

# The Middle Ages as a Critical Selling Point for Tourism and Leisure Activities Today: A Deep and Meaningful Cultural Experience



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## Abstract

This study, written by a scholar of the Middle Ages, highlights key aspects of medieval history, religion, architecture, the arts, literature, and knighthood making the visit of any of the German-speaking lands and other countries worthwhile not only for the history buff but also for any tourist interested in charming, attractive, historically important sites in medieval Europe. Although most tourists might think at first, or exclusively, of the famous castle Neuschwanstein near Kempten in the Swabian Alps and close to the Austrian border, completed only as late as in 1882, this building represents nothing but a Romanticized version of a medieval castle, characterized by a historicized mixing of styles that might repel any historical purist. Instead, this article presents a broad overview of some of the major highlights of medieval sites across Germany and in neighboring countries and identifies their deep values both architecturally and in military terms, which should motivate the curious and adventure-seeking tourists to track them down. The intention is to identify a variety of ways to create meaningful, attractive, and memorable travel packages with a focus on the Middle Ages, and this often off the beaten paths, also considering the history of religion, of art, craftsmanship, gender, and environment.

**Keywords:** Medieval sites in Germany; Castles; Cathedrals; Churches; Saints; Pilgrimage sites; Knighthood; Tourist attractionindex Tucker; TLI: Lewis Index; IFI: Incremental Fit Index

## Introduction

Human society is constantly changing in many different respects, and so also in terms of architecture, urban planning, and environmental organization. Our villages, towns, and cities, at least in the West, incessantly transform, meaning that we lose old buildings and spaces, create postmodern ones, gentrify, expand, add new infrastructure, and thus profoundly modify our urban and other social contexts. But those transformations are also observable in the environment, whether in cultivated lands and forests, or in unchartered territories. In many ways, this has meant in countless cases that tourists discover that often there is no longer any reason to travel to previously fascinating and famous sites because the differences between the architecture back home and that in foreign countries are shrinking. A citizen of New York does not need to travel to Frankfurt am Main or to Hamburg to visit ever more new skyscrapers, as intriguing some of the latest buildings might be (the case of London might be a valuable exception). Of course, someone intrigued by modern and post-modern architecture, might do just that for comparison's

sake, but most travelers today are on the lookout for alternative perspectives, culturally significant sites, and a certain degree of intrigue associated with old times, whatever that might entail.

Of course, there are, after all, good reasons to visit attractive and innovative buildings reflecting our post-modern age, but much of the charm, intrigue, and attractiveness tends to get lost in that global process because postmodern architecture is more often than not rather monotonous, sterile, unimaginative, and meets primarily principles of functionality and efficiency, following the theoretical and practical models developed by the school of Bauhaus in Dresden, Germany. What is the real difference between, say, modern-day Tokyo and Dubai, between the modern quarters in London and those in Los Angeles?

## Purpose

This paper was written by a medievalist who teaches at the university but who has also much personal experience in organizing student and other travels through study abroad.

Having originated from Germany, I am deeply familiar with that country and its history, and I think that I can offer significant perspectives regarding the relevance of the Middle Ages at large for global tourism of organized groups and individuals. The critical questions to be asked pertain to the following issues: Why would it be so important for anyone in the tourism industry to understand something about that past age? What makes the medieval world anywhere in Europe or in other parts across the globe so relevant, intriguing, and even meaningful for us today? And to what extent does it pay off to leave the major tourist sites aside and search for examples of more authentic cultural representation in their natural and historical context?

Although I have a vested interest in promoting anything medieval, there are many specific and objective reasons to justify the focus on that historical period especially for the modern traveler. This paper does not serve as a travel guide, as an outline of where to find the most important medieval castles, churches, cities, or monasteries in a German-speaking country, or as a blueprint for future travel agents. Instead, selecting unique examples, the purpose is to identify historical and cultural categories that will allow anyone planning a trip for him/herself or for a group of people to put together a reasonable and attractive travel package including a meaningful mix of major sites that provide a good insight into medieval history and convey a sensitive concept of alterity pertaining to the target country which hence makes the travel itself worthwhile. Every example studied here can be easily expanded or adapted, if the fundamental concept becomes evident. I do not intend to go into many details as to the foundation and building of a castle, for instance, the dynasty behind it, the cost factors, or architectural elements. Similarly, considering a cathedral, such as in Mainz west of Frankfurt or in Münster near the Dutch border; I will only highlight essential features and embed the building within a broader cultural context easily comprehensible by a professional travel agent or an individual traveler.

### History of Course

While most European or Asian travelers to the United States prefer to visit New York and Los Angeles because of the trend-setting modern architecture there, and then aim for the major national parks in the west (Grand Canyon, Yosemite, etc.), American or Indian tourists going to Europe tend to frequent historical sites because they have hardly any similar ones with such a historical pedigree back home (exception: the Cloister north of New York, or the Tudor House in Richmond, VA, Agecroft Hall). To be fair, however, as we all know, a trip to Japan or China, to South Korea or Indonesia without paying attention to their ancient or medieval temples or castles would be mostly meaningless and worthless, if not even shameful. A visit of China without a stop at the Great Wall or the Imperial Palace in Beijing would be a horribly missed opportunity. Anyone traveling to Peru who would limit him/herself to Lima, for instance, ignoring the famous mountain city

of Machu Picchu, for instance, would have foolishly deprived him/herself of a deep appreciation of the country's history and culture.

