

## Ortenau -- Black Forest, White Wine, Blue Lakes



### [Ortenau Map](#)

The Ortenau, along the western edge of [Baden-Württemberg](#), is a region of contrasts. Its oldest town, [Appenweier](#), was first mentioned in 884. That was nearly 1100 years before its most popular tourist attraction, the [Europa-Park](#) Amusement park in Rust, opened in 1975. The kids will love its fourteen plus differently themed areas and nine roller coasters, but this region has far more to recommend it!

The Ortenau soars to the moors on the heights of 1164 meters (3820-foot) Hornisgrinde, the tallest peak in the Northern Black Forest, and stretches along the [Rhine River](#) Plain with its abundant vineyards and fruit orchards. Mountains, rolling hills, verdant valleys, and crystalline rivers and lakes make the Ortenau a charming place for outdoor activities.

Whether you prefer leisurely hikes or the challenge of Nordic walking, cycling or hang gliding, golf, swimming, or archery, you could do any or all of them here. There's a tremendous amount to see and do in this relatively small piece of Germany, so it's hard to know exactly where to start.

A carnival, however, is always fun, so I'll start with the town of [Gengenbach](#) and its *Fasend*, the carnival season which begins a few weeks before Ash Wednesday. The entire population of the town of about 11,000 dons old-fashioned nightgowns, and raises a ruckus with fireworks to awaken the jester asleep in a medieval tower.

The jester takes possession of the key to Gengenbach's Town Hall and oversees the remainder of carnival season, during which mythical devils, forest goblins, and witches are seen frequently around the town! The Town Hall itself is one of Gengenbach's major attractions. Its twenty-four windows are transformed each year, in a single evening of theater and music, into the world's

largest Advent Calendar.

From the spectacle of *Fasend* in Gengenbach, you can head for the attractions of [Offenburg](#). Stop along the way at the village of Zell-Weierbach for a delightful diversion at the Barefoot Park, where you can return to childhood (and your kids will love it, too!) by removing your shoes and walking over a kilometer of different surfaces, including sand, pebbles, logs, slate, and grass. Wash your feet in a brook, as they thank you for the massage! :-)

Zell-Weierbach is also the place to sample some of the [German wines](#), especially the white Rieslings, for which the region is famous. There have been vineyards in the Offenburg area since the 14th century, but the city itself dates back to the days of the Roman Emperor Nero.

If you're a history buff, visit the Salmen Inn. It's the site at which the thirteen demands of the *Offenburger Programm*, a human rights platform in the name of the people of Baden, were presented in 1847 prior to the Badish revolution.

The ritual Jewish baths in Offenburg date back to 1300, but you'll have to arrange for them in advance.

Get a taste of Ortenau's romantic past in the village of Kappelrodeck, where Rodeck Castle was once home to a nobleman's daughter who fell in love with a peasant. Not permitted to marry him, she ran off to live in a mountainside vineyard cairn of rocks known as the Dasenstein.

She is remembered today in the name of the local wine growers' cooperative, *Hexe von Dasenstein* (*Hexe* = Witch). The success of area wines, one of which was named the best of all European wines in 1982, is attributed to her blessings of the grape crops.