



The city of Aachen lies in the westernmost part of Germany and borders with Belgium and the Netherlands. Tribes have been living here since the Stone Age. Celtic families also liked the neighborhood and so did the Romans. But what really put Aachen on the map were the kings of the Franks. The Franks were a German-speaking people who invaded Western Europe in the 5th century. The word France comes from the Franks. And the superstar of the Frankish kings was a guy named Charlemagne who came to power at the end of the 700s.

On Christmas Day in the year 800, Charlemagne resurrected the idea of the Roman Empire by having himself crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III.

Charlemagne had created a super-state that brought together all the Christian communities of Western Europe, it stretched from Denmark to Romania. The emperor's favorite city and the site of his royal household was Aachen.

And the Cathedral that he built for his court is still standing. The church is made up of three distinct parts:



First is the octagon which forms the central part of the structure. It is modeled after the circular church of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy. It's has eight sides which is typical of Greek churches. The interior of the dome is covered with a gold mosaic. Over the spot where Charlemagne was buried is an enormous candelabra---a gift from the Emperor Barbarossa.

Charlemagne's throne is a simple throne made of great slabs of white marble. But not just any ordinary marble for this Holy Roman Emperor. The stones are said to come from the tomb of Jesus.



Thirteen windows decorate the Cathedral. Each are 100 feet high. Between the windows stand fourteen statues---the Mother of God, the Twelve Apostles and of course, Charlemagne. Charlemagne made Aachen the capital of what we now call Europe and for hundreds of years it was the city in which the rulers of Germany were crowned.

Eventually the political importance of the palace at Aachen declined, and the power shifted to the Cathedral. Precious relics were brought to Aachen by Charlemagne and placed in his imperial chapel. After his death hundreds of thousands of pilgrims came to Aachen to see them. These great pilgrimages started during the 1300s and were known as Shrine Pilgrimages. To a considerable extent these journeys were the forerunners of today's holiday travel. You took a break from your normal day-to-day life and headed off to see something new.

Starting in the middle of the 14th century; it became church policy to display its greatest relics only once every seven years. It is a custom which still holds. Every seventh year, for the past 700 years, Aachen declares a Sabbath Year and presents an exhibition of its most sacred objects, namely, the cloak of the Virgin Mary, the swaddling-clothes of the Infant Jesus, the loin-cloth worn by Jesus on the Cross, and the cloth on which lay the head of St. John the Baptist after his beheading. Between the Sabbath Years, these relics are kept in the



Shrine of Our Lady, located in Aachen's Cathedral, which is a masterwork created by the goldsmiths of Aachen in 1238.

Aachen became the most important pilgrimage site north of the Alps and a gathering point for pilgrims setting out for Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain. Just around the corner from the Cathedral is a wall which holds a scallop shell---the symbol of Santiago. It points to the place where pilgrims gathered before they set off on the 1,235 mile walk to Spain.

TOWN HALL

The center of Aachen is the town square and it tells the story of Aachen's history for the past 650 years. Originally, it was part of an important road that connected Rome to the Netherlands and was used as a stopping point and a market place. It's still a market place where local farmers from Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands come to sell their goods.

In the middle of the market is Aachen's oldest fountain. It was cast in 1620 and presents Charlemagne holding the symbols of his office.



The buildings around the square were once the homes of Aachen's richest families.

The Lowenstein House is the show-piece of the square. It's named after Anna Lowenstein who built it in 1344.

The building that houses the Goldener Einhorn Restaurant dates back to the Middle Ages and was a hotel for pilgrims visiting the shrine at Aachen.

Across the square is the Postwagen building which is one of the few remaining structures made of wood and probably the oldest. Today it contains a restaurant serving the local specialties of the area.

On one side of the square is Aachen's ancient Town Hall. It was originally built in the 1300s and its foundation and dimensions are identical with

Charlemagne's old Royal Hall.

Inside are a set of frescos that tell the story of Charlemagne's life. Even during his lifetime, Charlemagne was called the father of Europe, particularly of France and Germany.

The hall also contains the Crown Jewels, well; actually they are copies of the Crown Jewels. Just before Napoleon invaded Aachen in 1794, the Crown Jewels were sent to the Emperor of Austria with a note that said "keep these jewels safe". But the Emperor misread the note, he thought it read "keep these jewels in your safe" and today they are still there. It's all about penmanship.

HOT SPRINGS ETERNAL

The name Aachen refers back to the ancient Celtic god of healing and the god's association with hot spring waters.

Roman soldiers were particularly attracted to hot springs and often built settlements nearby. The salts in the hot water increased the buoyancy of their bodies and helped relieve their pain and exhaustion. The troops felt they were floating back to health.



