



Germany Travel Planning Podcast

Ep 24 - 5 Things You Must Do in Heidelberg

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Today we're diving into one of the most picturesque cities in Southwest Germany, Heidelberg. This historic university town is a must for so many of our clients. And it can be the perfect first or last stop if you're flying in or out of Frankfurt, since it's located only about an hour from the airport. So does Heidelberg belong on your itinerary? Well, listen to this episode to find out.

This is the Germany Travel Planning Podcast, the show that helps you plan a super fun trip to Germany. My name is Cate and I'm your Germany Destination Specialist. I'm here to help you plan the trip of a lifetime. Today, I'm sharing five must-do Heidelberg experiences to help you make the most of your time in this stunning university town on the Neckar River. I'm also going to share some tips at the end and a big mistake that Aaron and I once made in Heidelberg. So stay tuned for that. Okay, let's dive in.

So I have always loved Heidelberg. I've been going there for years. And yeah, sometimes it can feel crowded, it can feel kind of touristy, but for good reason, because it is a beautiful university town. And it is easy to walk to all the sites and you can see a lot in just one day. And in my opinion, who cares if there's other tourists?

If Heidelberg is a city you want to visit, go! Ignore all the other tourists. Forge your own path and enjoy your visit. And if you would like help balancing popular, musty sites with getting off the beaten path, let me know. That's something that I help a lot of our clients with, and I would love to help you too.



Okay, so the first thing you must do in Heidelberg is visit the Altstadt, or the Old Town. If you've ever seen a picture of Heidelberg, it probably featured the Old Town. This is where you will find a pedestrian shopping street, narrow cobblestone winding side streets, little courtyards, pastel colored buildings, outdoor cafes and restaurants, charming shops and fairy tale views. Definitely make time to wander along the Hauptstrasse which is one of the longest pedestrian shopping streets in Europe. Actually, it might be the longest. And don't be afraid to duck into little side alleys and courtyards and just wander those little side streets because that's where the magic really happens. You're gonna find tucked away bookshops, little local bakeries, and maybe even a friendly cat perched in a windowsill. And those little side streets are a lot quieter. than the main square and that long pedestrian street. So definitely give yourself time to wander through the old town in Heidelberg. That's how you can forge your own path, even in popular destinations.

You'll also want to stop at the Marktplatz, the main square, which has a beautiful fountain and there's also the Church of the Holy Spirit right there and lots of old buildings.

This is also a great place to sit and people watch. can sit at a cafe or just sit on a bench or sit at the fountain. In December, this area becomes a Christmas market hotspot, but it really is delightful year round. I also recommend going to the Kornmarkt, which is another square very close to the main square. Go there at dusk because you can enjoy beautiful views of the castle all lit up.

Last time we were there, we just sat on a bench for like a half an hour and just listened to the sounds of people walking around and enjoying the evening. And we just gazed up at the castle and it was just beautiful once the lights came on after dark. Awesome.

And here's one last thing to think about. If you do go to Heidelberg, when I was living in Stuttgart in college, I had a friend who was living in Heidelberg and her university



dorm was in the Old Town in one of those historic buildings. Just think about that. It still kind of blows my mind when I'm in Heidelberg and I go by where she used to live. And she was in this really cool old building. There were students living in this building. And it was right on this little square. And so she would step out of her dorm and walk to the university and through these beautiful cobblestone streets. It was just amazing. Just think about that. Imagine going to university and living in a dorm that's in a really cool historic part of Heidelberg in an old historic building and how amazing that would be.

The second thing I recommend doing in Heidelberg is riding the funicular to the top of the hill. So when you get on the funicular, you can stop at the castle level or you can go all the way to the top to Königstuhl or King's Chair. This is the highest point in the area. So you'll be nearly 600 meters above sea level and there's amazing panoramic views from there. You're high enough that you can actually see the Rhine Valley and on a clear day, you can even see into France. There's a small cafe up there. There's a hotel and a restaurant. There's some hiking trails and you can actually take the hiking trails back down to the castle or all the way back down into Heidelberg Old Town if you have enough time to do that. And if you're traveling with kids, there's a fun forest adventure park with some rides and things like that. And there's a falconry center and it's just behind the hotel.

And then there's also the king's chair. There's an actual chair, like carved from, it's a wooden chair. I think it's like, I don't know, maybe carved from a tree or just made out of wood, I can't remember. But you can sit in that chair and you can admire the beautiful view and also get a picture of yourself sitting in the chair.

