

Ruhr River -- Feeding German Industrialism

Great. Here we go again arguing over the length of yet another [river in Germany](#). We Germans are a literal bunch, so the official length of the Ruhr River has been marked at 219.3 kilometers, or 136 miles.

You might hear 217, or 218 kilometer; but it doesn't change the fact that the Ruhr River starts at 666.5 meters or 2,200 feet above sea level, dropping down some 349 meters or 1,144 feet (and more) before it empties into the [Rhine](#) with the help of thirteen tributaries (the Lenne being the biggest).

Being the namegiver for the [Ruhrgebiet \(Ruhr Area\)](#), the source of the Ruhr starts in the former [Prussian](#) town of [Winterberg](#) in what is now [North Rhine-Westphalia](#), and the [Sauerland](#) Region. Winterberg is appropriately named since it's a haven for winter sports (bobsledding, luge, that kind of thing), and home to the West German Sports Museum.

Yeah, from the days when there was an East and West Germany. Now every year there's a huge dog-sledding event, and lots of hiking trails around the Rhine-Weser Watershed.

They also eat a lot of eggs around here, so expect to see them all over the menu.

As the Ruhr River starts its downward slope in elevation, it brings us to [Meschede](#) along the southern edge of the Arnsberg Nature Park — and the Hennesee, one of the five lakes along the way.

Meschede even has the ruins of an ancient city and a yearly Wine Festival.

The other town in the Arnsberg Nature Park is [Arnsberg](#) itself. The town is heavily forested, but that doesn't stop it from having a castle (Schloss Arnsberg), the Sauerland Museum (appropriate since this *is* the Sauerland), and lots of churches — although the Stadtkapelle is the prettiest of them all.

So what if that's biased — I'm writing this ditty. ;-)

Time for a Damn Attitude Beer. I apologize — I mean a DAB (Dortmund Actien Brauerei) beer — in [Dortmund](#), no less.

They got more than that here though. This is a vibrant former [Hanseatic League](#) city with a casino (c'mon triple 7's), another Ruhr River lake, a zoo, and a bunch of museums (like the Art Museum and Natural History Museum).

I don't wanna leave. And you can't make me. ;-)

Guess I have to, I suppose. We still have more towns left. Like [Witten](#) in the industrial Ruhr Area. Here's one of the River Ruhr's power plants that supply many of the half-timbered houses (among other) with electricity.

The Ruhr also supplies a good deal of drinking water, although not too many people are known to swim in the river — it's mainly canoeing, sailing, and rowing that goes on along the way.

Yuck, who wants to swim where any one of 28 species of fish (including American Crayfish — hey, how'd you get here?) could find its way to your swimming trunks? Thanks, I'll stick to the shoreline looking for Black Stork.

Where was I? Oh, yes, Witten. Not only is it industrial, it's historical, too. The ruins of Burg Hardenstein, the intact Schloss Steinhausen, and the landmark St. John Church prove that.

While Witten is historical and industrial, [Bochum](#) is educational — home to a slew of universities. Bochum's also home to like 20 theaters, an 8th century church (Sts. Peter & Paul), a Planetarium, a Railway Museum, and the German Mining Museum.

Tired isn't the word for it after a few days here in Bochum.

No rest for the weary, because [Essen](#) is pretty active too. Once a target for bombings during [World War II](#) because of its industries (like the Krupp Factory), Essen now has a bustling art & culture scene.

The Krupps, BTW, built the stunning *Villa Hügel*. And they weren't the only ones to build factories along the Ruhr — you could find everything from coking plants, to coal and iron production.

While here in Essen, come see the Essen Abbey, and the Golden Madonna at the Cathedral. Or, just shop til you run out of Euros at the gorgeous Christmas Market.

Did you shop til you dropped? If you got any Euros left over you can spend them at any one of the bars or cafes in [Duisburg](#).

While the Ruhr River ends "in" Duisburg, it actually doesn't officially until the water passes the *Rheinorange*, or Rhine Orange, a sculpture that marks the mouth of the Ruhr into the Rhine — and making it the fifth or sixth largest tributary of this mighty river. Again with the arguing?

At this point the Ruhr is "only" at 20 meter or 66 feet above sea level, having traveled from the [Rothaargebirge](#) to the town with the largest inland port on the continent.

Not a bad journey, I think. And Duisburg ain't all that bad either, with a Dragon Boat Regatta every year and all sorts of Philharmonic performances throughout the year.

If experts would stop arguing over the length (or its ranking along the Rhine) they might come to realize the Ruhr is just wonderful — and there's no arguing over *that*.