It was Charlemagne's interest in those hot springs that originally attracted him to the area. But he was not the only big name that came to Aachen for the springs. Casanova came because he believed the waters would rejuvenate his sexual powers. And they must have done

WHERE TO STAY



EXCELSIOR HOTEL ERNST

TRANKGASSE 1-5 / DOMPLATZ

50667 COLOGNE, GERMANY

T: 011 49 (0) 221 2701

WWW.EXCELSIOR-HOTEL-ERNST.DE

Aachen, Germany

something because he came back three times. But he was always disguised---didn't want the word getting out that his sex life was medically enhanced. Another famous guest was the Empress Josephine who wanted to have children with Napoleon. She stopped in to improve her fertility. Fortunately, Josephine and Casanova were never here at the same time.

SPA

For centuries mineral springs were thought to have magical powers that could heal the sick. Sometimes the magic was attributed to the water and sometimes to powerful spirits who were thought to live in the springs. It really didn't make any difference to the people who came for relief as long as they got better.



Natural spring water can be divided into three types:

There are salt waters that are filled with dissolved mineral salts like Epsom salt which is named after England's Epsom springs. There are also a series of salt waters that contain magnesium sulfate. People drink the waters that contain magnesium sulfate because of their purgative effects. It is nature's DRAIN.

The second category of spring water contains rust-colored iron oxide which is considered to have a restorative effect.

The third group is made up of waters that contain hydrogen sulfide—a gas you will recognize because it smells like rotten eggs. The waters at the spa in Aachen contain hydrogen-sulfide. People drink it and bath in it and give it credit for an assortment of cures.

During the 1800's hot springs became a preferred hangout for the rich and famous. They felt that the destructive effects of their high life could be corrected by an extended visit to a hot springs resort. However, the environment at these resorts offered a level of personal freedom that was, to say the least, excessive. Away from their families and totally on their own---the guests were getting into hot water.

WHERE TO EAT



CAFÉ VAN DEN DAELE

BÜCHEL 18 / ECKE KÖRBERGASSE
52062 AACHEN, GERMANY
T: 011 49 (0)241 357 24
WWW.VAN-DEN-DAELE.DE

MAIER-PEVELING'S

WWW.MAIER-PEVELINGS.COM

KLEIN PRINTEN BAKERY

FRANZSTRASSE 91
52064 AACHEN, GERMANY
T: 011 49 (0)241 47 4350
WWW.PRINTEN.DE



THE FOUNTAINS OF AACHEN

For thousands of years, people believed that any place where water came up from the earth was sacred and those spots were often surrounded by fountains or temples. Not surprising, Aachen is covered in fountains.

The most popular fountain in Aachen for big and little children is the Puppet Fountain. The many moveable figures on the Puppet Fountain are not only fun to play with, but also represent the many industries of Aachen: textiles, religion, commerce, science, and education.

AACHEN UNIVERSITY

One of Charlemagne's objectives was to make Aachen a cultural and educational center. Accordingly, he brought some of Europe's most talented scholars to the city. His vision is still in operation at the Rhineland-Westphalia Technical University. It has transformed the region into a focal point for researchers working on automobile technology, laser development, and medicine as well as the design and manufacturing of microchips.

INTERNATIONAL NEWSPAPER MUSEUM

Aachen's intellectual environment is also reflected in the city's International Newspaper Museum which is based in the house where in 1850 Israel Reuter established the Reuters News Service.

It was the first news agency and it is still in operation. The building contains over 170,000 newspapers with the earliest examples dating back to the 1500's.

In German, a newspaper is called a "Zeitung" which is a word that dates back to the 1300s and refers to a message about a recent event. The Einkommende Zeitungen published in Leipzig Germany in 1650 was the first daily paper. The Penny Magazine was the first illustrated paper. The Amsterdamsche Courant printed its advertising section at right angles in order to distinguish between advertisements and editorial content.

The museum has a copy of the Diario di Roma which was published during the early 1800s. It is the world's smallest newspaper. L'autre Monde was published in Paris and was printed with gold ink on black paper. It claimed to have originated from another world. The Tristan Times is published on a small island in the South Atlantic and because the island had no currency, the paper sold for four potatoes. Home delivery was an extra potato or two onions.

WHAT'S COOKING

In 1794, a French revolutionary army occupied



Aachen and incorporated the town into the French empire of Napoleon. Napoleon had a soft spot for the city, since he considered himself the cultural descendant of Charlemagne and believed, like Charlemagne, he would unite all of Europe under one ruler.