The third thing that I recommend doing in Heidelberg is visiting Heidelberg Castle, right? This is a must. You have to go see Heidelberg Castle. It's perched dramatically on the hillside overlooking the old town. And it's just beautiful when you're in the old town in that Kornmarkt Square that I mentioned, and you look up and you see this



amazing castle ruin up on the hill. Heidelberg Castle is part romantic ruin, it's part museum, and it is all kinds of impressive.

You can take the funicular up as I mentioned and just take it up to the first stop and then you can walk over to the castle. You can also walk up to the castle, but just a warning, it's a bit steep. It is rewarding to walk up there, but you will definitely work off some calories that way. You can also go up to the King's Seat that I, you know, go all the way up to the top, as I mentioned, and then take the funicular back down to the castle level and then go visit the castle.

Once you're at the castle, take time to explore the ruins, wander through the gardens, and you can also visit the Heidelbergtun, which is the largest wine barrel. You can actually climb the stairs and you can walk over and stand on top of the wine barrel. That gives you a really good idea of how big that wine barrel is. And there's a couple other really interesting exhibits that you can see. If you just buy a ticket to get into the castle, it's a self-guided tour and you can wander around and you can see the barrel and you can go into some other exhibits. But if you want to see some of the rooms inside other parts of the castle, you do have to do a tour. So I actually have never done the tour. I've always just explored on my own. But with the tour, you do get to go into other places that you can't get into if you just go in and explore on your own.

And sometimes they hold concerts up at the castle. So you might get lucky and you might be able to enjoy some music. And actually last time we were there, we saw that they were setting up for a concert right there in the castle. We didn't get to go to that. But when we were sitting on that bench in the evening in Kornmarkt, looking up at the castle, we actually did get to hear some of the concert. And when you're at the castle, definitely go out to the terrace. The view from the terrace is amazing.

I mean, I show pictures of Heidelberg when I'm doing one-on-one consults. I show pictures of this view on our map using our planning map. But if you have our DIY Germany Travel Planner, go take a look at our planning map because you can see



pictures of this view that I'm talking about. Go to Heidelberg, you can click on the castle, and then you'll see the pictures. But the view from the terrace is just stunning.

You get to see the red roofs of the Old Town below. You can see the river. You see the old bridge going across the river. You see the beautiful tree covered hills across the river. I mean, it's just stunning. Whenever I show these photos to people in those consults, the reaction I always get is, that is so beautiful. I want to see that. It's really amazing. So definitely go out there.

When you're finished with the castle, you can take the funicular back down to the Old Town or you can walk. I recommend walking because it's not that far, it's all downhill, and you get to walk through some really pretty neighborhoods and see some beautiful houses on the way.

The fourth thing I recommend you do is walk across the old bridge. So if you go back into the Old Town and go down to river level, you'll see a big gate at the beginning of the bridge. And I recommend taking a stroll across that famous bridge.

It was built in the 18th century and it connects the Old Town with the district across the river. And it offers another drool worthy view of the castle during the day and also at night. And you also get this beautiful view of the Old Town and the hills and the river. And sometimes you see boats on the river. I mean, it's just really, really stunning. And walking the bridge at sunset is magical. To see the sun going down and the light on the castle and then the lights coming on when the sun goes down. Oh, it's just beautiful. You can get some absolutely stunning photos from there.

And don't miss the Bridge Monkey statue. It's at the entrance of the old bridge on the old town side. You'll see this really big gate, the entrance to the old bridge, and the monkey is on the left of that. Legend has it, if you touch the monkey's mirror, you'll return to Heidelberg someday. And there's also a tiny bronze mouse nearby that kids love to find. So keep an eye out for that too.



And number five, last but not least, if you want one of the best views of Heidelberg Old Town and the castle and a peaceful escape from the crowds in the old town, head across the bridge to Philosophenweg or the Philosopher's Walk. This is an historic walking path across the river from the Old Town and it has been inspiring thinkers and philosophers for centuries. Hence the name, The Philosopher's Walk. You'll pass by gardens and vineyards and fields with animals grazing. And you'll get some of the best panoramic views of the city. There are these little lookouts that you can get off the path and they have benches and you can just stop for a minute to take in the views and get some photos or you can just walk up to one and sit on a bench and just relax, enjoy and take it all in.

