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The Family Adventure Project's guide to

# Castle Hostels of Germany

48 hours in **Nuremberg**

# Castle Hostels of Germany

## How would you like to spend a night in a castle?

Or take a road trip combining castles, palaces and forts? There are more historic hilltop residences offering beds to travellers in Germany than you might imagine, thanks to the extensive network of **Jugendherberge** hostels. We had no idea when we set out on our road trip of German Castle Hostels how much choice we would have, how many faraway hills we would sleep on, and how magical the hostels would be – thanks in part to the number of Harry Potter conventions we ran into. Well, what better place than a castle?

For the last century the German Youth Hostel Association has been refurbishing former grand or royal buildings specifically for families and groups. We set out to explore five of them to produce this series of guides which we hope will help you to do the same. We chose a range of different locations with ideally no more than three hours drive between them. We stayed for 48 hours in each and explored as much of the area as we could. In the pages that follow we describe the unique character of the hostel, profile what there is to do and give you the low down on why we think each one is worth a visit.

From a peaceful weekend escape into a national park to an overnight in a notorious prison, this action packed road trip put us right at the heart of many local stories and histories. It also offered a great night's sleep and an action packed adventure for our family. Of course, we only sampled what's on offer and welcome your ideas and feedback. Share your thoughts on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram using the hashtag **#CastleHostels**.

*Kirstie Pelling and Stuart Wickes, The Family Adventure Project*



## The Family Adventure Project *biography*

Kirstie Pelling and Stuart Wickes are co-founders of **The Family Adventure Project**, an award winning blog that's ten years into its mission to inspire others to get out, get active and adventure together. They work as a writer/journalist and photographer/videographer team to research and share ideas that encourage families to reap the benefits of doing something new and different together.

They have worked with dozens of leading travel brands all around the world. In 2016 the British Guild of Travel Writers recognised them as Travel Bloggers of the Year, commending their use of blogging, YouTube and social media as a "glorious celebration of adventurous life and the ups and downs of family travel."

You can follow their adventures on their blog at [www.familyadventureproject.org](http://www.familyadventureproject.org) or **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Instagram** or **YouTube**.

## Castle Hostels Road Trip



Thanks to **DJH**, **Tourismus Neurnberg** and **DFDS Seaways** for support in the production of this ebook.

# Welcome to Nuremberg

## A city with a story to tell

You might recognise Nuremberg from your history books rather than a bedtime story, but this medieval city in northern Bavaria has many fairy tale elements. Once world famous for its toymakers, it offers luck if you touch magical rings embedded in a gilded fountain. Shades of pink dominate the architecture. And towering above the edge of the Old Town is one of the most beautiful castles you could hope to visit, with Mayoral gardens to explore, a deep well to look into, and high towers and castle walls to climb.

Nuremberg is Bavaria's second biggest city and the largest in Franconia. It's just 170km from Munich with good transport links in and out by bus, intercity or regional train. From Nuremberg Hauptbahnhof it's only a 20-minute walk to the city centre, Hauptmarkt and castle.

A good value way of seeing the city is by investing in a **Nürnberg Card**. This is valid for 2 consecutive days and gives you free entry into more than 40 museums and attractions and you can use it for unlimited travel on Zone A city public transport.

And when you are tired of city hustle and bustle, you can follow a trail of gingerbread crumbs to **DJH Nuremberg Youth Hostel**, which was magically turned from royal stables into a modern palace for the backpacker and family traveller. It was a great base for our city centre stay.



# A Stay in the Stables



*Once the old stables of the Imperial Castle, now a modern Youth Hostel*

## A modern city hostel

**Nuremberg Youth Hostel** lies immediately beneath the city's main tourist attraction, the **Kaiserburg Imperial Castle**. The hostel has been redeveloped in the castle's former royal stables; consequently ceilings are high and the bar and bistro are spacious.

This is a modern hostel with an upmarket, contemporary look and city vibe. Facilities include 93 smart en-suite bedrooms, all with en-suite shower and toilet. There are lots of little children's play areas and a lift. How we longed for one of those as we trundled backpacks up winding tower staircases elsewhere.



