

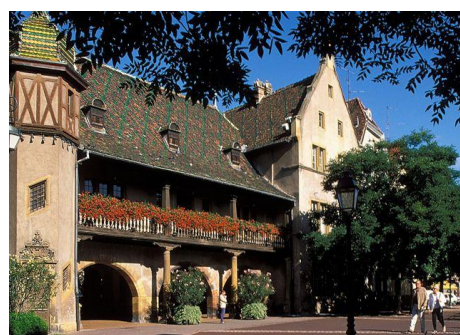
UPPER RHINE valley

ALSACE 🇫🇷 REGION BASEL 🇨🇭 BLACK FOREST 🇩🇪 PALATINATE



Cosy Colmar

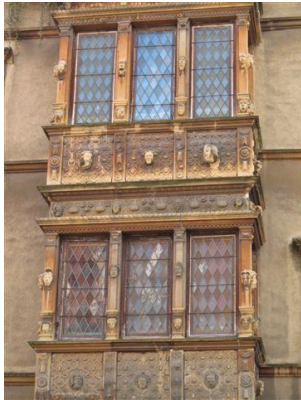
The term “Gemütlich” is specific to the German language and its dialects - such as Alsatian - but even if you don’t exactly know its meaning you will clearly recognise what the translators have agreed upon after a visit to Colmar: “it connotes, much more than cosiness, the notion of belonging, social acceptance, cheerfulness, the absence of anything hectic and the spending of quality time”. Travellers in the know have already found out that this homely, or gemütlich, Alsatian city which lies in the heart of the Upper Rhine Valley - halfway between Basel and Strasbourg, between the Rhine and the Vosges Mountains - will captivate those who take a look around its charming little lanes, taste the tarte flambée and admire the world-class works of art. The ensemble of historic buildings surrounding the Gothic St. Martin’s collegiate church and the Dominican mendicant church, which dates from the High Middle Ages, is unique. Miraculously all of them survived the last six centuries without being destroyed and they are therefore quite rightly under protection as a listed UNESCO world heritage site.



Little Venice and the heart of the Wine Route

Among Colmar’s unique features are: atmosphere, aroma, cosiness, tranquillity. Gables, dormers,

tavern signs, timber framing, colourful shutters, fountains, ornaments, a music festival, a wine fair, the Christmas market and the artful illumination of the city - art connoisseurs, gourmets and sightseers will certainly get their money's worth, be it during a stay of three hours or three days. Colmar is unsurpassed - they even built a copy in Malaysia! But let us stay with the original, an experience in art



history which one can walk around in, and start with the year 1480. This is the year the Koifhüs (Alsatian for store), also known as the Ancienne Douane - a magnificently representative customs station - was built, due to the fact that the city was independent for a long period of time and benefited from its status as a border town, even after it became Alsatian and later on French. Another magnificent house is the Maison Pfister, built in 1537 for a wealthy hatter, and the Maison des Têtes with its decoration of 111 heads and grotesque masks. The former Ancien Corps de garde and the Maison des Chevaliers de St Jean are both inspired by the Italian

Renaissance. The former ploughman's guild hall Poêle des Laboueurs, dating from 1626, is an early example of Baroque architecture. And the Classical style is represented by the court house Tribunal in the Grand Rue and the former hospital Ancien Hôpital. Images of Venice are evoked in the Krutenau - Alsatian for a pasture full of herbs - with its flower-decorated bridges over the little river Lauch.

Remember to leave some space on the camera's memory card for the fishmongers' waterfront Quai de la Poissonnerie or the tanners' quarters Quartier des Tanneurs. It's good that they don't bring the cheque to the table right after dessert in the restaurants! You may gladly remain seated for as long as you like and just take it all in. White wines of highest quality are supplied by 119 wine-growing villages from the region: Colmar is at the heart of the 170 km long Wine Route. And when it celebrates its wine at the annual summer festival it draws nearly a quarter of a million visitors. Of course these numbers may also benefit from the performances by artists such as Deep Purple, Manu Chao, Patti Smith, Jean Louis Aubert or Umberto Tozzi.