To get there, you want to walk across the Old Bridge and then you're going to turn left and then the entrance will be on the right. It can be a little bit hard to find. So you might want to put the Philosopher's Walk into your Google navigation and then that will direct you to exactly where you need to go. You can hike the full trail and I've done that a couple of times and it's really, really pretty. It's a nice walk if you have the time to do it. But you can also just go up part of the trail. The beginning of the trail is fairly steep, but it's worth it. And it's paved, it's like cobblestone brick type paving. So I would wear good shoes. You don't need hiking shoes or anything like that. But you know, just wear some comfortable shoes if you want to hike up there. So wear some comfortable shoes, bring some water, take your time and soak in the peaceful vibe and just enjoy.

So those are five things that I highly recommend doing in Heidelberg. Let me now share some tips with you. As I mentioned, Heidelberg can be a really good first or last stop if you're flying in or out of Frankfurt, because it's only about an hour away. So if you're landing in Frankfurt, you can very easily take a regional train to Heidelberg, and it doesn't take that long to get there, and then you have most of the first day to go out and explore beautiful Heidelberg.



Another thing to know about Heidelberg, is that the train station is about 20-ish minutes walking from the Old Town. So if you're arriving by train and you're staying in the Old Town, be prepared to walk. It's not bad. I've done it with my luggage. So if you want to do a walk of 20-25 minutes, depending on where your hotel is, you can Google map it to figure out the exact route and how long it will take. Or you can hop on the tram and you can get very close to your hotel if it's in the Old Town or you can hop in a taxi and they'll also take you right to your hotel.

If you want that Old Town charming, historic vibe, stay in one of the beautiful hotels in the Old Town. If you're looking for a hotel in Heidelberg, we do have an accommodation guide on our website and I'll link to that in the show notes. That's a great place to start. And if you have our DIY Germany travel planner, I highly recommend going to our map because we have our recommended hotels in Heidelberg marked on that map.

So you can see exactly where they are. You can click on the dot, you can see photos, you can see our comments, and then we also include a link so you can go over and read reviews for that hotel. It's really helpful to see it on our map because then you can see how far away it is from the train station or the river or the castle, and then you can also see where it's located in relation to the other sites that you want to see. And we do have our recommended sites on the map.

If you have our planner, I recommend skipping the blog post we have on our website. Go right to the map and check out the hotels we have recommended there. It does make things so much easier. Now, if you're arriving by train and you don't want to carry your luggage very far, then I would recommend looking for a hotel closer to the train station. And we have those hotels on our map as well. You can also save a little money if you stay near the train station because it's a little bit further from the Old Town and the area is just fine. It just doesn't have that Old Town cobblestone feel. It's just more like everyday Heidelberg.



The last time we were in Heidelberg, we stayed in a little place that was kind of halfway between the train station and Old Town. And we chose this hotel, which I'll link it up in the show notes so you can check it out. It was pretty basic, but it was great. And we chose it because it had a little kitchenette. So we wanted to be able to have breakfast in our room and have some snacks and things like that. So it was a great hotel. It was very quiet and it was lovely. And I really actually liked being halfway between the train station and the Old Town because we walked to our hotel from the train station. That was no problem. Dropped everything at the hotel in our room. And then it was a short walk into the Old Town.

But if you do want that ambiance, that historic vibe, then definitely choose a hotel in the Old Town. They have some beautiful hotels. And it is really nice. You kind of feel more immersed in that vibe, in that Old Town historic vibe when you're staying in the Old Town. And you can also get up really early or stay out a little bit later, and you can walk around the Old Town when not many people are out. And that's also really, really fun to do. It's a lovely experience.

Okay, now for the last thing. At the beginning of this episode, I mentioned that Aaron and I made a really big mistake in Heidelberg once, so let me tell you about this. So this was probably 26 years ago, and we were on this two-month trip to Europe, and we had spent a week staying with a friend of ours in Mannheim, which is not too far away from Heidelberg. So one very hot summer day, Aaron and I decided to go spend the day in Heidelberg, because neither of us had been there for a couple of years.

We took the train over to Heidelberg and all we had with us was one crossbody bag that we were sharing as our day bag because it was so, so hot on that day. We had so much fun in Heidelberg. We walked everywhere. We walked all the way up to the castle. We walked up to the Philosophers Walk, all over the old town. And it was so much fun. And at the end of the day, it was in the evening.



We collapsed into chairs at a restaurant that was, think, on that main street or it was in the old town. And we sat outside and we were so tired. Our feet were killing us because we had already walked like 30,000 steps or something crazy. We enjoyed dinner. It was so lovely. And then we thought, OK, it's getting late. It was probably like nine o'clock by this time. And we thought, OK, it's getting late. We should probably head back and go back to our friend's house.