*Watch the video - click to play*

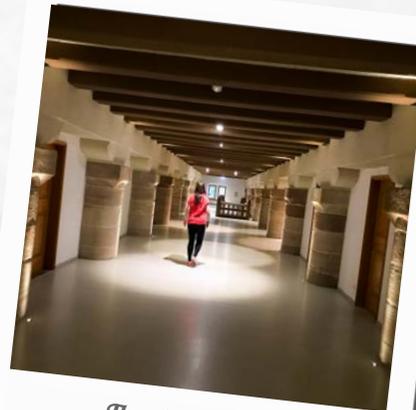
**TIP** If you have a few drinks and forget where you are, there's a giant barcode for the hostel's website above the comfy seats in the lounge. Check it out on your phone.



*QR art*



*Stylish bar and dining area*



*There's a spacious feeling in this hostel*



*Old castle features complement modern furnishings*

# You Can't Miss the Castle

## Castle of the Empire

As the hostel is so convenient for the castle, it felt logical to begin our tour of the city on the doorstep. The **Imperial Castle** itself dates back to the 11th century and was one of the most important castles of the Holy Roman Empire. Many of its guests were more grand than us - all of the Emperors checked in (to the castle not the hostel) over a period of 500 years. One of the most impressive rooms is the double chapel, built on two levels, where the history is locked into the tall walls and arches. There are interpretation boards throughout the buildings as well as cabinets filled with military equipment and royal artefacts.



*Exploring the gardens*



*Inside the Sinwell Tower*



*Peering down the well*

**TIP**

If you or your kids are unimpressed by pomp try climbing the Sinwell Tower for great views of the city. Or head to the Well House to watch a demonstration of the Deep Well and hear how long it takes water to fall 47 metres to the bottom.

# The Beautiful Fountain



Schöner Brunnen



Aristotle and friends

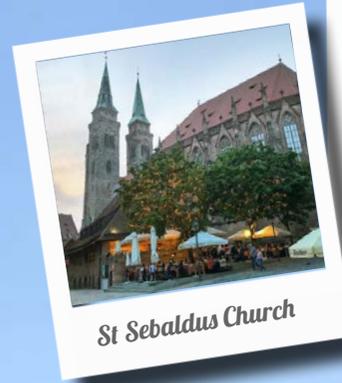
## The fountain of luck

If I told you about a ring that would bring you good fortune you may think I was proposing. But no. I'd just be proposing to take you to Nuremburg's main market square or Hauptmarkt, where **Schöner Brunnen** (the beautiful fountain) is reported to host two of the luckiest bronze rings in all the land. The rings aren't hard to find, they are more or less at eye level on the ornate 14th century fountain that stretches up around 19 metres and resembles a gothic spire. If you twist them it's believed your fortunes might change.

**Don't Miss!**

See if you can spot Aristotle and name the 39 other figures on the fountain. They represent the world view of the Holy Roman Empire. All are brightly painted, framed by curls and swirls of ironwork.

# Tour the Historic Old Town



St Sebaldus Church



Old Town Street Views



Views from the bridges



## The train takes the strain

The **Stadtrundfahrt City Tour Train** was just leaving from the market square so we hopped into one of its bright red carriages for a 40 minute circular tour. Nuremberg Altstadt or Old Town is a fair size so it was a good way of seeing the sights without wearing everyone out. It passed landmarks like Maxbrücke Bridge, St Lorenz Church, and the Hospital of the Holy Spirit on its way up to the castle. Second World War raids took their toll on this city; in one night alone in 1945 allied bombing displaced 100,000 residents, and many landmark monuments were razed to the ground. But Nuremberg was carefully rebuilt over four decades, with many original buildings restored. A commentary talks you through what was there before and what still stands.

**TIP**

Headphones are free for the commentary and if you sit in a certain carriage you'll get it in English. Look out for the voucher for a free cup of coffee.

# City of Toys

## A playful place

Nuremberg is famous for hosting the biggest toy fair in the world. Held over several days in the early part of the year, the **International Toy Fair** entertains more than 73,000 visitors from 120 countries. You can't visit unless you are trade, but a good place to trace the city's extraordinary success in toymaking is the Toy Museum.

The **Nuremberg Toy Museum** (or Spielzeugmuseum) is no dusty old attic full of trains and planes. It's a charming museum packed with everything from porcelain dolls to Meccano and tells the story of the history of toys.



## Toys through the ages

The toy industry in the city began in the 1400's with Dockenmachers; craftsmen that produced little, wooden dolls, trumpets and animals.

In the 1600's Nuremberg became the centre of tin and brass toys and the tin soldier was born. By the late 1800's more than 240 toy companies worked out of the city; its central location in Germany making it an important trading route.

