

## Oranier Route -- Honoring The Mighty House Of Orange-Nassau

Trivia question time. Do you know why the many sports teams of the Netherlands wear orange? The color doesn't appear on its flag. Nor, is it known for the citrusy orange fruit.

I'm gonna tell you. It is because of William I of Orange (often called William the Silent), who helped the Dutch gain independence from the Spanish in the 16th century.

William I of Orange? Wait, wasn't there a William of Orange?

Yes, he was William III — or Wilhelm III as this is Germany we're talking about.

Uh, no. No it isn't. You see, William III was the King of England.

Wow, I think I even confused myself on how we got from talking about the Netherlands to the British monarchy, on a Germany website.

Let me go back and explain...

Actually, the mighty Oranier Route would do a much better job than I ever could. Highlighted along 2,400 km (1,491 mi) between the Netherlands and Germany is the history of the Oranges and the Nassau-Oranges — a family dynasty that went on to produce Queens and Kings to the far reaches of Europe, including the modern day ruling family of the Netherlands.

### Start of the Oranier Route

The Oranier Route is a circular route that actually starts in Amsterdam, Netherlands. But since we focus on Germany, what about we start off at its twelfth stop, [Cleves](#), or Kleef as it's known in Dutch?

You might have heard of Anne of Cleves as she is sometimes known. Anne was born here in 1515, going on to become the first German Queen of England when she married Henry VIII.

Visitors to Cleves should also see the *Haus Koekkoek*, with works of the 19th century painter; the *Museum Kurhaus*, and the Schwanenburg. A town that produced a queen should have a castle, right? And the Schwanenburg is it.

[Moers](#) is our next town, famous for its Miners Lamp, standing 30-meters high. The Moerser Schloss, a 12th century castle built atop volcanic rocks, was the home of Maurice of Orange. The castle was also home to Princess Louise Henriette — the mom to Prussia's first king by marrying

Friedrich Wilhelm of the Hohenzollerns. She also founded the first orphanage in Germany.

After a visit to the castle, check out Moers's pedestrian zone for some shopping or relaxing at an outdoor cafe.

Sorry, Maurice, it's time to go. We're heading to Burg Nassau in the town of Nassau (Lahn). The castle was built before the 12th century, and while it's now partially in ruins you can eat at the restaurant. Stein's Castle is also in ruins — but the half-timbered houses and *Rathaus* are in grand shape.

[Diez](#) is one of the oldest towns on the Oranier Route, dating to around 20–12,000 B.C. It has seen Prehistoric Man, Romans, Celts, and a number of others come passing along the way — the Nassau-Oranges too. The 11th century Diez Castle belonged to the Nassau family, and is now a museum on the House of Nassau after being used as a prison for a while.

FYI, Diez received a park known as The Grove, a gift given to the people by Wilhelm I. And the town hosts the *Martinsmarkt*, a festival going on for 30 years.

Care to live like a knight during the Oranges' day? You can at the Medieval Joust, held on even numbered years in the summer at Schloss Braunfels. The city of [Braunfels](#) has, besides the 13th century fortress-looking castle, plenty of half-timbered houses, a Royal Brewery, a Forest Museum, and City Museum.

[Dillenburg](#)'s contribution to the House of Orange-Nassau is the *Wilhelmsturm*, a tower housing a museum on the "Family." Like their part of a Mafiaso film. ;-)

After a stop there, enjoy the hiking trails and all the framework houses since Dillenburg is also on the [German Framework Road](#) — plus get to party at the Cherry Market in June.

More museums (Contemporary Art & Regional History) are found in the town of [Siegen](#). Yes, you now left [Hesse](#), entered [North Rhine-Westphalia](#), and are looking over to [Rhineland-Palatinate](#). ;-)

Either way, not only was Siegen ruled by the Orange-Nassaus, but was the birthplace of Peter Paul Reubens. His digs, however, weren't as grand as the 12th century Upper Castle and 17th century Lower Castle that the Nassaus lived in.

The Counts of Nassau lived in the Freudenberg Castle (built in 1389, destroyed in 1666) — and it also has an *Altstadt*, half-timbered houses, a 13th century Romanesque Church, and a City Museum too.

