

Via Claudia Augusta -- Following The Road To Rhaetia

I would think in order to appreciate traveling on the Via Claudia Augusta scenic route, a bit of history is in order. Then again, if you're following in the footsteps of Nero Claudius Drusus (under the order of his step-father Augustus Caesar in the last decades of the BC era), then chances are you're aware of at least some Roman history.

For those of you who don't know, the Via Claudia Augusta was one of the first regular "roads" to cross the Alps from Italy to the Roman Province of Rhaetia and Noricum (Rhaetia, often spelled Raetia, was the region that's now the southern part of Germany).

And Nero Claudius Drusus wasn't the infamous Emperor Nero. Nope, the Roman pioneer who first traversed the areas now known as the Brenner, Fern, and Reschen Passes was the Christian-burning Nero's great-grandfather. He was also the brother of the Emperor Tiberius, and the grandfather of the really rotten Caligula.

Whatever his relation to some of the most notorious Roman emperors in history, he (in essence) gave us a beautiful way of discover Germany, Austria, and Italy.

Start of the Via Claudia Augusta in Germany

We're only concentrating on the German portion (143km/89mi) of this 500 km (311 mi) [scenic route](#), which we pick up just south of [Donauwörth](#) in the town of Mertingen. Nero knew the strategic importance of Mertingen, which was the northern border of the Roman Empire.

Before going to Mertingen, I'd wander around Donauwörth for a while. It was home to the [Teutonic Knights](#), and its Archaeology Museum (with exhibits starting from the Stone Age to the time of the Alemanni) is a great way to start off this Roman inspired route. Its medieval jousts every two years (even-numbered years) and its *Reichsstrassenfest* (odd-numbered years) make it fun to boot.

Today Mertingen is a quiet [Swabian](#) town with a museum that highlights what it was like to live here in the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1969 a bunch of Merovingian graves were found here with a hoard of early medieval weapons and jewelry.

Traveling the route from [Meitingen](#) to [Langweid am Lech](#) and on to [Gersthofen](#) you'll notice that the remainder of the Via Claudia Augusta became almost invisible. Only once you reach the St. Jakobus Kirche (St. James Church, Schulstr. 1) in Gersthofen, which connects you with the [Way Of St. James](#), will you see remnants of the Via Claudia Augusta again.

The Via Claudia Augusta leads off next to Augusta Vindelicorum. Uh, where in Germany is that? You might know it by its more modern name: [Augsburg](#), the capital city of Raetia. It was vital to the Roman legions and their pocketbooks because of its great location on the [Lech](#) and Wertach

Rivers.

More than fifteen centuries later, Augsburg delights her visitors with its 9th century (AD, since we're talking about the Romans) cathedral — earning it a place on the [Romantic Road](#), BTW. Sightseeing in Augsburg is never done before you've seen its *Rathaus*, its City Palace, its St. Anna Chapel (formerly a Carmelite monastery), its old synagogue, and Botanical Gardens.

As hard as it is to leave Augsburg we're headed to [Königsbrunn](#), originally a Celtic settlement that was scooped up into the Roman Empire. It was the site of a Roman legion camp, and the Temple of Mithraeum (a 3rd century AD temple dedicated to the Cult of Mithras).

Königsbrunn's long history of the Celts and Romans are told at the town's Archaeology Museum. But, the Mercateum (it's the world's biggest globe) is pretty neat too.

We meet up with the Romantic Road once again in [Landsberg am Lech](#). Considered to be one of the sunniest [cities in Germany](#), chances are it won't rain on you while you're out sightseeing the Church of the Assumption (a blend of Gothic and Baroque design), the Rococo styled Church of St. John, and during the *Ruethenfest* that takes place every 4-years (the one in 2011 — lots of fun).

You'll also eat better than the Romans did. Landsberg am Lech lies between Swabia and "real" [Bavaria](#), so you've got the best of Swabian and Bavarian cuisine.

Epfach, a village of Denklingen, was a very important crossroad — military station included. As a result you'll find a number of Roman sights including an Abodiacum Museum in the *Feuerwehr* (Fire Department), the Lorenzkirche atop the Lorenzberg (a hill), a St. Lorenz (St. Lawrence) statue on the Lech Bridge, and a Roman fountain house Nymphaeum near the school.

We're now going to Abodiacum, a.k.a. Hohenfurch. Again on the Romantic Road, it's a town of meadows and forests, and the charming St. Ursula Chapel that was built in the 16th century (but is really much older), and the Roman Museum Abodiacum.

Time to leave for [Altenstadt](#), which fell into the hands of the Romans in 15 B.C. Not only is Altenstadt on the Via Claudia Augusta, but also what was once an Old Salt Road. Here you'll see the Via Claudia Square (called the Via-Claudia-Platz) with a Via Claudia Monument, fountain, and footpath. However, the Basilica of St. Michael with its 12th century crucifix is a definite must-see; and there's a Hosiery Museum here too.

The Via Claudia Augusta at this point has only three towns left (in Germany). But, what towns they are!

Just being outside in Bavaria is a delight, you'll just be over the moon on one of the hiking trails or bike paths in the town of Burggen. It's a small town, but it swells over with people every two years

on the 2nd Sunday in September for the *Roßtag*. You might want to wait for a quieter time to see Burggen's Church of St. Stephen or the former pilgrimage church of St. Anna.

Roßhaupten might have originally associated with the Romans, it is a medieval saint that has made the deepest impression. A legend says that Magnus slayed a dragon here in the 8th century, long before he was canonized into sainthood.

I'm not sure if St. Magnus would recognize the town of Roßhaupten today, but I think he'd like it. The walking trails and bike paths along the [Allgäu](#) region are fantastic, the carriage rides totally romantic, and you know you'll be pampered properly since numerous spas are available here around the [Forggensee](#).

Yeah, I'd have slayed a dragon to stay here too. ;-)

I'd have slayed two to stay in [Füssen](#), the last town on the Via Claudia Augusta where it meets the end (or start) of the Romantic Road. During the days of the Romans (but long after Nero was gone) Füssen was a 3rd century AD military campsite, and by the 5th century it was a Roman fortress town.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, it was the time of the Middle Ages — which gives us the Kloster St. Mang (although it is now done in the Baroque style). Long after that gave us the days of King Ludwig II and his [Neuschwanstein Castle](#).

You know what? I think I would slay three dragons just for "Mad" King Ludwig's castle alone — but I gotta thank Nero, since he's the one who started it all. ;-)

Via Claudia Augusta Web Site

Yes, here's the official Web site of the [Via Claudia Augusta](#).