

Rhenish Hesse (Rheinhessen) -- Germany's Wine Triangle

Are your two favorite things in the world great wine and days spent cycling through warm, sunny, peaceful green countryside dotted with vineyard after vineyard? Then there's no better way for you to spend a vacation than by visiting Germany's Rhenish Hesse region aka *Rheinhessen*!

Book yourself rooms at some of the area's vineyard guest cottages, from which you can explore the countryside along the 322-km or 200-mile Rhine Cycle Route (*Rheinradweg*). You'll travel to the three towns of [Worms](#), [Mainz](#), and [Bingen am Rhein](#), which define the boundaries of Rhenish Hesse, but you'll also enjoy many delightful surprises along the way.

Begin your *Rheinhessen* cycling tour at Worms, where one of Germany's best-known wines, *Liebfraumilch* (named for the *Liebfrauenkirche*), originated. Worms is famous for its role in the Legend of the Nibelungs. Arrive during August, and you can enjoy the Nibelung Festival aka *Nibelungen Festspiele*. If you're lucky, you might just stumble across a piece of gold the Nibelungen left behind on the river bank! Also take in the Cathedral, where in 1521 Martin Luther refused to retract his teachings.

Cycle north to Oppenheim, for some excellent Riesling wine and an even better view of the [Rhine Valley](#) from atop the St. Katherine's Church tower (*Katharinerkirche*). This Church is widely regarded as the finest example of Gothic architecture between the Strasbourg Minster and the Cologne Cathedral! Visit the German Wine Making Museum and one of the largest underground systems on the planet, the eerie medieval Oppenheim labyrinths!

Two miles or 3.5 km further on is Nierstein, home of the oldest vineyard in Germany (documented in 742 A.D). A festival-happy town, Nierstein holds the Flower Festival or *Maibaumfest* in April/May, the *Roter Hang* (Red Slope) Wine Festival in June, and the *Winzerfest* during August. The wine-tasting booths of the *Roter Hang* are actually located on the slopes of the vineyards themselves!

From Nierstein, continue on to Mainz and the Gutenberg Museum, with its display of rare Gutenberg Bibles. Some of Germany's most important churches, including St. Martin's Cathedral where many of Germany's kings were crowned, are here. Its Museum contains the diocese's art treasures, some of which are two thousand years old. Lovers of the Impressionists will be fascinated by the astonishingly beautiful stained glass windows Mark Chagall created for Mainz' St. Stephen's Church.

Cross the river from Mainz into [Hesse](#)'s capital, [Wiesbaden](#). The Romans settled here twenty centuries ago to take advantage of the area's hot springs. Now a renowned health center, Wiesbaden has 26 thermal spas and a magnificently restored *Kurhaus*.

Continue along this side of the Rhine to [Rüdesheim](#), also known as the "Gateway to the Upper Middle Rhine Valley." Stroll the Old Town's infamous *Drosselgasse*, where live music will entice

you into one of many wine gardens and taverns.

See what remains of 13th-century Ehrenfels Castle, one of the most photographed landmarks on the Rhine. As you head back to the ferry dock, notice the Bromersburg, which the Archbishops of Mainz built between the 11th and 14th century. The castle is now home to the Rheingau Wine Museum, where you'll learn everything you wanted to know (and some things you didn't!) about the history of humankind's fascination with wine.

Bingen, named for Abbess Hildegard von Bingen, lies back across the Rhine. The riverside museum devoted to the life of Hildegard is a must-see! Walk, as she must have, along the 1000-year-old Drusus Bridge for a view of the Bingen Mouse Tower (*Bingen Mäuseturm*), a legendary site where mice devoured the evil bishop Hatto. Make sure to sample the local specialty "Ice Wine" or *Eiswein* before you leave Bingen.

Finish your tour of Rhenish Hesse with a visit to [Alzey](#), named for the fiddler in the legend "Song of the Nibelung." Alzey has everything you'd expect from an ancient German village, including its own fish market, streets of perfectly preserved half-timbered houses, and a Renaissance-era town hall!

As a final reward for your cycling efforts, stop in at the Alea Restaurant for a meal of *Saftiges Schweinerückensteak* (if you like this...). This pork loin steak is served on potato noodles cooked in sauerkraut, and braised to please any wine lover's palate with mushrooms, bacon, onion and of course, grapes!