



# TOAST THE TOWN

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A Bavarian cultural revival is bringing new life to Germany's largest and most misunderstood beer festival, encouraging visitors to venture outside the tents.

**PREVIOUS PAGE** Festivalgoers enjoying Munich's Oktoberfest. **RIGHT** Marvel at other sites such as Nymphenburg Palace while in town for the festival.

Münchener who, along with Sascha Arnold and Steffen Werner, are behind several of the city's most exciting clubs, bars, hotels and restaurants (including The Flushing Meadows Hotel & Bar, located in a former post office with stylish suites designed by surfers, actors, DJs and other creatives.) "Now the festival is full of young people and every girl has three, four, five dirndls [traditional dresses] in her closet," he adds.

Another traditional dress is the *tracht*, and the fact it's back in vogue has led to a marked rise in its quality. Gone are the tawdry, tightly laced costumes that helped earn Paris Hilton a lifelong ban from the festival in 2006. In their place are lederhosen made of actual leather and 'couture' dirndls that retail for hundreds, or even thousands, of euros from labels such as Lodenfrey and Gottseidank.

According to Claudia Nowka, these days the dirndl is popular with young people because it has evolved; it's modern.

Nowka learned to sew from her mother in the town of Neuburg an der Donau, where she began attending folk festivals and creating the labour-intensive attire. In 2007, after noticing a dearth of high-quality options, she founded her Munich-based label Alpenmädel Dirndl Design, which offers modern interpretations of the dress in silk and custom fabrics. The response was beyond what she expected. "So many people kept asking me about bridal dirndls that I started to make them."

For decades following the Second World War, Bavaria and much of Germany shunned regionalism and nationalism. Yet thriving Munich media, biotechnology, IT and automotive industries have given the city an enviable prosperity and its citizens a good quality of life. Its business success, combined with its picture- ➤

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**ASK THE AVERAGE** traveller what springs to mind when they think of Munich and the odds are that they will mention the Oktoberfest (now held from 17 September to 3 October to take advantage of the milder weather). Given the scale of the world's largest 'folk festival', it's hard to blame them — last year more than 5.9 million guests consumed about 7.7 million litres of beer. But Wiesn, as Oktoberfest's known colloquially, may be a victim of its own success, and spin-offs around the globe haven't done much to bolster its image, either. What began more than 200 years ago as a royal wedding celebration is now almost universally considered a crass, commercialised affair — where buxom beer maids serve overpriced mugs of beer to lads in lederhosen all the way from Sydney to Singapore.

Yet those willing to look beyond the stereotypes are often pleasantly surprised. Unbeknownst to many, there's exceptional food to be had at the festival, along with fine wines and a genuine joie de vivre. And as 2016 marks the 500th anniversary of Reinheitsgebot (Germany's beer purity law; see page 64 for more on this), this year's festivities are set to be especially grand.

The event has become one that even locals gladly attend, fostering a renewed interest in Bavarian traditions and regional pride that cannot be replicated elsewhere. "When I was growing up, Oktoberfest wasn't cool and when you did go, you'd never be caught in Bavarian garb. All that's changed," says Niels Jäger, a





## EAT + DRINK

With its vintage bowling alley and Bavarian menu, **Wirtshaus Hohenwart** (Gietlstrasse 15; [www.hohenwart.net](http://www.hohenwart.net)) — set in the restored 1896 tavern where German comedian Gerhard Polt filmed *Man Spricht Deutsch* — feels like it has been a part of the neighbourhood for years. Other eateries such as the century-old **Wirtshaus in der Au** (Lilienstrasse 51; [www.wirtshaus.inderau.de](http://www.wirtshaus.inderau.de)) or the **Spezlwirtschaft** (Ledererstrasse 3; [www.spezlwirtschaft.me](http://www.spezlwirtschaft.me)) serve updated local staples with subtle twists. At the former, the dirndl-clad waitresses serve seasonal variations of *knödel* (dumplings) with prosciutto and spinach, while the latter is set in a 1264 building and serves the best *brotzeit* (bread with cold cuts, cheeses and spreads) this side of the Isar River. Asian-style steamed dumplings filled with *schweinebraten*

(roast pork) make an unorthodox dim sum more than a gimmick at **Fei Scho** (Kolosseumstrasse 6; [www.feischo.com](http://www.feischo.com)). **Charlie** (Schyrenstrasse 8; [www.charl.ie](http://www.charl.ie)), in the up-and-coming Giesing area, has the look of an old-school tavern, but serves contemporary Vietnamese cuisine and hosts raucous parties on weekends. Get cocktails at **Zephyr** (Baaderstrasse 68; [www.zephyr-bar.de](http://www.zephyr-bar.de)) in the buzzy, LGBTQ-friendly neighbourhood of Glockenbachviertel, while **Les Fleurs du Mal** (Schumanns Bar, Odeonsplatz 6–7; [www.schumanns.de](http://www.schumanns.de)) is a whisky joint run by local legend, Charles Schumann.

