

Zeil am Main -- Wine, Witches, Wine

There was no definitive moment that I fell head-over-heels in love with the [Lower Franconian](#) town of Zeil am Main. It could have been love at first sight of its perfectly manicured vineyards. Or, it could have been the view of a castle ruin in the fading sunlight.

At this point, there's no questioning why I love Zeil so much — it's a matter of telling you how utterly fantastic this Franconian town is.

It wasn't always, mind you. Over the course of two centuries Zeil was in the midst of some serious witch hunts — where some 400 people were burned at the stake.

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Yikes, rough crowd. Today you can learn all about this (calling it a dark stain on its history is an understatement) at the *Hexenturm* (Witches Tower).

No worries of being branded a witch around here these days, you're free to enjoy all that Zeil has to offer.

One of these things are the ruins of Burg Schmachtenberg. The grey colored stones of the present ruin are from the mid-1400s, but there was an even older castle here originally. These days the castle has been in ruins much longer than the present castle stood; and it doesn't take much of an imagination to envision how formidable the place was in its heyday.

For anyone seeking the chance to see what Old World Germany must've looked like, this is it. Right on the Town Square you'll find a smattering of half-timbered houses, including the one built by Jörg Hoffmann (a local carpenter) back in 1689.

The *Rathaus* (Town Hall) is even older, built around 1540.

The absolute other must-see here in Zeil is the *Pfarrkirche* (Parish Church) of St. Michael, with its Anna Chapel. Who couldn't love a Baroque church that's full of breathtaking art? Look closely and you'll find frescoes from the 14th century — because the church is much older than what you see.

With all this marked off your To-do list, it's time to drink. I already told you there were vineyards, so that means there's plenty of wine to go around. Every August there's the Wine Festival (it's official German name is the *Altstadt Weinfest*), bringing thousands of people to town all wanting to try some delicious reds.

Even with no festival going on Zeil keeps with its wine theme because it's got a *Wein-Wander-Weg*, or Wine Hiking Trail. It's actually a number of hiking trails ranging from 5 to 25 km in length (and a couple of other smaller wine festivals, too), showcasing the town's more than 1000 years of viticulture.

It's all right if you can't make the previously mentioned Wine Festival, Zeil has other cultural events throughout the year. Like what? How about a couple of *Kirchweih* celebrations (September & October), the *Jakobimarkt* (July), a Community Festival (June), a Village Festival (July), an Autumn Festival (October), an Oktoberfest (in September, of course), and the obligatory Christmas Market.

The moment escapes me of when I felt love for Zeil, but what I do know is that I never want to leave — and neither will you.

So, c'mon... let's go get another glass of wine — the place is full of it. ;-)