[Hilchenbach](#) is full of Orange history. William I's campaign against the Spanish started here at the Ginsburg, where he planned his liberation of the Dutch people. The Ginsburg is in ruins, but its

tower is used for cultural events and weddings. The local *Stiftskeppel* (a Baroque church) was created under the patronage of one of the Orange Counts.

The Baroque city of [Bad Arolsen](#) is next. Schloss Arolsen is a Baroque castle, and the Royal Palace holds all sorts of art exhibits. Because of the “Bad” designation, take advantage of the town’s spa treatments.

Then you’ll get to do it again in [Bad Pyrmont](#). Pyrmont Castle is now the City Museum (it was a bit worn for wear during the [Thirty Years’ War](#), but not destroyed), has a Jewish cemetery, and music piped into the streets.

We meet up with the German Framework Road again in the town of [Wernigerode](#) in the [Harz](#) Mountains of [Saxony-Anhalt](#). Its Neo-Gothic 19th century castle is now a Cultural & Historical Center, but it is the *Rathaus* (built 1497) that wins Architectural Best-in-Show.

Stolberg’s landmark is its castle, which the Oranges owned in 1542 — and the *Zinkhütterhof* is an enormous building of industrial, economic, and cultural history.

[Dessau-Roßlau](#) doesn’t have castles — it has palaces. The *Georgium* (named for Johann Georg who married an Orange-Nassau princess) has a stunning art gallery and English-style garden. Luisium Castle too has a museum, if you’re interested.

Don’t be lingering too long, Schloss Oranienbaum awaits. It was the summer home of Princess Henriette Catharina von Orange-Nassau — and its Baroque gardens are heavenly.

Close to Oranienbaum is Wörlitz (well, politics just merged those to into [Oranienbaum-Wörlitz](#)), found within the Biosphere Mittelbe. Yeah, yeah, hiking trails and natural scenery. I guess I shouldn’t be like that — Goethe stayed here, and it has all sorts of festivals like the Spring Awakening, Heritage Day, and Christmas Market.

[Potsdam](#) is where the Oranges meet the Prussians. [Schloss Sanssouci](#) (one of the most striking Rococo palaces in the world) was home to the King of Prussia (remember, it was an Orange who was the 1st Prussian king’s mom), and the Mediterranean style Orangery Palace was used for foreign royals.

The city of Potsdam is also where you’ll find the Babelsberg Film Studios, where Marlene Dietrich got her start.

Nearby is [Oranienburg](#), meeting up with the [German Ceramics Route](#). It’s where the Baroque palace of Johann Georg II and his wife Henriette Catharina of Orange-Nassau was once used as an SS barracks during [WWII](#), then by the Soviet Army afterwards.

Oranienburg Castle might be beautiful, but compared to [Schwerin Castle](#) in [Schwerin](#) (our next town), just about any other Burg just pales. Schwerin Castle is the proud seat of the State Parliament, but this 10th century castle is said to be haunted on top of it all.

After playing Ghost Buster, stop at the 13th century Schwerin Cathedral for a wonderful example of Gothic architecture in brick.

We're meeting up yet again with the German Framework Road in [Hitzacker](#) — and the [Drawehn](#). This [Lower Saxon](#) town might be well-known for its framework houses, though it also has a number of tumuli (prehistoric graves); plus, they pick a Wine Queen every year at the Grape Harvest.

The journey of the Orange-Nassaus is at an end once you arrive in [Lingen](#). The city itself was once of great strategic importance during the Spanish rule over the Dutch, eventually coming into the rule of the Oranges in the 1630s.

Once the Oranges took over they leveled Lingen Castle, leaving only the *Pulverturm* (Powder Tower). A strange end to a 13th century castle, don't you think?

And even though the Oranier Route ends here in Lingen, you don't have to leave until you've partied at the Tower Festival at Pentecost, or the Medieval Market (every three years), also at Pentecost, and the Harbor Festival. A truly romantic thing to do in Lingen is an outdoor skate right outside the *Rathaus* during the Christmas Market.

Now, that's not a strange way to end our time on the Oranier Route, that's for sure. ;-)