## STAY

Situated directly on the Munich market, Viktualienmarkt, boutique **Louis Hotel** (Viktualienmarkt 6; [www.louis-hotel.com](http://www.louis-hotel.com)) has a minimalist aesthetic and a



stunning rooftop terrace best enjoyed in summer. One of Munich's first Design Hotels, **Cortina Hotel** (Ledererstrasse 8; [www.cortina.com](http://www.cortina.com)) is a study in tasteful, understated style and is situated just moments from

Marienplatz. A central location, buzzy bar and retro decor give **Hotel Lux** (Ledererstrasse 13; [www.munich.hotel-lux.info](http://www.munich.hotel-lux.info)) plenty of appeal — just beware, the hotel is centred around a spiral staircase and there is no elevator. **Hotel Bayerischer Hof** (Promenadeplatz 2–6; [www.bayerischerhof.de](http://www.bayerischerhof.de)) is a grand dame that has hosted celebrities and intellectuals in its opulent halls.



perfect surrounds, is part of why *Monocle* magazine named it the world's most livable city in 2007 and 2010. It's a good time to be Bavarian, and locals like to flaunt their roots all year round, not only during Oktoberfest. "Everything's so globalised," says Nowka who, although is positive about Munich's multicultural outlook, is glad local traditions are thriving. "It feels like regional cultures and products are becoming more popular."

## UNDER THE TENT

Part of enjoying Oktoberfest is discovering its nuances. The 14 large tents and 21 smaller ones that pop up for the event in the Theresienwiese, a fairground space in the south-west of the city centre, range from Hofbräu-Festzelt (a roaring 10,000-person tent) to the Käfer's Wies'n-Schänke (where the gentry go to drink champagne) and Schützen-Festzelt (a local favourite, complete with a terrace overlooking the Bavaria statue, a symbol of the region's strength). For those looking for a more subdued atmosphere, there's Kufflers Weinzelt. "Every tent draws a different crowd," says Stephan Kuffler, whose family-run space attracts a local audience.

The Kufflers run several restaurants throughout Bavaria — Spatenhaus an der Oper is a stalwart of the power lunch set, while Haxnbauer im Scholastikahaus is where you can get 24-hour marinated pork knuckle roasted over a beechwood charcoal grill. They bring that gourmet approach to their tent, serving upmarket renditions of classic dishes.

Still, even at the most refined tents, the scene can get rowdy and a number ➤



of visitors miss the old times when Wiesn was a more family-friendly celebration. Those wistful for bygone days head to the wholesome Oide Wiesn and Festselt Tradition. With folk songs, marionettes, theatre and antique wooden carousels in lieu of glitzy carnival rides, the contrast is stark. “It’s just the way it was in earlier days: no one has to get up at 7am to stand in line and we don’t dance on benches — we’ve got a dance floor for that,” says Lalita Statello, one of the organisers.

Launched in 2010 to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Oktoberfest, the Oide Wiesn was intended to be a one-time event, but clearly filled a niche. “Many Münchenern wanted something quieter and more traditional, that celebrates our history,” she says. To describe it, she turns to a word that goes a long way to explaining the local Bavarian psyche and conveys a sense of warmth and good cheer: “It’s simply *gemütlich*,” she says.

## BEYOND THERESIENWIESE

Given Oktoberfest’s annual attendance is roughly quintuple the population of Munich, it was all but inevitable that the festival would begin to overshadow its host. It’s a shame, because this culturally rich city on the banks of the Isar River has plenty going for it. More than 1200 kilometres of bicycle paths and leafy parks are spread throughout the city. The largest of these,



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Inside a room at The Flushing Meadows Hotel & Bar; reservations at the hotel bar are taken with a sense of humour; surf’s up at Eisbachwelle; the view from The Flushing Meadows. **PREVIOUS PAGE, FROM TOP** Rides are part of the fun at Oktoberfest; Louis Hotel; the Spatenhaus an der Oper restaurant. **NEXT PAGE** The Museum Brandhorst; sunbathers enjoying the English Garden.

the English Garden, features an artificial wave called the Eisbachwelle that surfers can ride all year round. Glacial lakes, snow-capped mountains, fairytale castles and picturesque monasteries are never more than a day-trip from the city centre. “The clichés that exist about Germany — the Alps, the lederhosen, the beer — they’re actually about 90 per cent Bavarian,” points out Niels Jäger.

Munich’s cultural offerings and 80-plus museums are equally worthy of attention, many of which have in recent years been built or given a makeover. When strolling through Kunstareal — the verdant museum quarter lined with swanky cafes and boutiques — it is impossible to miss the eye-popping rainbow-hued Museum Brandhorst. The exterior took up a sizeable chunk of the €46 million budget and makes a fitting home for its edgy collection.

Design is also front-and-centre at the Munich Documentation Centre for the ➤



History of National Socialism, a white, minimalist structure that explores the darker elements of German history. Opened last year, it aims to spread a message of tolerance. In 2013, the elegant 1800s villa that houses the Lenbachhaus — which has a vast collection of German expressionist works — extended its offering with a swish Norman Foster-designed wing.

