

Hanseatic League -- From The Sea Coasts To Flying The Skies

What do [Lübeck](#), [Hamburg](#), [Cologne](#), [Osnabrück](#), [Goslar](#), [Erfurt](#), [Berlin](#), [Frankfurt \(Oder\)](#), [Rostock](#), [Stade](#), [Wismar](#), and [Bremen](#) all have in common?

What if I add Visby, Brügge, London, and Novgorod to the list? Then we know they're not just [cities & towns in Germany](#).

Give up?

They were all part of an international alliance known as the Hanseatic League, or Hansa, or *Hanse*, as it was sometimes called.

The Hansa was the brainchild of Henry the Lion, a 12th century Saxon Duke. Although, when he organized a bunch of towns along the [Baltic Sea](#) and [North Sea](#) coasts little did he know the power the merchant guilds would hold until around the 18th century — actually going until around the mid-19th century.

Trade around the Baltic Sea wasn't all that lucrative until the Hanseatic League got in on the sailing action. Well, between the Vikings and pirates, who could afford to do anything? This is why so many towns and cities joined in, they all made a pact to help each other with aid. They even had their own legal system.

But, trade was their ultimate be-all end-all. See? Everything has to do with money. At the height of the League's power in the 14th century, all sorts of new and exciting goods were making their way to/from Germany. They were getting things like herring from Scandinavia; and they were exporting salt — because Hamburg was at the epicenter of the Salt Routes.

I'm sure not just the Germans were happy with all the linen, wool, and silk that made its way from port to port. Sometimes goods weren't the only things transported, a good number of ships carried troops. The *Hanse* was partially responsible for carrying on the infamous War of the Roses.

They did get their rear-ends handed back to 'em by the Dutch, who fought against their monopoly during the Hansa-Dutch War in the 15th century — giving the Netherlands the much needed access to the Baltic Sea.

The wealth generated by all the timber, amber, grain, and everything in-between gave rise to many gorgeous cities along Germany's coastline. We can thank the *Hansa Teutonica* (its Latin name) for all the outstanding brick Gothic architecture found in places like [Anklam](#), [Greifswald](#), and [Lüneburg](#).

Come to think of it... we probably wouldn't have the [European Route of Brick Gothic Architecture](#) without them.

Too bad Lübeck isn't on that scenic route, but it was the capital city of the *Hanse*. Once you've seen the city's Holstein Gate, you can see the real power and wealth of it all. Too bad the Hanseatic Museum isn't in Germany (it's in Bergen, Norway). Maybe someone will eventually add one.

One of the greatest achievements of the Hanseatic League wasn't a church or castle, nor was it a typical building of any kind. They were lighthouses along the coasts. A good safety feature, huh?

As with most things, nothing lasts. By the 16th century the Hanseatic League was losing its grip, caused by things like the [Protestant Reformation](#) and the rise of the Ottoman Empire.

In 1862 the Hanseatic League was officially dissolved. However, they are making a comeback of sorts. Many of its former members are proud of their Hanseatic history, which is why the Rostock Football Team is known as *Hansa Rostock*. And why you'll see titles like the "Free & Hanseatic City of" (English) or "Freie- und Hansestadt" (German) added before the names of Lübeck, Hamburg, and Bremen.

There's a New Hansa in town, BTW. Any city or town associated with the original organization (or was the site of a Kontor, a trading post belonging to the League in other cities) can join in the New Hansa. Every year they host a huge festival, known as the Hanseatic Days of New Time, or *Hansetage der Neuzeit* in German, hosted by one of the League's former cities.

Even Lufthansa, the German National Airline, carries the Hansa name (*Luft* means air, BTW). Wow, if that doesn't say something about the Hansa's contribution to Germany, nothing will.