You can see many of the typical tin toys and model railways on display as well as a wonderful collection of dolls' houses and magic lanterns.

**TIP** Look out for the play spaces in the museum. You'll find lots indoor and out. You can also have tea and cake while watching a model train blast around on a track in the charming open air courtyard of Café La Kritz.



*Watch the video - click to play*

# Lessons from the Past

## Fascination and terror

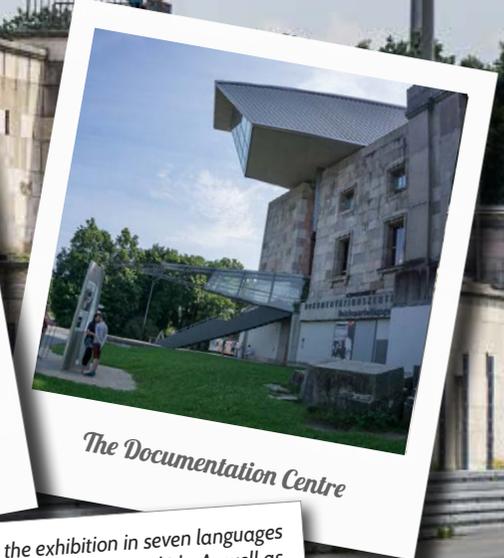
The name of Nuremberg will be forever associated with Nazi Party conventions, historic rallies and war trials. The city makes no attempt to escape its darker past but uses it as a focus for education and memorial.

The remains of buildings that formed the world stage for the Nazi Party are in the southern districts of the city. The unfinished Congress Hall houses the **Documentation Centre** where a thoughtful exhibition **“Fascination and Terror”** looks at causes and consequences of the regime.

Nearby, at the **Nazi Party Rally Grounds** you can climb the grandstand that was purpose built to connect with huge crowds at the enormous rallies. I found the sheer scale of it quite shocking. And in the **Palace of Justice** a permanent exhibition covers the Nuremberg War Trials and repercussions. Depending on when you visit you may also be able to book a visit to Courtroom 600 where they happened.



*Fascination and Terror Exhibition*



*The Documentation Centre*

**TIP**

There are free audio guides for the exhibition in seven languages including English. Make use of them, even for the kids. As well as being informative and engaging they trigger the soundtrack to several of the videos in the exhibition.

# Sugar and Spice

## Gingerbread house

If you wander Nuremberg's famous **Christmas Market** you'll notice how many bakeries are producing gingerbread to their own secret recipe. Nuremberg Lebkuchen has a Protected Designation of Origin and must be produced within the city. We headed to **Wicklein Lebkuchen** on Hauptmarkt, which claims to be the oldest gingerbread bakery in Nuremberg.

Wicklein gingerbread goes back to the 1600's when a master baker in Auerbach came up with the spiced recipe. This was then handed down through six generations, until it was taken over by Lebkuchen Schmidt. You can watch the shop assistants making it if you are lucky enough to pitch up at the right time or ask for one to be iced with a message for those back home.



Decorated lebkuchen  
- that's gingerbread

**Did You Know?**

There are nine spices essential to a basic Wicklein Lebkuchen recipe: anise, fennel, cardamom, cinnamon, coriander, mace, pimento, cloves and ginger

# The Nuremberg Bratwurst

**TIP**

For a morning snack you can't beat a Nur Brat, a traditional Nuremberg sausage in a fresh bun, served on your way to somewhere else.



*The famous and ever so tasty  
Nürnberger Rostbratwurst*

## The best food is the wurst

Another food you'll find at the famous Christmas Market and in many city centre restaurants is the Nuremberg sausage. The Nürnberger Rostbratwurst must be no longer than 9cm and no heavier than 25g. Chefs have been making the sausage for the last 700 years.

We tried some in the **Bratwursthäusle**, a traditional hostelry on Rathausplatz under the Sebaldus Church. Staff dress in traditional costume and seem to serve a hundred people at once. Food is simple and cheap – basically a little row of sausages on a tin plate with potato salad and bread. You can **watch them being cooked** on the beech wood fire and I can honestly say I have never tasted a more tender sausage. It was so good we went back for more.

**Don't  
Miss**

A visit to **Bratwursthäusle** to try the local sausage in a traditional setting. Sit inside to watch the action.