Most daring of all is Haus der Kunst museum, which was once a propaganda showpiece for the Third Reich. Okwui Enwezor was appointed as its director in 2011 and has pushed for radically changing the museum's original intent, hosting exhibitions that critically examine the history of Nazi-era art and construction.

Munich's art scene, however, isn't confined to these hallowed halls. A sophisticated local population with plenty of purchasing power fuels dozens of carefully curated galleries catering to both mainstream and more avant-garde tastes. One of the best places to tap into the arts is Kunstraum, a privately funded collective that supports many of the city's artists. It's been a powerful force for more than four decades, but still

## CULTURE

To brush up on your local history, pick up a copy of **Munich: From Monks to Modernity** by Paul Wheatley, a journalist and local resident. This eminently readable volume breezes through more than eight centuries and delves into the city's cultural side — creatives such as painter Wassily Kandinsky and author Thomas Mann both spent time in Munich — without shying away from darker elements, such as the 1972 Olympics massacre and the early roots of the Third Reich.

## THE BEER PURITY LAW

The **Reinheitsgebot** is a set of regulations that state what can be in beer: specifically hops, barley, water and absolutely nothing else. The rules have evolved over the years but they hold a special place in the hearts of locals, and, to this day, all beers have to abide by this decree.

## DETAILS

**Alpenmadel Dirndl Design** Klenzestrasse 43; [www.alpenmaedel.de](http://www.alpenmaedel.de).  
**Crew Republic** Andreas-Danzer-Weg 30; [www.crewrepublic.de](http://www.crewrepublic.de).  
**Eisbachwelle** Prinzregentenstrasse; [www.eisbachwelle.de](http://www.eisbachwelle.de).  
**Festzelt Tradition** [www.oktoberfestzelt-tradition.de](http://www.oktoberfestzelt-tradition.de).  
**Galerie Kronsbein** Würzstrasse 12; [www.galerie.kronsbein.com](http://www.galerie.kronsbein.com).  
**Giesinger Bräu** Martin-Luther-Strasse 2; [www.giesinger-braeu.de](http://www.giesinger-braeu.de).  
**Haus der Kunst** Prinzregentenstrasse 1; [www.hausderkunst.de](http://www.hausderkunst.de).  
**Haxnbauer im Scholastikahaus**

Sparkassenstrasse 6; [www.kuffler.de](http://www.kuffler.de).  
**Hofbräu Festzelt** [www.hb-festzelt.de](http://www.hb-festzelt.de).  
**Käfer's Wiesn-Schänke** [www.kaefer-wiesn.de](http://www.kaefer-wiesn.de).  
**Kufflers Weinzelt** [www.weinzelt.com](http://www.weinzelt.com).  
**Kunstraum** Holzstrasse 10; [www.kunstraum-muenchen.de](http://www.kunstraum-muenchen.de).  
**Lenbachhaus** Luisenstrasse 33; [www.lenbachhaus.de](http://www.lenbachhaus.de).  
**Museum Brandhorst** [\[brandhorst.de\]\(http://brandhorst.de\).  
\*\*Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism\*\* \[www.ns-dokumentzentrum-muenchen.de\]\(http://www.ns-dokumentzentrum-muenchen.de\).  
\*\*Schützen-Festzelt\*\* \[www.schuetzenfestzelt.de\]\(http://www.schuetzenfestzelt.de\).  
\*\*Spatenhaus an der Oper\*\* Residenzstrasse 12; \[www.spatenhaus.de\]\(http://www.spatenhaus.de\).  
\*\*The Flushing Meadows Hotel & Bar\*\* Fraunhoferstrasse 32; \[www.flushingmeadowshotel.com\]\(http://www.flushingmeadowshotel.com\).](http://www.museum-</a></p>
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feels fresh thanks to its emphasis on current political and social issues.

And while Munich can't compete with Berlin for brutalist architecture covered in murals, recent years have seen the arrival of street works by masters such as HNRX, TONA and Shepard Fairey. Banksy, who has reportedly made several trips to the city, recently held his first German solo exhibition at Munich's Galerie Kronsbein. "Given the population, there's a tremendous diversity of arts and nightlife. Münchenerers definitely know how to enjoy life," says Jäger.

Then there's the tattooed chefs at eateries such as Spezlwirtschaft and Fei Scho, who are taking traditional Bavarian cuisine and reinterpreting it, resulting in lighter fare. Even beer, a cornerstone of the region, is being modernised. There are six big breweries that still dominate the city's 180-plus beer gardens and adhere to the Reinheitsgebot, but these days they're joined by quirky microbreweries such as Giesinger Bräu and Crew Republic, with its motto 'Craft beer is not a crime', poking fun at the fact that craft beer was a crime in Germany until 2005 when the purity laws were loosened.

It means today Münchenerers can prost with flavourful unorthodox beers, but are just as likely to be seen enjoying the traditions that have been honoured for generations. 🍷

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