

Münsterland -- Westphalia's Heaven On Wheels And Hooves

Many horse lovers believe that all horses go to heaven when they die. Would it be too great a stretch, then, for bike lovers to think that all bicycles go to Münsterland when their working days are over?

The flat expanses Münsterland, where 4,500 km or 2,800 mi of biking paths are flanked by hedgerows, meadows, and woodlands make this area of northern Westphalia a bicycling Paradise! Moated castles rise from the Münsterland's plains like dreams, some welcoming, some forbidding, and some simply too fantastical for belief!

The best way to take in as many of Münsterland's castles in as short a time as possible is to cycle along the 1,000 km or 621 mile 100 Palace Route. It takes in a remarkable 150 of castles, chateaux, and manor houses of every age and pedigree, some of which are open for tours and others of which turn away all comers with the same ferocity which has kept them standing for a thousand years or more.

None of them is more astonishing than *Schloss Nordkirchen* (Nordkirchen Palace) in [Nordkirchen](#), the 18th-century Baroque masterpiece often referred to as the "Versailles of Westphalia." Should your efforts to view the castle of your choice be spurned, take heart, because the 100 Palace Route has an abundance of inns and restaurants more than eager to welcome you with shelter and sustenance!

While the bicycle is most popular form of transportation throughout Münsterland, it has some serious competition. Horses have always held a special place in the hearts of the region's people. Why not arrange a stay at farm with riding horses, or at the very least pay a visit to the Meerfelder Bruch Nature Area near the town of [Dülmen](#)?

Here you'll find the last of Germany's native ponies, the Dülmeners, running free thanks to the Dukes of Croy, who set aside land for them in the mid-1800s. Each year the herd is rounded up and its yearling stallions sold to people who come from around the globe for the privilege of bidding on them!

While the Dülmener ponies revel in their freedom, Münsterland's equine aristocrats from the North Rhine-Westphalian State Stud Farm in [Warendorf](#) are doing their best to maintain the legendary excellence of Germany's warmbloods. In the early fall of each year, they show off in the Parade of Stallions performing in the Pas De Deux and in the quadriga races, the equine equivalents of ballet and NASCAR racing!

If seeing Münsterland from the back of a bike or horse isn't quite for you, why not soar above it all in a hot air balloon? The capital of Westphalia is the 1200-year old city of [Münster](#), where hot air ballooning is (almost!) as popular as biking and riding.

You're not one for heights? Then try to arrive in time for the August Montgolfiade, when fifty hot air balloons take to the air above Lake Aa (*Aasee*), staying aloft long enough to fill the evening skies with a surreal glow.

While you're in Münster, take a guided tour with a *Kieperkerl*, a wooden-shod peddler like those who once kept Münsterland's villagers supplied with food and household goods (see the statue in the *Speikerhof*).

At St. Lambert's Church glimpse the city's turbulent history by taking in the iron cages in which heretics were once suspended from the towers. The Peace of Westphalia, which ended the [Thirty Years' War](#) in 1648, was signed in Münster's 14th-century Town Hall.

Relax with the locals over a cold one at the *Kuhlviertel* (cow quarter), where a host of wonderfully restored pubs await. How about Pinkus Müller, which boasts of being the world's oldest brewer of organic beer?

When you're ready for some genuine Münster fare, head back to the *Speikerhof* and *Grosser Kieperkerl*, for a dinner of Potthast or Tottchen, two of Westphalia's specialties. Wrap up your day by heading for the Jüdefelderstraße, where you're sure to find a good number of Münster's 50,000-plus students more than happy to introduce you to nightlife, Münsterland style! ;-)