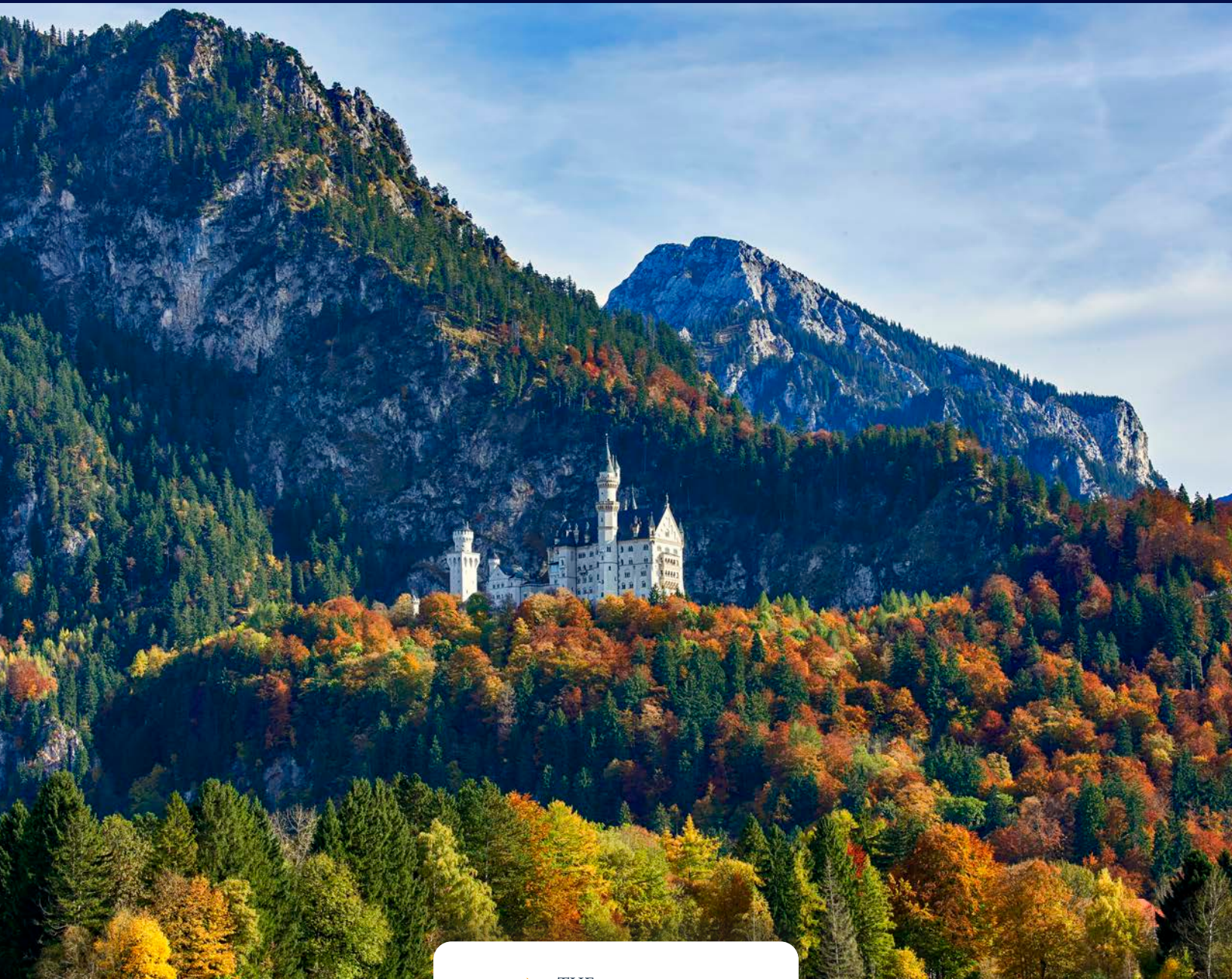


Germany's Castles, Cultural Traditions, and Medieval Life

with Dr. Kat Tracy (May)
or Dr. James Pfrehm (September)

