

Destination
FABULOUS!



Bavarian DRE

Going on a beer hunt? Head to the famous Hofbräuhaus, one of Munich's oldest breweries.



SHARON STEPHENSON UNLOCKS THE SECRET JOYS OF MUNICH

To most Kiwis, Munich means one thing – Oktoberfest. This year, the world's largest beer festival ran from September 19 to October 4, with revellers from all over the world indulging in beer, bangers and brass bands.

Sober, Oktoberfest looks like collective madness. But after a stein, or four, it starts to make perfect sense. I don't even like the taste of beer, but having survived two Oktoberfests, my enduring, if slightly hazy, memory is one of fun.

It's unlikely Crown Prince Ludwig of Bavaria imagined his wedding to Princess Therese would spawn such

a festival. In October 1810, locals were invited to eat, drink and be merry at the couple's wedding reception. Today, some six million people, most of whom have probably never heard of the prince, come to consume the city's finest beers, dance to oompah bands and nurse colossal hangovers.

But when the lederhosen are put away and the noisy hordes stagger home, Munich proves it's more than just a place to get tiddly. The Bavarian capital is clean, safe and, like most things in Germany, super-efficient – trains run on time, everything works as it should and the locals speak English.

And despite losing more than 40% of its central district to American air raids in WWII, Munich is an architectural stunner. It's also surprisingly green and features a winding river and leafy, pedestrian-friendly streets. Unsurprisingly, Munich is often voted Germany's most liveable city.

If, like me, your internal compass is on the blink, don't worry, because it's easy to get your bearings. Maximilian Strasse bisects the city with food markets and residential areas on one side, and the posh bit with the Bavarian State Opera and Munich Residenz, former home of the Bavarian royal family, on the other.

We begin our tour at the city's central square,



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Marienplatz. Dominating proceedings is the beautiful Frauenkirche Church, whose soaring towers can be seen across the city. Built in the

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12th century, the Gothic-style cathedral can hold around 20,000 worshippers, although the day we visited only a handful of tourists are milling about.

Anchoring one side of the square is the Neues Rathaus (New Town Hall), which houses the city government. I'm in awe of the spiky, gargoyle facade,



Above: Get your fill of boutique brews at Oktoberfest, enjoy a hotdog in the sun or pick up a plate-sized pretzel. Right: A monument of King Ludwig I, whose wedding reception became the very first Oktoberfest, in front of the Residenz. Left: The National Theatre Munich is home to the Bavarian State Opera.



but most visitors come to admire the Glockenspiel clock at the top of the tower, with its 32 life-size figures and 43 bells. Try to time your visit for 11am, noon or 5pm when these figures re-enact jousting scenes from the 16th century.

We climb 302 steps to the top of St Peterskirche tower, and are rewarded with views over the city. I stifle a laugh at the group of British lads behind us who aren't coping with the climb – they spent the night before at Oktoberfest and are suffering the consequences.

Munich is well known for its cutting-edge design, so if you

visit only one museum, make it the modern art museum. Pinakothek der Moderne has an impressive collection of modern design – furniture, TVs and, aptly for the city that's the home of BMW, cars and motorbikes.

But if you can't resist the call of the stein and you're not in town for Oktoberfest, drop into Munich's most famous watering hole, the Hofbräuhaus. Opened in 1830, the bar seats around 2300 people and serves 17,600 pints of beer a day.

Whether you're in Munich for Oktoberfest, or at any time of the year, you can be sure there's a great party in store.

Insider's guide to... Munich

BEST DRINK: You can't visit this city and not try the local tipple. They've been brewing beer since the 13th century.

LOCAL FLAVOUR: One thing residents are big on is *gemütlichkeit*. Don't try to pronounce it, but it means cosiness, wellbeing and having a good time. After a stein of local beer, you'll understand what it means.

NOT TO BE MISSED: Munich is a haven for meat lovers. Expect lots of bratwurst, roast pork, steak and offal. Pretzels and dumplings are also great for soaking up the beer.