What Matthias Grünewald and the inventor of the Statue of Liberty have in common



If you visit Colmar and give the museums and churches the cold shoulder you will miss out on world-class works of art and world history. For centuries important aesthetic impulses were sent out from here - most obviously recognisable in New York's Statue of Liberty, up until recently the largest free-standing statue in the world - and a product from Colmar!

But already a few centuries earlier the most beautiful and touching wood carvings were being made here. In 1473 Martin Schongauer painted his "Virgin in the Garden of Roses" for St Martin's Church.

Her sincere spiritual expression was something entirely new at the time and still captivates everyone pausing for devotion before the young woman with the child - who is often compared with the Sistine Madonna. Schongauer, a pupil of Albrecht Dürer, was an expert on Dutch paintings and went on to create copperplate engravings with depth effects that were unknown before.

Wealthy Antonine monks from Isenheim, near Colmar, commissioned an altarpiece for the ward of their hospital. Matthias Grünewald painted the monumental altar with its two sets of wings at the beginning of the sixteenth century. It became the most famous piece of work by this "last Gothic", a final farewell and at the same time precursor of a new era. It is on display at the Musée d'Unterlinden: Annunciation, the birth of Christ, Crucifixion, Lamentation and Resurrection as a wordless sermon, a passing on of the faith of highest distinction. Grünewald's altar was intended for plague sufferers and poses the great questions on suffering and desperation, acceptance and overcoming. The altar still attracts some 200,000 visitors a year. The Musée d'Unterlinden is therefore France's second largest crowd puller after the Louvre - also because of its collection of important pieces of art from the period and region.



A masterpiece was also what the artist Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi wanted to create: in the spirit of enlightenment his Liberty Enlightening the World - for that is the correct name of the lady - should welcome those arriving at the gates of the New World. It was intended as a present from the French to the Americans, a conspicuous statue holding up the torch of liberty in her hand. No wonder that it took some decades before the statue could finally be inaugurated in 1886: political, economic, aesthetic, technical and - most important - financial problems kept arising and had to be solved. And once again Alsatian ingenuity became the motor of history: the engineers Eiffel and Koechlin helped the copper-clad figure gain stability by introducing a new technique. This ludicrous transatlantic-Alsatian story is told in the Musée Bartholdi - don't miss it!

And therefore a continuum can be recognised in Colmar's history through the works of art created at different points in time: Colmar's characteristic absence of anything hectic may very well be translated with "Gemütlich", but at the same time it is a driving force for great achievements.





The Upper Rhine Valley

The beautiful Upper Rhine Valley is located in the heart of Europe, where the Rhine connects France, Germany and Switzerland. With an area of more than 21.000 km² the region is almost as large as Tuscany, and has the same centuries-old tradition of attracting tourists who love art, culture and fine cuisine. The Upper Rhine Valley is a compact region of versatile scenery and culturally of extraordinary diversity with many charming towns and villages on both sides of the Rhine. The economically prosperous region with its six million inhabitants is within easy reach and offers its visitors a lot of everything.

It never takes more than ten minutes to get from one highlight to another. Famous for its short and mild winters and pleasing summer temperatures from April to October, the region is one of the most beautiful and fertile landscapes in Europe: The markets, vineyards and sophisticated restaurants as good as gold for gourmets; the Gothic cathedrals in Freiburg, Basel and Strasbourg, medieval castles and the countless museums with art collections ranging through history make it a MUST for art connoisseurs; the unique landscape is a paradise for golfers, hikers and ramblers, swimmers, bikers and outdoor fans. Some eighteen million overnight stays each year - of which many guests are returning visitors - confirm the region's outstanding appeal to tourism.

For further detailed information:

Web: www.upperrhinevalley.com; **Email:** urv@fwtm.freiburg.de; **Phone :** +49 (0)761 3881 1211



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Text: Margarete Schwind

Pictures: Hans Kohl

Press Contact regional: Gisela Graf Graf Communications contact@gisela-graf.com

Press Contact national: Margarete Schwind Schwindkommunikation ms@schwindkommunikation.de

Press Contact international: Hans Kohl Reiko PR hans@reiko.org.uk