

## The “Holy Cologne” 2015

*Cologne Cathedral (UNESCO World Heritage Site), 12 incomparable Romanesque churches and a wide variety of art treasures and cultural artefacts*

For centuries, **Cologne Cathedral** has been the heart and hallmark of this city on the Rhine. The cathedral has always been a major attraction for pilgrims, believers, tourists and architecture lovers from all over the world. With more than six million visitors per year, the cathedral is the most frequently visited attraction in Germany. Due to the building's impressive Gothic architecture, the shrine of the Three Wise Men, the outstanding stained-glass windows and the many other important works of art, UNESCO declared Cologne Cathedral a World Heritage Site in 1996.

Cologne's ring of 12 large **Romanesque churches** is another major highlight of ecclesiastic architecture. Cologne's cityscape has been shaped by this ring of churches since the 12th century. Although the churches were destroyed in World War II, they were subsequently rebuilt, and since 1985 *Colonia Romanica* has once again shone in its former glory.

During the Middle Ages, Cologne had one of the most significant Jewish quarters in Europe, as well as the oldest synagogue north of the Alps. The city is planning to honour its Jewish cultural heritage through its planned **Archaeological Zone** with an integrated **Jewish Museum**, which will be located on and underneath the square in front of Cologne's City Hall. This is one of the most spectacular cultural projects ever undertaken by Cologne. On an area of approximately 7,000 square metres, visitors will be able to see the original locations of monuments from two millennia. Ever since its construction in 1899, the neo-Romanesque synagogue in the Roonstraße has been the biggest religious and cultural center of the Jewish communities in Cologne. It was burned down during the Reichspogromnacht and rebuilt between 1957 and 1959.

Cologne has many places of worship of other faiths as well. The large **mosque** that is currently being built in the city's Ehrenfeld district will serve as a centre for the Muslim community. The building's design is characterized by a sophisticated interplay between concrete, glass and wood as well as a transparent dome flanked by two delicate 55-metre-high minarets.

The **Museum Schnütgen** in the city centre of Cologne invites visitors to enter the fascinating world of the Middle Ages. In one of Cologne's oldest church buildings, the Romanesque church of St. Cecilia, the impressively staged permanent collection of medieval art reveals its full splendour.

**Kolumba** is the art museum of the archdiocese of Cologne. Originally founded as the Diocesan Museum of Cologne in 1853, it was renamed Kolumba in 2004 after its present location on the site of the former church of St. Columba. Here visitors can experience 2,000 years of Western culture under one roof. The museum houses works of art dating from late antiquity to the present. Its architecture is an interplay of the ruins of the Late Gothic church of St. Columba, which was destroyed in the Second World War, the “Madonna in the Ruins” chapel (1950), the unique archaeological excavation on the site (1973–1976) and the new construction designed by the Swiss architect Peter Zumthor. Kolumba was named “Museum of the Year” by the Art Critics Association in November 2013.

In the cellar of the sacristy, which dates back to the Middle Ages, the **Cathedral Treasury** presents a rich store of Christian church treasures dating from the fourth century A.D. to the present. It comprises objects made of gold, silver, bronze or ivory, reliquaries, liturgical implements and textiles, archbishops' insignia, medieval sculptures and objects discovered in Frankish graves.

The **Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum – Cultures of the World**, which received the Council of Europe Museum Prize in 2012, offers multifaceted insights into new and old worlds as well as strange and familiar cultures. In the Religion section, the museum presents the major religions – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism – and their offshoots. With its splendid sculptures from Asia, the museum focuses on the images of deities in Buddhism and Hinduism.

There will be a number of **events** related to the theme of “Holy Cologne” in 2015 – for example, the Festival of Early Music from 6 to 15 March and the Mülheimer Gottestracht (a boat procession on the Rhine on the feast of Corpus Christi) on 4 June. In the Kolumba Museum the new annual exhibition called “playing by heart” will run until 24 August. And the traditional Romanesque Summer will once again feature a series of concerts in the Romanesque churches of Cologne from 17 to 19 June 2015.

The Cologne Tourist Board has designed two **guided city tours** on the theme of “Holy Cologne”. “On the trail of ancient bones” focuses on relics in Cologne Cathedral and the churches of St. Andrew and St. Ursula. The “Gates of Heaven” guided tour is devoted to the theme of doors and portals that serve as entrances into a church. In many cases, such doors and portals are the products of exquisite craftsmanship.

The Cologne Tourist Board also offers a **travel package** for a theme-related stay in the cathedral city.

The theme of “Holy Cologne” can be approached on many levels. It encompasses not only the city as a centre of Catholicism and a city of churches but also, and even more, Cologne as a cosmopolitan city with many religious communities and a multifaceted culture. The open and tolerant mentality of Cologne's residents is expressed in a song by the popular kölsch band Bläck Fööss: “I'm a Greek, a Turk, a Jew, a Moslem and a Buddhist – All of us are just people, equal in the eyes of God.”

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