

Germany's Main River Begins With Beer And Ends With Wine

The Main River in Germany is really two rivers: the Red Main, which begins in the [Franconian Jura](#), and the White Main, born in the mountains of the [Fichtelgebirge](#). They become simply the “Plain Main” at [Kulmbach](#) in [Upper Franconia](#), and remain so until the Main empties into the [Rhine River](#), some 529 km or 330 miles distant at [Mainz](#).

Choosing to enter the world at Kulmbach isn't a bad idea, if you like beer. Kulmbach has both the enormous Kulmbacher brewery and a populace so eager to enjoy its products that they celebrate with a suitably large *Bierfest* each July!

The Main then proceeds west across the Franconian Jura (German: *Fränkische Alb*), running past the quaint medieval town of [Burgkunstadt](#). At the Town Hall here you can view artifacts of a 9th century castle unearthed during a 1975 archaeological dig.

Next on the Main's route is one of the few places in the world where traditional basket-weaving is still treasured, Lichtenfels. The creations of the town's basketry artists, displayed at the annual autumn Basket Market, weave a spell of their own!

The Main now curves southwest, following the edge of the [Franconian Switzerland](#) Nature Park. As it flows toward Bad Staffelsten, it passes beneath the Banz Abbey, founded in 1069 atop a 421m (1380-foot) hill and converted to a palace in 1803.

This shining example of Baroque architecture is surprisingly eclipsed by Balthasar Neumann's *Vierzenheilige* (Church of the Fourteen Saints) just on the other side of the Main Valley!

Even older than the Banz Abbey is the 1012 Cathedral at [Bamberg](#), although it burned twice before its present incarnation was begun in 1237. One of the great mysteries of German culture is the identity of the Bamberg Horseman, a medieval equestrian statue occupying one of the Cathedral's niches!

The Main leaves lovely [Franconia](#) at lovely [Würzburg](#), where the mighty cliff-top Marienberg Fortress sheltered the population from Allied bombs late in [World War II](#). Würzburg is at the heart of Franconia's wine production industry, and Franconia's specialty, white wine, flows as freely as the Main itself from the *Juliusspital* wine cellar!

The Main now makes a horseshoe turn, heading north and then south to Marktheidenfeld. Here, the blue 18th-century Franck-Haus, once the home of a wealthy wine merchant, now contains a collection of miniature books locally known as “the world's smallest library!” Atop a 224m/735-foot bluff outside the town is 12th-century Rothenfels Castle.

Leaving [Bavaria](#) for [Hesse](#), the Main River flows through the [Spessart Forest](#), past the haunting moated castle at Mespelbrunn before entering [Frankfurt am Main](#). A city in transition, Frankfurt fights to keep its ties to its past, which began in 500 A.D..

The Emperor's Room at the Römerberg in the Old City was the site of many past coronations. Adjacent to Römerberg are the art treasures of the Emperor's Cathedral (*Kaiserdom*). Goethe's birthplace and childhood home is now a Museum. The *Commerzbank Tower*, Frankfurt's tallest building, casts deeply contrasting shadow over them all!

Past Frankfurt the Main flows through [Rüsselsheim](#), famous for its Opel automobiles. Then, again, it's on to the ancient (38 A.D.) city of [Mainz](#). At the confluence of the Main and Rhine, Mainz is Germany's wine capital. The Mainz Wine Fair, held annually at summer's end, kicks off the Rhenish-Hesse grape harvest.

Did you notice? From the beer gardens of Kulmbach to the wine gardens of Mainz, the waters of the Main flow past all the best of Germany! :-)