# Eat Your Way Around Town



*Organic vegetarian burger  
at Premium Junk Food*

## Premium Junk Food

What kid would say no to a menu solely consisting of burgers? Not one of ours, that's for sure, which is how we ended up at **Auguste Premium Junkfood** restaurant on Augustenstrasse. The restaurant is proud of its bio, locally sourced ingredients and there's lots of choice, even for the vegetarian amongst us, although the price felt a bit hefty for burgers and chips.

## Witches brew

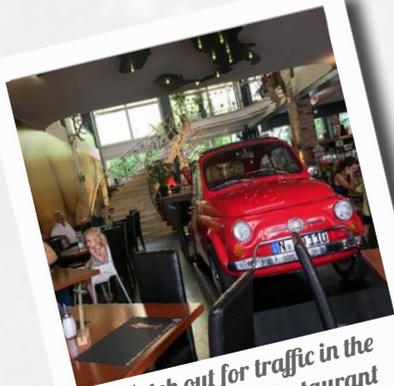
After an exhaustive tour of the castle, we stopped for a snack at **Hexenhäusle**, a half timbered former gatehouse that was once the residence of a witch. It wasn't just the view of the castle that was magical - the "burning and strong" Witches Schnapps was a little too fiery for us. But we did refresh ourselves with a dark blackcurrant brew. No toil and trouble, just plenty of bubble.



*A Hexenhäusle brew  
beneath the castle*

## Pizza piazza

A pizza with a view at the shiny **Provenza Café Restaurant** gave us a chance to take in all the action of the market square, Hauptmarkt. The restaurant is full of Italian vehicles which may interest any car enthusiasts in your party and gives you a clue as to what to expect on the menu.



*Watch out for traffic in the  
Provenza Cafe Restaurant*

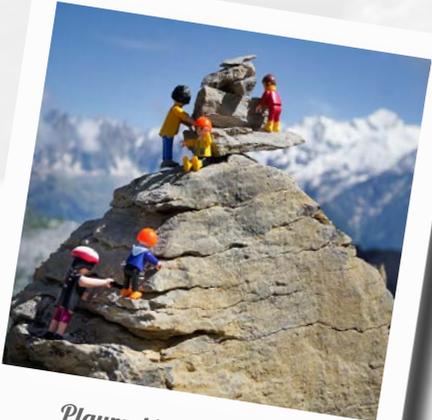
## Lucky ices

At **Buonissimo**, just off Hauptmarkt the lucky ring finally delivered. Kinder Egg ices, Nutella creations and a spaghetti bolognese made out of gelato all turned up at once and disappeared just as quickly.



*Buonissimo ices*

# More Things to Do



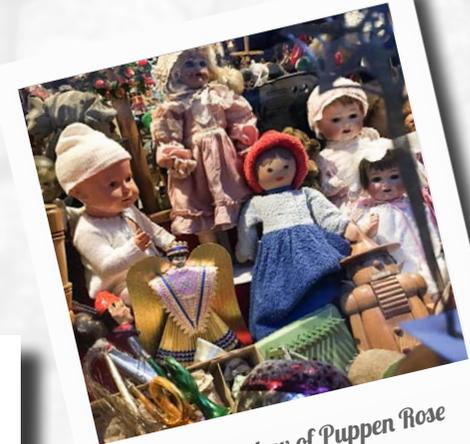
*Playmobil people at play*

## Play with mini figures

If you have children aged between three and eleven they'll probably be your best friend if you take them to the **Playmobil FunPark** in Zirndorf to the west of the city. There are several activity worlds that spin you into the lands of pirates, knights, dinosaurs and fairies. There's a Wild West too.

## Puppet on a string

Nuremberg was once packed with toy shops and a visit to **Puppen Rose** Doll Maker and Doctor in the Old Town provides a nostalgic and curious glimpse into the past. If you are on a budget you may just want to stop and look in the window.



*In the window of Puppen Rose*

**TIP**

Playmobil was founded in the city. Look out for limited edition minifigures sometimes available from Tourist information shops.



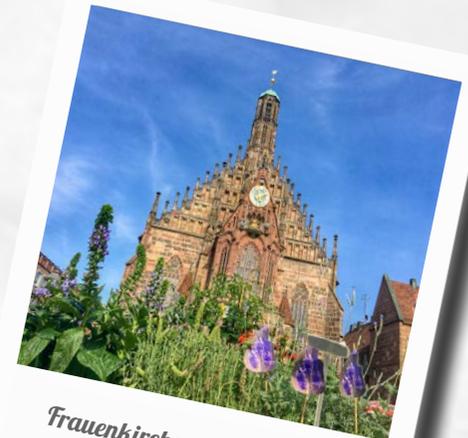
*Dürer's House in the Old Town*

## Get arty with Albrecht

If you prefer art to toys, visit the **Albrecht Dürer House**. Dürer is the city's most famous son, an important Renaissance artist known particularly for his hare drawings. The house has been sympathetically restored to showcase his life and work and visits can include a painting and printing workshop demonstrating Dürer's observational art techniques as well as a multivision show.