So we walk back to the train station and it's like, you 20 minute walk or something. We get almost all the way back to the train station and we realize we don't have our day bag. We had left it at the restaurant and we were sitting outside. So we were very, very concerned because we thought, no, what if somebody just came by and picked it up and took off with it and we don't have it. So we were thinking about, okay, what was in that day bag?

And fortunately, I had a small, really tiny purse. So I had our year-round passes and my wallet, and I think maybe Aaron's wallet too for some reason. Maybe I had those on me. So I remember we did have those things. But I think our cameras and a few other things were in that bag. So we quickly turned around and we walked all the way back into the Old Town, which was another 20 minutes. And our feet were killing us because we had walked so much all day long.

We walked back and the restaurant was closed because it was closing right before we left or right after we left actually. And I could not get into the restaurant, couldn't get a hold of anybody. This was before cell phones, so we couldn't call anyone. But we didn't see the bag either. So we thought either somebody took off with our bag or when they came out to close down the restaurant, then maybe they saw our bag and they took it into the restaurant. That's what we were hoping.

So then we walked all the way back to the train station. So we had walked back and forth a couple of times and we got back to the train station. Gosh, it was probably like 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock by this point or something. I don't know. It was getting really late.



We were exhausted and there were no more trains going back to Mannheim. We had missed the last train. And so the way, what I would have done since we had our Eurail passes, my suggestion was why don't we just hop on a train and we'll just sleep on the train and we'll just go somewhere. Like we can take the train towards some place and then we'll get out and then we'll take the train back and then we'll go to Mannheim in the morning. And Aaron looked at me like I had three heads and he was like, yeah, I'm not doing that. So he's like, let's take a taxi and go back to Mannheim. So we did that and we hopped in a taxi and we were able to, actually I remember now.

We took a taxi, but we had to go back to the main train station in Mannheim because we knew where our friend lived. We could get to his apartment, but we didn't know what the address was. So we couldn't explain to the taxi driver how to get to his apartment. So we said, just take us back to the main train station because that's what we were going to do, taking the train anyway. So by the time we got back there, it was after midnight and we couldn't get on a streetcar. I don't know if they weren't running or if we just missed it. I can't remember. So we had to walk from the train station back to my friend's apartment. And that was like 25 minutes.

By the time we got back to his apartment, it was like after 1 a.m., maybe 1.30 a.m., I don't know. We were so tired. I don't think my feet have ever hurt that badly. We must have walked 40,000 steps or something. Anyway, so we get back and we're just laughing at how, you know, at this experience. And also we were still a little bit worried about our day bag.

So the next day, my German friend or our German friend helped us find the number, you know, for the restaurant. And we called and fortunately they had our bag. They had come out to clear our table right after we left and they'd seen our bag. But unfortunately we were too far away.



So the next day, we went back to Heidelberg and we got our bag and so everything was fine. But we still laugh about that whenever we're in Heidelberg and we walk by where we ate, we just laugh about that experience and I can still remember how badly our feet hurt. So a big tip is when you sit down at a restaurant, do not set anything down. Make sure that everything is attached to you. I never set my phone down. I always have it attached to my wrist or it's in my day bag. And my day bag is also always attached to me. And same thing for Aaron. And in all the years since, we have not left anything at a restaurant.

Okay, so that is it for today. I hope you found this episode helpful. And if you're considering going to Heidelberg, check the show notes because I'm gonna link up some starter guides that we have on our website all about Heidelberg.

And if you have our Germany travel planner, definitely go check out the map because you can see our recommended sites and hotels and more. All right, everyone, I'll talk to you next week. Happy travel planning. Before you go, two quick things. First, if you found our podcast helpful, please leave a five star rating and even better, a review. That helps more travelers find our podcast and that means we can keep creating episodes to help you plan an unforgettable trip to Germany and surrounding countries.

And second, if you're just starting to plan your trip and you want to enjoy the best of Germany while also skipping those rookie mistakes most travelers unknowingly make, you'll love our best-selling DIY Germany travel planner. Think of it as your travel savvy best friend who's handing you everything you need to know to plan your perfect trip. And if you'd like personalized support, upgrade to a one-on-one consult, itinerary review, or even a complete custom itinerary and travel plan.

You'll find everything on mygermanylvacation.com. Thanks so much for listening to the Germany Travel Planning Podcast and until next week, happy travel planning.