

## Ruhrgebiet -- Home of Germany's Cultural Revolution

Germany's Ruhrgebiet (also known as Ruhr Area) is as much a concept as it is a geographical reality. This collection of municipalities, with its more than 50 separate towns and cities and nearly 5 1/2 million people, has big plans for the future.

If you want to get a glimpse of what is really going on in the Ruhrgebiet, now is the time to do it. The city of [Essen](#) has been designated as a "European Capital of Culture" city for 2010. What does that mean for your trip?

The European Union gives this designation to cities which have something unique. What is unique about not only Essen, but the entire Ruhrgebiet, is its ongoing transformation from being the heart of Germany's 19th-century coal mining and steel production. Its landscape is no longer obscured behind clouds of black smoke.

The Ruhrgebiet is now a major service industries area, with cultural and natural attractions overshadowing its industrial past. The area's defunct industrial sites have become aesthetic attractions. See for yourself by following the Industrial Heritage Trail!

Along the Trail's 400 km (248 mi) length are museums containing at least a dozen sculpted or painted masterpieces for every smokestack within sight. What Germany's other spectacular biking routes have to offer in half-timbered villages, soaring steeples, ancient monasteries, and deep dark forests, this trail matches with places like the *Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord*, a 200-hectare (500 acre) public park at [Duisburg](#) in the Ruhrgebiet's west.

The remarkable aspect of this park is that its flourishing green spaces have been reclaimed from a former steel mine, yet have managed to retain much of the mine's infrastructure as a tribute to the industrial past. Old mine works have been transformed into soaring recreational spaces, theaters, and intimate gardens inviting reflection on past, present and future.

Essen, in the heart of the Ruhr Area, is home to both the armament-producing Krupp family's Villa Huegel, at which royalty dined regularly in days gone by, and the Margarethenhöhe mine workers' estates. Margarethenhöhe, with a hotel on the market square, has charming mock-Tudor homes set among tiny terraces and squares bordered with bright flowers.

The Krupp's working families who lived in them had not only indoor plumbing, but room for small gardens. They were supposed to benefit from their exposure to the best of both urban and rural life.

Get an idea of how a day of work went for the coal miners of Essen by spending some time at the UNESCO World Heritage Zeche Zollverein coal mine. Opened in 1928, this mine was once the largest and most advanced in all of Europe. The mine's complete infrastructure still remains, and the sections of the mines built during the 1930s are widely acclaimed for their period architecture. If

you're into massive structures, this is the place to visit!

For Ruhrgebiet fun on a much smaller scale, reserve a ticket for [Bochum](#)'s long-running musical, "The Starlight Express," which for fifteen years has thrilled millions of viewers. Visit to the Bochum Museum, where some of the world's best modern art is on display. Between mid-August and mid-October, it's time for the RuhrTriennale when you'll be immersed in creative experiences strongly inspired by the former industrial sites places in which they occur! Bochum also hosts the Total Music Festival and the Ruhr Piano Festival, delighting music lovers from all over Europe.

Nowhere on Earth does past co-exist with future in as pleasing a way as it does in the Ruhrgebiet!