

# Bavaria for Lovers

*Forging a romance on the Romantic Road*

BY MARGIE GOLDSMITH

Once upon a time, Neuschwanstein Castle, located in the Alps in Bavaria, Germany, was the inspiration for Walt Disney's Sleeping Beauty Castle.



**M**y hands are gripped around Jamie's waist as I ride behind him on the back of a brand-new BMW motorcycle we rented in Munich. For the next five nights we will drive Bavaria's Romantic Road, a 220-mile scenic route considered a German favorite that very few Americans have heard of, much less seen. Our first stop is the extraordinary Neuschwanstein Castle, on which Disney modeled Sleeping Beauty Castle.

I feel exactly like Sleeping Beauty with Jamie Anthony as my Prince Charming. Two years ago, we met unexpectedly at a blues club in New York City. I was wearing my T-shirt from the Blues Festival in Clarksdale, Mississippi, a festival that Jamie had also attended, so he introduced himself. I was smitten with his Southern accent (he's from Atlanta) plus he was charming, smart, and attractive. Like me, he'd been divorced twice, thought Internet dating was a waste of time, and loved the blues.

Then he told me he loved riding his motorcycle, and I imagined black leather, silver studs, and tattoos, even though I saw none on his arms. On our third date, he invited me to join him on a motorcycle ride promising that if I didn't like it, we'd turn around. Outfitted in protective helmets, ballistic jackets, and leather gloves, we left Manhattan bound for Bear Mountain State Park, a lovely wooded outpost just north of the northern New York City suburbs. I expected to hate riding on a motorcycle and was sure I'd want him to turn around after a couple of blocks, but it was exhilarating looking up at the skyscrapers from an entirely new perspective and, further north, watching the boats sail along the Hudson. It was also very sensual being tucked in against his body.

Since then, we've done some day trips by motorcycle, but never a weeklong trip in which everything we're taking has to fit into three small cases attached to the bike. What's even crazier is that this trip, traveling by motorcycle in a foreign country, was my idea. When I first mentioned the idea of this scenic drive by motorcycle, Jamie broke into a smile as wide as a four-lane highway, and that was it.

The Romantic Road route was partially based on an old trade route and on the Roman Via Claudia Augusta.

During World War II it was called Germany Travel Path No. 1 and used to transport troops and supplies. In 1950, hoping to attract tourists and change its evil reputation, some clever marketing folks considered changing the name to the Romantic Road for Couples Who Fall in Love, then shortened it to the Romantic Road. And that's exactly what it is, a region of Germany that has existed unchanged for centuries.

On the first day of our ride, a short trip from Füssen to Schwangau, we pass golden hayfields with round bales of hay glittering in the sun and

pillowy hillsides laid out like patchwork quilts in every shade of green from emerald to lime. Wildflowers line the roadside, sunlight streams through groves of trees, and we pass herds of sheep and cows and dairies where we inhale the pungent smell of manure – in this context, a fresh and pure odor.

Schwangau is home to King Ludwig II's 19th-century castle Neuschwanstein, one of the most photographed castles in the world. Ludwig, who was crowned king when he was just 18, was in love with Richard Wagner and created the castle and every room in it to depict the composer's operas. Unfortunately, Ludwig's love not only went unrequited, but Wagner married the wife of a famous music conductor, breaking poor Ludwig's heart.

Our love is anything but unrequited, whether we're walking hand in hand down crooked cobblestone lanes beneath the Alps in 12th-century Füssen, or sharing steaming plates of sausages, which seem to be the primary local fare. There's bratwurst (pork sausage), weisswurst (white steamed veal or pork sausage), blutwurst (blood sausage), wiener (hotdog), and short and plump Regensburger wurst (boiled sausage with a pork filling).



**Roadies:** Author Margie Goldsmith and Jamie Anthony pause to take in the view.

PHOTO COURTESY MARGIE GOLDSMITH; PREVIOUS: SHUTTERSTOCK





**Small town, big reputation:** Rothenburg ob der Tauber is one of Germany's oldest and best preserved medieval towns. The hidden gem is encircled by massive 14th-century stone walls, out of which rise 42 ancient towers.

Every dish in Bavaria is served with potatoes or egg noodles and, always, sauerkraut. At one meal, I request a vegetable substitute for the potatoes and the waitress seems puzzled as she says, "But you have vegetable: sauerkraut!" Jamie and I squeeze each other's knees under the table and try not to burst out laughing.