May 28–June 4, 2026 | September 24–October 1, 2026



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Germany's Castles, Cultural Traditions, and Medieval Life

*with Dr. Kat Tracy (May)
or Dr. James Pfrehm (September)*

Join Professor James Pfrehm on a The Great Courses Journey in southern Germany, a region where history and tradition intersect at every turn. Begin in Munich, where royal palaces stand as a testament to the artistic and political ambitions of former dynasties and traditional beer gardens offer an entertaining example of the historical significance of communal dining and brewing culture in German society. Travel to Haldenwang for the rare opportunity to witness the annual *Viehscheid*, or cow train, that marks the return of cattle from alpine pastures with lively music, dancing, and regional cuisine. (*Viehscheid only takes place in the fall; travelers on the May departure will spend Day 3 in Augsburg with a visit to the Schaezler Palace.*)

Continue to Nuremberg, where both castles and beer have roots that date back to the Middle Ages, and visit Rothenburg ob der Tauber, one of Germany's most well-preserved medieval towns and home to Franconian wines renowned for their distinct terroir. Conclude your journey in the university town of Heidelberg, where the evocative ruins of Heidelberg Castle and monastic winemaking traditions of Eberbach Monastery showcase how culture is not only preserved in sites and monuments, but also in the languages, traditions, and artisanal practices that endure throughout the ages.

Your Journey Expert



Dr. Larissa “Kat” Tracy (*May*) is a Visiting Assistant Teaching Professor of English at University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Her research focuses on 13th- to 15th-century literature with cross-cultural contacts and what such literature reveals about law violence, judicial torture and punishment, and social justice. Professor Tracy’s work covers German medievalisms, including Nazi appropriations of Arthurian and Old Norse traditions, as well as medieval German texts such as the *Nibelungenlied* and its Norse analogues. Additionally, her research into torture and brutality includes laws of the German principalities and the Holy Roman Empire. She has appeared in several National Geographic and Discovery Channel documentaries, and her work has been published by Salon.com, Business Insider, Elite Daily, *Entertainment Weekly*, *The Wrap*, and *The New York Times* “Women of the World” supplement. Professor Tracy received her PhD in Medieval Literature from Trinity College Dublin. Among the books she’s authored are *Torture and Brutality in Medieval Literature*, *Medieval and Early Modern Murder*, and *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*. For The Great Courses, she produced the Audible Original *The Culture of Knighthood in Medieval Romance* and is developing a new Great Course on medieval Christianities.



Dr. James Pfrehm (*September*) is an independent scholar who has taught German language, literature, and culture at the university level for more than 20 years. He has a PhD in Germanic Linguistics from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. In addition to studying and conducting research in Germany and Austria, he has taken dozens of students on trips to both countries. As an associate professor at Ithaca College, he was recognized for his outstanding teaching and commitment to his students. He is the author of the book *Technolingualism: The Mind and the Machine*.

Highlights

- Explore the legendary Neuschwanstein and Hohenschwangau Castles and uncover the myths surrounding “Mad” King Ludwig II, Bavaria’s most enigmatic monarch.
- Attend the annual Viehscheid Festival in Haldenwang and observe as decorated cattle return from mountain pastures, accompanied by traditional music, jubilant folk dancing, and hearty local cuisine. (September Departure.)
- Travel to Augsburg, one of Germany’s oldest cities, and immerse yourself in Renaissance and Baroque heritage during a visit to the opulent Schaezler Palace. (May Departure)
- Visit Nuremberg and discover the historic stronghold that played a key role in the Holy Roman Empire while sampling the city’s signature red beer.
- Walk the cobblestoned streets of Rothenburg ob der Tauber, one of Germany’s best-preserved medieval towns, and enjoy a tasting of Franconian wines.
- In charming Heidelberg, visit a historic Cistercian monastery renowned for its centuries-old winemaking tradition and explore the grand ruins of Heidelberg Castle.

