

## Himmelpforten -- Land Of Santa With Scenic Routes

The town of Himmelpforten (known as *Himmelpoorten* in Low German, literally translating to Gates of Heaven) is a town of three districts, but when you factor in that it's part of the Samtgemeinde (Collective Municipality) Oldendorf-Himmelpforten it becomes some ten districts, and increases its size to over 17,000 residents spread out over 196.24 square kilometers.

That's a lot of ground to cover, so it's a good thing I'm here to help you find all the highlights of both the town, and the Collective Municipality.

A great place to start is the Local History Museum (*Heimatmuseum*), a great place to learn more about the local environment, and the region's prehistoric history. Can I actually call it that?

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Nevermind, I'm thinking about the environment, and the best way to explore it is on one of the many different cycling routes that cross around the countryside. You'll find the *Elberadweg* (Elbe Cycle Path) around here, as well as the *Nordseeradweg* (North Sea Cycle Route) and the *Mönchsweg* (Monk's Trail). Plus, once a year the community comes out to bike along the *Niedersächsische Milchstraße* (Lower Saxon Milk Route) all together.

Yikes, almost forgot to mention the Nature Reserve Hohes Moor and the Nature Trail that might only be 2.5km long, but offers ponds and plenty of shady trees. Plus there's the Hammaher See, great for fishing and hiking — perfect for the nature lovers.

As for the town's architectural history, you'll find lots of fantastic old churches to see, like the St. Peter's Church, known for many of its old gravestones in the cemetery in the village of Burweg.

Speaking of the town's villages, in Düdenbüttel, you'll find a charming old mill from the 1850s — the reason Himmelpforten lies on the *Niedersächsische Mühlenstraße* (Lower Saxon Mill Route); while the village of Hammah is famous for its Neolithic graves, and Heinbockel has charming pubs for a few rounds of drinks after a long day of sightseeing.

All of this sounds totally great, doesn't it? Well... what if I told you the best time to be here is Christmas? Because that time of year, Himmelpforten turns into *Christkinddorf* (Santa Village). A winter wonderland with loads of letters to good ol' Santa Claus arrive full of little kids' wishes for the season. No surprise with that town name...

My wish is the same no matter what season it is — for all of you to love Germany (and places like Himmelpforten) as much as I do.