As we ride along each day, one of my favorite things is the sight of an onion-domed church in the distance, meaning we're about to arrive in a medieval village where we'll spend the night. It also means we didn't get lost, which happens occasionally. Because voices can't be heard above the sound of the engine, when I see a sign for the correct destination ahead, I stroke Jamie's shoulder as if to say, "Nice job, sweetie, we made it." Mostly I communicate by pointing as if to say, "look over there to that beautiful field full of sunflowers or fir tree forest or field polka-dotted with sheep," just in case he didn't see it. We've also made up our own signs. When I make a closed fist it means stop (usually for a photo), and when I

make two closed fists, it means stop, take off your helmet, and kiss me.

The hotels we have chosen are not posh, but they are comfortable and each offers something special. (For suggested lodgings and restaurants along the route, see

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[saturdayeveningpost.com/romantic-road](http://saturdayeveningpost.com/romantic-road).) In Füssen, we sit on our private balcony overlooking the lapis-lazuli-colored lake and watch the sun sink behind the Alps; in Augsburg, our room has a heart-shaped bathtub; and in Rothenburg ob der Tauber, we squeeze into the tiny eleva-



tor and remain locked in an embrace all the way up to our floor.

Each morning begins with a huge breakfast buffet of eggs, pancakes, bacon, sausages, cold cuts, cereals, yogurts, fresh fruits, rolls, muffins, and – my favorite – pretzel bread. Afterward, we wander the town, following cobblestoned alleyways past medieval walls and houses, into museums as beautiful as the art within, and inside Gothic churches with dazzling frescoes.

By midday we are loading our stuff into the bike's cases and setting off toward our next destination, none more than 50 miles away. Before this trip, I always thought of driving as simply a way of getting from point A to point B, but here the drives are like a reset button. I don't have a care in the world, and can think about nothing except enjoying the magnificent scenery with my man.

It's also fascinating to learn the love stories of Germany's most romantic cities such as Augsburg, the birthplace of Bertholt Brecht, Hans Holbein, and Mozart's father, Leopold. It was in Augsburg that Leopold's son Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart fell in love with his first cousin, but he lost interest. The young Mozart next fell in love with Aloysia Weber from Mannheim, but she rejected him. Mozart wrote to his father, "I can only weep. I have far too sensitive a heart," and then courted Aloysia's sister, Constanze, whom he married. At their wedding, the bride, the groom, the priest, and the entire congregation wept.

That evening, Jamie calls to me from the shower. I figure he's left the shampoo on the sink, but no, he wants me to join him. I don't think I've taken a shower with a guy since I was 30, but I eagerly step in, and we embrace under the running water, giggling like kids. For a brief moment I wonder what would happen if we slipped on the tub floor and one of us broke a hip. Later, we lie contentedly on the bed, listening to the church bells toll the hour.

In Germany, love is so often associated with music, especially along the Romantic Road. When Beethoven was 20, he played viola in the concert hall at Bad Mergentheim, a 14th-century village with a medieval castle. One legend has it that he was supposed to leave for Vienna to meet Mozart, but Beethoven missed the opportunity because he fell in love with a local girl. Beethoven was nearly always in love; one was a 16-year-old countess, a pupil of his, to whom he dedicated the *Moonlight Sonata*.

Sharing the moonlight with Jamie on the Main Bridge in Würzburg feels as romantic as any Beethoven sonata. In the middle of the bridge is a small bar where visitors can buy a glass of wine and stand overlooking the river.



**Architectural masterpiece:** Completed in 1780, Würzburg Residence is a three-winged palace containing more than 300 Baroque and Rococo rooms that was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1981.

There, we meet a historian who tells us about Walther von der Vogelweide, a famous 12th- and 13th-century love poet who wandered from court to court, reciting poems in exchange for food and lodging. In 1230 when Von der Vogelweide died, he was buried in Würzburg, leaving instructions that the birds were to be fed daily at his tomb. But instead of birdfeed, lovesick visitors arrive with fresh flowers to leave on his grave. "It is said that when the flowers wilt, lovesick hearts will heal," the historian tells us and then adds, "In the winter, they bring flowers that last longer."

Jamie and I look at each other and smile. He squeezes my hand. How lucky I am that I don't need to leave flowers at the love poet's grave. And neither does Jamie.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Margie and Jamie were engaged in November in Bali and married December 13, 2014.*

*Margie Goldsmith has published articles in Elite Traveler, Robb Report, Travel + Leisure, Global Business Travel, and The Affluent Traveler, among others.*

**If You Go:** For advice on where to stay along the Romantic Road, visit [saturdayeveningpost.com/romantic-road](http://saturdayeveningpost.com/romantic-road).