biking, our male companions discovered **Weib's Brauhaus** a microbrewery where we should have stayed to eat. Dinner in the hotel that evening was the most disappointing meal of our trip. There were no choices to accommodate dietary concerns and the staff was a bit rude.

Reaching Augsburg, our next destination, involved a few wrong turns, some unplanned off-roading and, to travel 130 km, almost nine hours in the saddle. Our group arrived at the **Hotel Augsburger Hof** in dire need of liquid refreshment and nourishment. I still have foodie visions of beetroot, feta and walnut salad followed by filet of char with pumpkin-ricotta ravioli.

Augsburg included a rest day where we women ogled the cornucopia of rainbow-coloured stalls in the Stadtmarkt (city market) while the "boys" sampled beer. Chilled and tired of wandering aimlessly, we chose the cosy, vaulted room at the **Bayerisches Haus am Dom** for lunch. We all gawked at a man at the adjacent table devouring a dinosaur-sized pig's knuckle.

The next day we were back on our bikes, with a short warm-up loop to **Friedberg** before continuing along the Romantic Road. It was difficult to pick up the route after Friedberg, and, to our dismay, the bike odometers indicated a trip of 99 km on a short day! Despite the extra distance, we had pedalled gorgeous flat roads under a china-blue sky, finally shedding the layers of clothing that we had purchased in Würzburg.

Füssen was almost within our sights as we glided over green rolling hills with the Bavarian Alps as a backdrop. The scenery throughout the trip was gorgeous, but this day was particularly tasty eye-candy. We parked our bikes for the last time in Füssen and ordered *flammkuchen* – cracker-thin German-style pizza – and ales for lunch.

On our final tour day, we visited **Neuschwanstein**, the extravagant castle built under the direction of King Ludwig II. Our rain-soaked castle tour confirmed there would be no cycling that day. Instead, we settled for a traditional lunch of *pfannkuchensuppe*, a clear beef broth served with sliced crêpe-like pancakes, veal sausage and extra orders of sauerkraut.

Our diets started the next day.

Travel Tips:

The Romantic Road was created as a driving trip and is marked along the way with brown signs. The route is also well established for cyclists, with signage at regular intervals. It can easily be done either as a self-guided ride or with a tour company.

romanticroadgermany.com

Hotel Würzburger Hof, Würzburg
hotel-wuerzburgerhof.de/hotel.html

Weinstuben Juliuspital, Würzburg
juliuspital.de/weingut/en/index.html

herrnschlösschen Hotel, Rothenburg
hotel-rothenburg.de/en/restaurant-en

Weib's Brauhaus, Dinkelsbühl
weibsbrauhaus.de

Hotel Augsburger Hof, Augsburg
augsburger-hof.de/?lang=en

Stadtmarkt, Augsburg
stadtmarktaugsburg.de

Bayerisches Haus am Dom, Augsburg
bayerischeshaus.de/en_index.php

Neuschwanstein, Füssen
neuschwanstein.de/englisch/palace ❖



Carolyne Kauser-Abbott writes gingerandnutmeg.com, a travel blog for foodies, manages a digital magazine perfectlyprovence.co and has travel apps at edibleheritage.com.

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