Germany's Castles, Cultural Traditions, and Medieval Life

Itinerary



Day 1: Willkommen in München

Arrive on individual flights into Munich (Munich International Airport - MUC) and meet your fellow travelers and expert, Professor James Pfrehm. Begin your journey into southern German culture on an introductory coach tour of Munich, visiting vibrant gardens like Hofgarten and the English Garden, and Marienplatz, home to the city's town halls as well as the iconic glockenspiel whose life-size characters reenact scenes from Munich's history twice a day. Enjoy a guided tour of Nymphenburg Palace, once the main summer residence of the former rulers of Bavaria and the House of Wittelsbach, followed by a welcome dinner at Königlich Hirschgarten, a classic German beer garden that has been serving pints since 1791.

Included Meal: Dinner

Accommodations: Hotel Jakl-Hof

Day 2: It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad Monarch

Begin with a visit to the legendary Neuschwanstein Castle, built by "Mad" King Ludwig II of Bavaria to serve as both a summer retreat from the constraints of Munich and a tribute to composer Richard Wagner. In the afternoon, visit Hohenschwangau Castle, King Ludwig II's childhood residence, as well as The Museum of the Bavarian Kings, which highlights the history of the House of Wittelsbach. Throughout the day, Professor Pfrehm will discuss Ludwig's unique vision, his patronage of the arts, and the role his mythologized image continues to play in Bavarian identity. Join professor Pfrehm this evening at a local restaurant.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodations: Hotel Jakl-Hof

Day 3 (September Departure): Bavarian Bovines and Alpine Traditions

Travel to the quaint village of Haldenwang to experience an annual event during which decorated cows are driven from mountain pastures to mark the beginning of autumn. This *Viehscheid*, or "cow train," is accompanied by traditional Bavarian music, folk dancing, hearty local dishes like sausages and pretzels, and local revelers celebrating this cherished rural tradition. As you admire the



elaborately adorned cattle and take in the stunning alpine scenery, Professor Pfrehm will offer insight into how this festival underscores the deep connection between agrarian life and regional identity. After a day in the picturesque countryside, enjoy dinner at a local restaurant.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodations: Hotel Jakl-Hof

Day 3 (May Departure): Augsburg Through the Ages

Embark on a full day excursion to Augsburg, one of Germany's oldest and most architecturally significant cities. Take a panoramic tour of the charming old town to examine the centuries of history reflected in its Renaissance facades and medieval lanes, followed by a tour of the magnificent Augsburg City Hall, renowned for its gilded ceiling and intricate woodwork (*pending availability*). Afterward, enjoy lunch and some free time to explore the city at your own pace. In the afternoon, delve into Augsburg's Baroque splendor with a guided tour of the Schaezler Palace, home to an exceptional collection of European art. Dinner will be at a local restaurant before returning to your hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodations: Hotel Jakl-Hof

Day 4: Imperial Nürnberg

Check out of your hotel and travel via coach to Nuremberg. Explore Nuremberg's city center on the Bimmelbahn, a comfortable mini train that passes by historic sites such as the Maxbrücke Bridge, St. Lawrence Church, and the Hospital of the Holy Spirit. After lunch in a local restaurant, visit Nuremberg Imperial Castle, a collection of centuries-old, fortified buildings that played a key role in the domestic and imperial affairs of the Holy Roman Empire. Gather at Hausbrauerei Altstadtthof for a cellar tour and a tasting of *Rotbier*, a red beer brewed with barley malt and, coincidentally, one of Professor Pfrehm's favorite beverages. Check in to your hotel and enjoy dinner and the rest of the evening at leisure.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Le Meridien Grand Hotel Nuremberg



Day 5: Medieval Charm in Rothenburg ob der Tauber

Enjoy a day trip to Rothenburg ob der Tauber, a “quintessentially German” walled town in the heart of the Franconia region. Learn from Professor Pfrehm about the thousand years of history packed between its cobblestones on a guided walking tour of the city’s remarkably well-preserved medieval center. After lunch on your own, visit a winery and enjoy the opportunity to taste local Franconian wine. Return to Nuremberg, where dinner will be in a local restaurant.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodations: Le Meridien Grand Hotel Nuremberg

