

Bergisches Land -- Ancient Caves And Afternoon Coffee

The British tradition of afternoon tea pales in comparison to German tradition of *Bergische Kaffeetafel*. Imagine yourself returning home from a day of hiking along the waterways and taking in the sights of the 18,000 hectare (45,000 acre) nature reserve which is Germany's Bergisches Land, and being greeted by a feast to warm your very soul.

Fresh coffee served from a pewter Dröppelmina, waffles with rice pudding and sour cherries, raisin bread with butter and apple jam, Rhenish black bread with butter, sausage and smoked ham, cake, and brandy are all staples of this coffee-drinking interlude. The *Bergische Kaffeetafel* is typical of the larger-than-life character of the Bergisches Land, with its marvelous scenery, stately homes, and long history as one of Germany's leading industrial areas.

In this region of the country you'll find the unspoiled meadows, fruit orchards, and thick forests of oak and pine which blanket the mountains of Westphalia, made all the more magical by slate-fronted, half-timbered, gabled and turreted buildings which line the town and village streets. Such a landscape would be incomplete without its share of castles, mills, and ancient churches.

The Bergisches Land region, naturally, has a full complement of them all. It also has the clear blue lakes one would expect from postcard-perfect country, and the trails to explore all of its delights whether on foot, on a bicycle or motorbike, or even on horseback. It would, however, be a major tourist attraction even without its scenic and architectural treasures.

The Neander Valley near [Mettmann](#) has given its name to the most famous residents of the region, even though the last of them died around 200 millennia ago: the Neanderthals. The Neander Valley, oddly enough, was once a rugged limestone canyon known as *Das Gesteins* (The Rockiness) which attracted visitors to its many caves and waterfalls. Ironically, the same limestone mining which uncovered the fossilized bones of Neanderthal man eventually destroyed the cave in which the remains were found.

Other historic sites in the Bergisches Land region, fortunately, have fared better. The Müngsten Bridge, constructed between 1893 and 1897, was an engineering marvel when first built and remains so today. It's the tallest steel railway bridge in Germany, at 107m (350 ft).

The largest city in this region is [Wuppertal](#). Here is a suspension railway dating back to 1900, and the enormous Zoo park. Wuppertal also holds the distinction of being in the Guinness Book of World Records as the site of the world's largest one-day flea market.

Not far from Wuppertal is the city of [Solingen](#), where you can visit the Castle Berg. This castle, dating back to 1000 A.D., was the ancestral home of the Counts of Burg, the rulers of the Bergische Land. Solingen served as the region's capital during the Middle Ages, and the Castle has a museum where you can get a remarkable glimpse into life during that time. Today, Solingen

is renowned as “The City of Blades” for the outstanding steel scissors and knives manufactured there.

You must not leave Bergisches Land without a trip to its western region and the two three-star Michelin restaurants of [Bergisch-Gladbach](#). On the other hand, you could simply buy one of those Solingen knives and head for the nearest *Bergische Kaffeetafel*, where you can slice yourself some of that wonderful Rhenish black bread and sausage! ;-)