

European Route Of Brick Gothic -- God Bless The Hanseatic League

The European Route Of Brick Gothic, or *Europäische Route der Backsteingotik* in German, would be hard to appreciate without understanding the [Hanseatic League](#) of the Middle Ages. The wealth afforded by all the guilds, trading, and commerce allowed many opulent churches, monasteries, houses, and defense walls (with gate entrances, of course) to be built in the grandest style of its time.

The Hanseatic League wasn't limited to just Germany (with [Lübeck](#) as its capital, but sadly not listed on this route), but travels all the way from Denmark to Poland and Estonia.

We will, however, only worry about Germany — which just so happens to be the biggest portion of the route.

Start of the European Route Of Brick Gothic (in Germany)

We'll start our tour in [Schleswig](#), which doesn't have too much in terms of number of brick Gothic architecture, but its St. Petri Cathedral (built in 1134) and its 400 figures carved into its altar is an awesome start.

[Buxtehude](#)'s 13th century *Stadtmauer* really gives the town a medieval feel some eight centuries later. The town's St. Peter's Church (also from the 13th century) also helps in that regard. Residents are also proud of its 16th century *Bürgerhaus* and its man-made port, known as the *Fleth*. Take a guided tour around the *Altstadt* (Old Town) for the best experience.

[Lüneburg](#) is next up — and I hope you plan to stay for a while. It's going to take some time to see its *Rathaus* (Town Hall) with its "rooms" known as the Prince's Hall (15th century), the *Alte Kanzlei*, *Bürgermeisterkörkammen*, and its 14th century porch called the *Gerichtslaube*.

Yeah, that's just one building.

Time to move on to see the St. John Church (this one built in 1174, but an old Carolingian one stood here before); the 15th century St. Nicholas Church; the former Franciscan Monastery (the kloster's from the 13th century, the chapel 15th century); the town's 12th century convent (housing a carpet museum with exhibits from the 13th/14th centuries); and the oldest of the them all the 10th century St. Michaelis Church, which is the final resting place for many of the region's ruling families.

Don't even think of exploring the [Lüneburg Heath](#); there are still quite a lot of stops on our Brick Gothic Architecture itinerary... ;-)

[Schwerin](#)'s contribution to the European Route of Brick Gothic is the Schweriner Dom, or Schwerin Cathedral. Its tower stands some 117 meters skyward, and is decorated with stained glass and a bronze baptismal font. Beautiful on inside as well as the outside.

You won't be long in [Parchim](#). That is, unless, you've gotten totally mesmerized by its St. Mary's Church (built 1249) and its organ, artwork, and altarpiece. The St. George Church is another reason why Parchim's on this scenic route.

Do yourself a favor at this point, find a quite inn or guesthouse to get a good night's rest. You're going to need it to see all the sites in [Stendal](#).

Start at the Kirche St. Marien (built 1283) which still has a working astronomical clock; followed by a visit to the Church of St. Nicholas and its 22 stained glass windows. Stained glass is also the focal point of the late 13th century Church of St. Jacobi, while its carvings from the 14th and 15th century that await you at the Church of St. Peter.

You'll be greeted by Roland (a 7-meter high statue) at the the 15th century *Rathaus*, but you will have to take a guided tour if you want to see inside the *Tangermünder Tor* (a gate built in the 13th/14th centuries). Although, it has been said that Stendal's *Uenglingen Tor* is "one of the finest medieval tower gates built in the brick Gothic style."

I don't know if I'm educated on the subject enough to dispute that claim. You be the judge, OK? ;-)

[Brandenburg an der Havel](#) is another town where just an afternoon isn't going to cut it, there's too much to see. Start with introducing yourself to Roland, the Royal Protector of the Market — and who stands some 5 meters high. Follow up with a visit to the 13th century *Rathaus* (you'll find it at the Old Town Market), then to the Cathedral of Sts. Peter & Paul (it was a 10th century Romanesque church, now a 13th century Gothic one).

The *Domklausur* was a Bishop's Palace at one time, onwards to the Dominican Monastery & Church of St. Pauli that was a retreat for monks. It houses an Archaeology Museum, so its way educational.

Brandenburg (Havel) has some towers built in brick, which would be the *Plauer Torturm*, the *Rathenower Torturm* (built 1290), and the *Mühlentorturm* (built 15th century).

Yikes, I haven't even mentioned the Franciscan's Church of St. John (1237), the St. Gotthardt Kirche (12th/15th century), and the true Gothic masterpiece of the St. Catherine Church...

There's no getting away from churches in [Prenzlau](#), whose towers of the St. Mary's Church is the town's landmark. During the summer you're more than welcome to climb to the top of 'em. The 1.5km of Prenzlau's *Stadtmauer* doesn't seem that big from that vantage point. ;-)

Promise me you won't leave Prenzlau before heading to the Dominican Monastery Prenzlau from the 13th century.

Another Franciscan Monastery awaits you in the next town on our itinerary: [Neubrandenburg](#). The Johanniskirche that belongs to the monastery might be from the 13th century, but its Renaissance pulpit and Baroque altar are beautiful in their own right.

Neubrandenburg also has those City Gates and a medieval *Stadtmauer* that everyone loves so much. The Treptow Gate is 32-meters high, towering above the city wall that's only a mere 7-meters tall. At the peak of their defense of the city, it had more towers as well as moats to safeguard the city — and places like the 14th century Chapel of St. George.