Aachen's time under French control had a number of benefits. The economy improved. Currency, weights and measures were standardized. The restrictive guild system was dissolved. Transportation was improved.

But to my mind, the most important French influence to remain in Aachen can be found at the restaurant Maier-Peveling's.

About 25 years ago, Christof Lang opened an elegant French restaurant called La Becasse. But some part of Christof's heart belonged to a typical type of German fast-food called a "currywurst". Currywurst was invented in Berlin in 1949 and consists of a grilled Bratwurst sausage, sliced into bite-size pieces and covered with ketchup that has been laced with curry. It is traditionally served with French fried potatoes and a bread roll and has become so popular that during the spring of 2006 over 6 million dollars were spent building a National Currywurst Museum.



Currywursts are available from small fast-food joints in virtually every German city. But the fast-food joints were uncomfortable and when you left you often smelled of cooking oil. Christof wanted to make the world's finest currywursts and perfect French fries. And Maier-Peveling's is the result. The sausages are made daily from Christof's own recipe. The French fries, which are truly outstanding, are made to order and served with different sauces that are made in Christof's elegant French restaurant. The only sauce they don't make is the tomato ketchup which is Heinz---some things just can't be improved upon. They offer a selection of beers, soft drinks, wines, even champagne. And he's put a giant air-conditioner on the roof to keep the atmosphere fresh so you won't smell like

Aachen, Germany

French fries when you leave.

And as long as we are talking about “what’s cooking” in Aachen, allow me to introduce you to printen. The word “printen” comes from the English word “print.” In Aachen it refers to a sweet, spicy, flat, and hard cookie that is made in a mold and because you could make many cookies that were the same, bakers thought of it as being like printing. They were developed by an Aachen baker about 300 years ago and became the favorite of the pilgrims. They have an interesting taste, they’re nourishing, easy to carry around and they don’t get stale for months. These days, the bakers of Aachen produce over 4,500 tons of Printen a year.



The Café van den Daele was founded by a Belgian pastry chef. It consists of four historic buildings. The oldest dates to 1655. Because each building was built at a different time and designed to meet the needs of a different family the inside rooms are connected by staircases and steps that lead in and out of seven different rooms. Picturesque for the patrons, not that much fun for the waiters. The original baker was a collector of furniture, pictures and baking tins which are still on display.

The restaurant menu has a number of classic German dishes. But they’ve each been given a slight twist that makes them quite interesting. Sauerbraten, is beef that’s been marinated in vinegar and wine for a couple of days, and then roasted. Then the marinade is used to make a sauce. But when they’re making the sauce here they add printen cookies which gives it a gingerbread sweetness.



The rolled beef dish is filled with sautéed onions, bacon, and pesto sauce and served with sauerkraut and roasted potatoes. Very nice.

Van Den Daele is considered to be one of the finest cafes in Germany and is particularly famous for its baked goods.

WORLD EQUESTRIAN FESTIVAL

Every year in June hundreds of thousands of visitors come to Aachen for one week to admire the horses at the World Equestrian Festival. The competition includes everything from show jumping to carriage driving.

Horses have been in the neighborhood for at least 30,000 years and it was Charlemagne’s horse pawing the ground that uncovered the hot springs that made Aachen Charlemagne’s favorite town. Charlemagne himself was passionate about breeding horses.

At the end of the festival everyone celebrates with music, dancing and a promise to return next year.

TO LEARN MORE . . .

GERMAN NATIONAL TOURIST BOARD

WWW.D-Z-T.COM

AACHEN TOURIST SERVICE

WWW.AACHEN-TOURIST.DE

AACHEN CATHEDRAL

WWW.AACHENDOM.DE

CAROLUS THERMEN SPA

KUR-UND BADEGESELLSCHAFT MGH
KURVERWALTUNG BAD AACHEN, GERMANY

T: 011 49 (0)241 182 74 121

WWW.CAROLUS-THERMEN.DE

INTERNATIONALES ZEITUNGSMUSEUM DER STADTR AACHEN—INTERNATIONAL NEWSPAPER MUSEUM

PONTSTRASSE 13
52062 AACHEN, GERMANY
T: 011 49 (0)241 432 4508

WWW.IZM.DE

RWTH AACHEN UNIVERSITY

WWW.RWTH-AACHEN.DE

SABINE MATHIEU – AACHEN TOUR GUIDE

FOR GUIDED TOURS OF AACHEN, CONTACT THE
AACHEN TOURIST SERVICE AT EMAIL:

INFO@AACHEN-TOURIST.DE

T: 011 49 (0) 241 1 80 2960