Day 6: From Grape to Glass

Check out and depart for the delightful town of Heidelberg and a tour of the 12th century Eberbach Monastery, the former monastic home of the Cistercian monks who have been cultivating vineyards and producing wine since the 1600’s. Enjoy a tasting of the monastery’s most popular varietals, which may include Riesling, Spätburgunder, and Grauburgunder, and engage in a discussion with Professor Pfrehm about the ways in which religious institutions have historically shaped both regional economies and cultural landscapes. After lunch in a local restaurant, the remainder of the day will be yours to enjoy at leisure in Heidelberg.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Atlantic Hotel Heidelberg

Day 7: Historic Heidelberg

Begin the day with a walking tour of Heidelberg Altstadt, the historic city center known for its narrow streets, quaint market squares, and gothic churches. Stroll across the iconic Old Bridge, where statues of medieval rulers and philosophers stand watch over the river, and take in the timeless charm of this university town. Explore the grand ruins of Heidelberg Castle, the former home of the Palatine Wittelsbach family that offers sweeping views of the Neckar River below. In the evening, raise a toast to your journey through southern Germany during a farewell dinner cruise along the Neckar River.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodations: Atlantic Hotel Heidelberg

Day 8: Departures

Transfer to the airport (Frankfurt Airport – FRA) and depart Germany on individual flights for your journey home.

Included Meals: Breakfast



Accommodations



Hotel Jakl-Hof

Wörthsee

Family-run for generations, Hotel Jakl-Hof is located only 200 meters from Lake Wörth, one of the warmest and cleanest bathing lakes in Bavaria. Bright and comfortable rooms feature knotted-pine furniture, Wi-Fi, and satellite TV, while onsite amenities include a sauna area with large whirlpool, a daily breakfast served in a quaint dining nook, and a cozy bar offering the perfect spot to enjoy a nightcap after a day of travels. **(3 nights)**



Le Meridien Grand Hotel

Nuremberg

Set against the stunning backdrop of Nuremberg's historic city center, this elegant hotel highlights the skillful fusion of classic and modern style. Contemporary rooms are outfitted with luxury bedding, Wi-Fi, flat-screen televisions, and Art Nouveau-style marble bathrooms. The refined Restaurant Brasserie serves regional specialties, Atelier Bar is a chic gathering space for specialty cocktails and other beverages, and an onsite fitness and wellness area offers workout equipment and sauna and steam rooms. **(2 nights)**



Atlantic Hotel Heidelberg

Heidelberg

Located in the heart of medieval Heidelberg, Atlantic Hotel's 310 rooms offer high-speed Wi-Fi, air conditioning, flat-screen televisions, tea and coffeemaking equipment, and a pillow menu to ensure a restful sleep. A state-of-the-art fitness and wellness area features a full suite of fitness equipment, a relaxing sauna, and a stylish steam bath. At the 15 High Restaurant & Bar, sophisticated flavors meet a unique view high above the rooftops of Heidelberg. Atlantic Hotel follows Germany's Passive House standard, a set of guidelines that aims to reduce energy use and carbon emissions. **(2 nights)**



Pricing:

Departure:	Double Occupancy:	Single Occupancy:	Deposit:	
May 28–June 4, 2026	\$7,350	\$8,105	\$500	BOOK NOW
September 24–October 1, 2026	\$6,750	\$7,340	\$500	BOOK NOW

What's Included:

- All accommodations for the duration of the tour
- Meals, as noted in the itinerary
- All sightseeing and visits as noted in each itinerary
- Expertise of The Great Courses Expert, travel director and local guides throughout the tour
- All gratuities for on-tour guides, drivers, hotel and restaurant staff as part of the group program
- All on-tour transportation, unless otherwise noted
- One group airport transfer upon departure
- Quietvox listening devices to facilitate audibility and social distancing on tour
- The assistance of an ATA professional travel team to assist with pre-trip questions, travel arrangements, including flights, extra hotel nights and other services
- Comprehensive pre-departure mailings and materials with information about the destination and what to expect on tour, including a suggested reading list
- Emergency evacuation insurance

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