You're just about to the half-way point of the German portion of the European Route Of Brick Gothic when you arrive in [Anklam](#). The reason you're here is its Nikolai Church (built 1280) and its 52-meter high tower that doubles as an observation tower. The Church of St. Mary (built 13th century) also has a lookout tower.

The 32-meter high *Steintor* (Stone Gate) is the only remaining gate of its day, and is now a museum.

There isn't a whole lot to see in [Wolgast](#), so that means you'll have plenty of time to look around the town's St. Peter's Church (built 12th/13th centuries) and its 15th century of Chapel Gertrude.

It's your first ruin when you arrive in [Greifswald](#), the Klosterruine Eldena was built in the 13th century, eventually destroyed as the [Thirty Years' War](#) raged on in the 17th century. The Dom St. Nikolai is still intact, said to be the oldest and biggest (including all its side chapels) in the region.

If you thought you've seen a lot so far, that ain't nothing compared to what Rügen has to offer. There are some 20 churches throughout the island that have made the Brick Gothic list.

Deep breath... here we go:

St. Mary's (built 1180) was used by Cistercian monks, the Old Parish Church belonged to Danish monks, St. John's (13th century) tower was used by sailors as a landmark, St. Michaelis' Church is one of the most "imposing," while the Church Bobbin has an extensive collection of art spanning centuries.

Church Piseritz might have been built in 1302, but it is its 16th century crucifix and Rococo pulpit that everyone wants to see, St. George Wiek was built in 1318, and Church Lanthow is still holding services (as well as concerts) after more than 500 years.

The St. Lawrence Church Zudar is a former pilgrimage church, and St. Mary Magdalene's got the

oldest bells around these parts. There are two churches to St. Andrew — one being in Lacker Granitz having a wide squat tower, the other in Rappin built in 1305.

In my opinion (I'm entitled, ha ha), the United Church Zicker whose simple design (and squat tower) from the late 14th century really grabbed my attention, as I'm sure it will yours.

[Stralsund](#) is another town with a number of sites to see. The St. Nikolai is one of the oldest churches, and offers free tours in both German and English for anyone interested. St. Mary's also has German/English tours, and from atop its 104-meter high tower you can see the [Baltic Sea](#).

The St. James' Church is more than just a place of worship, it's a concert and exhibition venue; while the St. Catherine Monastery was also an orphanage and arsenal at one time or another. It is now where you'll find a Cultural History Museum and the German Oceanographic Museum & Aquarium.

At Mönchstraße 38 the Museum House (built 1320) shows what it was really like to live during the height of the Hanseatic League's zenith.

And because I'm obsessed with books, it was the Baroque library at the Franciscan Monastery of St. John from the 13th century that I loved the most.

[Ribnitz-Damgarten](#) has less than a handful of sites to see. One being the *Rostocker Tor*, the last of its kind in town. It's been keeping watch since it was built in 1257, and is open to visitors from May to September. St. Bartholomew is open from May to October, even after being destroyed during the Thirty Years' War. Last stop is the Klarissenkloster Ribnitz, a staple around here since the 14th century.

I can't believe the time on the European Route Of Brick Gothic is winding down. Good thing a place like [Bad Doberan](#) has got my spirits up. The reason you're here is the 12th century Cistercian Cathedral with an altar dedicated to St. Michael. The Ossuary, the final resting place of 13th-16th century monks' bones is also an interesting (albeit a bit morbid) piece of architectural and religious history.

All right, after this long of a journey so far, you're entitled to relax a little in one of Bad Doberan's wellness centers.

With just three more towns left as you arrive in [Güstrow](#) (and now that you're refreshed), I hope you're making the best of what's left. Too bad the Dom Güstrow (Cathedral) hasn't been used since the 16th century — it's a bum rap for a church that's been around since 1226. At least the 14th century Parish Church of St. Mary's 45-meter high observation tower makes up for it.

No leaving before you've gotten the chance to see the 14th/15th century Gertrude Chapel or the

Holy Spirit Church built in the “doubly unlucky” year of 1313.

Tosh! Thirteen is a lucky number in my books — bring on Friday the 13th, and wouldn't that be quite an auspicious day to see it? ;-)

Neukloster's deal on the European Route Of Brick Gothic is the Propstei, a home belonging to the Provost of the local monastery. The painting in the monastic church of St. Mary Sonnenkamp are legendary — a place that fell to the Swedes during the Thirty Years' War.

It's been a long journey, and we've one town left: the grand city of [Wismar](#). The first thing you might notice is the 80-meter high tower of the St. Mary Church.

Amazing as you'll find the church's architecture. You'll really be stunned once you've learned that it was the Lutheran St. Nicholas Church that managed to survive [World War II](#) totally unscathed.

Everyone gathers at the churchyard of St. George to enjoy all sorts of lectures, concerts, and other types of exhibitions; yet to just sit for a spell with a drink would be at the Summer Cafe run by the 14th century Holy Spririt Church. Guided tours will take you around for just 1 euro — and they even offer a pilgrim hostel for affordable (yet basic) accommodations.

That's good, 'cause I'm really tired after trekking what seems like all over [North Germany](#). Maybe I'll stay for a few days — before finding another [scenic route](#) that's all about [Germany history](#) of some sort or another.

European Route Of Brick Gothic Web Site

Here's the official Web site of the [European Route Of Brick Gothic](#).