## Marching time

The gothic **Frauenkirche** church dominates the east side of Hauptmarkt. If you are there at midday watch out for the mechanical clock chiming, sending the Prince-Electors on a musical procession around the Holy Roman Emperor.



*Frauenkirche on Hauptmarkt*

# Our Awards

On our Castle Hostel tour we've been awarding shields for excellence. Here's how Nuremberg fared in the battle of the Castle Hostels. Shield scores out of 5.

Modern and contemporary interiors



Fabulous city centre location



Indoor and Outdoor Kids Play Areas



Bar offering drinks and snacks



# Our German Castle Hostel Guides

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Bilstein

## Burg Bilstein - The Character Castle

**Burg Bilstein** is set on a hill above the town of Lennestadt. There are plenty of walks from the door or you can take off in many different directions enjoying what the region has to offer. Western Germany's Sauerland is liberally populated by hills, forests and valleys. Hikers and bikers alike come to enjoy the scenery. We loved messing about by the water at the Bigge dam and reservoir, where we hired a pedalo and played mini golf. We also enjoyed visiting the ski resort of Winterberg where there's tobogganing, barefoot walking and one of the best bike parks around. But the real fun began back at the imaginative youth hostel where you're as likely to bump into a knight as kiss a frog. Read more in our [Burg Bilstein blog post](#).



Colditz

## Schloss Colditz- The Prison Hostel

People don't come to **Schloss Colditz** for the hospitality. They come for the escape stories, the museum and the TV and film nostalgia. But within the imposing looking gates, you will find a comfortable, simply furnished hostel. The real treat comes in the morning with a tour. There are different lengths of tour - long and even longer- but our guide kept the whole family captivated. After all that information about how to escape, you'll want to head off and enjoy the surrounding area. We had strawberry pizza in the Colditz village centre, visited an aquapark with crazy and lazy rivers and then took a canoeing day trip in nearby Leipzig. Read more in our [Schloss Colditz blog post](#).



Blankenheim

## Burg Blankenheim - An Old World Escape

**Burg Blankenheim** is located in Germany's Eifel, a national park in western Germany near the border with Belgium. Don't come looking for night life - you're more likely to find bird life, country life and a quiet life. The baroque castle was built as a display of wealth rather than a defence and is thought to date back as far as Roman times. There are five apartments for families in the bastionhaus and simple pleasures on the doorstep range from hiring a bike (or e-bike) and pedalling around the Eifel to eating After Eight ice cream in a family run gelato shop and then visiting Roman ruins. If it's all too slow you can head to the infamous Nürburgring for motor racing action. Read more in our [Burg Blankenheim blog post](#).



Stahleck

## Burg Stahleck - The Fairytale on the River

Bacharach hostel, known as **Burg Stahleck**, is all about location, location, location. Set on a hill on a bend of the middle Rhine, the view is either sparkling in the sunlight or moody in the mist. There's nothing as pleasurable as enjoying board games and a drink on the terrace at sunset, especially if you are one of the lucky families to be returning to a castle themed bedroom. There are dozens of castles packed into a small section of river here including a floating one. Check it out on the way to the famous Lorelei rock with its summer toboggan run. Further afield, Koblenz provides a fortress tour, city attractions and opportunities for tea on the palace lawn. Read more in our [Burg Stahleck blog post](#).



Nuremberg

## Nuremberg - A Modern City Break

The modern city hostel in **Nuremberg** is situated in the old stables of Imperial Castle of Nuremberg and one of the joys is being so close to the old town action. Any tour surely starts on the doorstep where you can view the gardens and palace, gaze down into the darkness of the well or climb the circular Sinwell tower and see for miles. But there's a lot to do in Nuremberg that doesn't involve royalty. Turn the bronze ring in the famous fountain, visit the delightful toy museum, sample the famous sausages and see how they make the gingerbread that goes down a storm at the Christmas markets. Read more in our [Nuremberg City Hostel blog post](#).