The same applies to Europe as a continent where the most attractive sites are those with much history behind them. This history extends, of course, far beyond the Middle Ages, both back to antiquity and forward to the Renaissance and Baroque. Rome, for instance, would be 'nothing' without the ancient Colosseum, but the city is riddled with medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque churches. Those who visit southern France cannot afford to miss the famous Roman aqueduct, Pont-du-Gare, and then should turn to Aix-en-Provence, Nîmes, Oranges, or Montpellier and Perpignan strongly determined by their ancient ruins and medieval buildings, such as the Papal Palace in Avignon.

England is a very attractive goal for countless tourists, but those mostly do not limit themselves to the banking or insurance quarters in the city of London. Instead, they aim for the Tower, Buckingham Palace, Westminster, and many other historical sites. And then, both Stonehenge and Bath beckon from the distance, the first dating from the Stone Age and the latter from the time of the Roman conquest and colonization.

### The Popularity of the Middle Ages both in Europe and Elsewhere

There are countless reasons why the Middle Ages are so attractive for modern travelers, and many incentive tours aim for medieval castles, such as in Gruyère, Switzerland, or Friesach, Carinthia, Austria, where the historical framework is often intriguingly associated with historicizing dinners, enactment of tournaments, and imitating of courtly life. People have always enjoyed putting on masks and to play historical roles, such as kings, queens, knights, bishops, or abbesses, etc. All over the world, there are stores that offer medieval paraphernalia, such as a knight's outfit and weapons. Medieval (torture) museums are highly popular for those who are looking for gruesome excitement, whether the objects displayed there are authentic or not. And medieval fairs and festivals, movies and novels based on the Middle Ages are hot sellers the further we move away from that period [1] most recently, see the contributions to Brandi, Loic, and [2] there is a vast amount of relevant research on the popularity of the Middle Ages today in literature, the visual arts, music, gaming, etc.). By the same token, any region, city, or location that can pride itself on looking back to its medieval past as documented by unique buildings and other structures, whether ancient or medieval, can count on tourists to come for a visit.

A striking example would be the US state of Arizona where there are many natural wonders, such as the Grand Canyon or picturesque Sedona, the Walnut Canyon, the Meteorite Crater or the Chiricahuas. Beyond those sites, however, the true highlights quickly prove to be medieval ruins such as Wupatki, Montezuma's Castle, Tuzigoot, and then, from the more recent past, the towns of Jerome, Wickenburg, or Bisbee. The capital Phoenix or the

modern city of Tucson are certainly points of attraction because of their museums but not really because of their history.

Cairo in Egypt is so famous among visitors from the entire world not because of the modern or twentieth-century architecture, which is certainly not particularly appealing, but because of the pyramids of Giza at the outskirts of the city and the medieval mosques. Barcelona in Spain boasts of the curious church "La Sagrada Familia" originally erected, based on designs by Francisco de Paula del Villar, by the Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí since 1883 and still not finished today. Its essential design closely follows the model of a Gothic cathedral, which many innocent visitors find most intriguing, whereas others with a more learned background lament the irresistible pull to expand the structure evermore which ultimately distorts the true concept of a Gothic church.

The interesting medieval buildings in Barcelona, however, though much less frequented, are the Monastery of Sant Pau del Camp, the royal Monastery of Pedralbes quite a long distance outside of the city limits, and the famous Museum Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, then the cathedral, and the Santa Maria del Mar church. Truly worth visiting also proves to be El Call, the medieval Jewish ghetto, which today is bustling with businesses, markets, stores, museums, etc., with hardly anyone remembering the medieval history of the original inhabitants - the same is often the case in other medieval cities across Europe, such as Girona, Spain, or Antwerp, Belgium.

Mutatis mutandis, we can make very similar observations all over the world. The common touristic hypes easily turn out to be nothing else but that, simply a fascination with imitations, whereas the truly precious and appealing sites or buildings are those that are hidden behind the modern traffic and urban architecture. One of the major problems might well be that too many people have a 'bucket list' and want to brag about their exotic trips without having any real understanding and appreciation of the local cultures and historical backgrounds. Tourist guides might know about alternative sites, as I am discussing them below, but since they normally want to appeal to the average traveler with little educational foundation, they tend to favor the fake copies of medieval structures since those are more easily recognizable from movie versions or television shows and simply meet the general expectations of what the past is supposed to look like in an idealized fashion.

Basically, what happens in this process is simply a transfer from the replicas of medieval castles in Disney World, for instance, to the 'actual' sites in Europe, and both sides then prove to be nothing but illusions and bad misrepresentation serving only the desire to play games or to assume historical roles. Of course, in the late nineteenth century, many 'fakes' medieval buildings were erected because of the same interests and motifs in a public show, as the cases of castle Neuschwanstein, castle Hohenzollern north of Lake Constance, or castle Cochem on the Moselle indicate. Similarly, the entire Gothic quarter in Barcelona as we have it

today, was the result of urban interests to recreate the Middle Ages in the late nineteenth century.

In central Europe – here I will focus primarily on Germany, Austria, and Switzerland – the Middle Ages left an indelible imprint, if we think of monasteries, churches, cathedrals, castles, city halls, city walls, chapels, private residences, and other constructions.

Of course, the remains from later periods, such as the Baroque, cannot and should not be ignored either, especially if we think of major palaces and cathedrals, such as in Vienna or Würzburg, Graz and Karlsruhe, Dresden and Berlin, Fulda and Potsdam, Hameln and Bremen, each period being reflected in its own architectural styles or building strategies. In fact, the entire history of architecture in Europe until the very present constitutes a most fascinating phenomenon, and anyone in the travel business would do well to gain a solid understanding of the various periods and an extensive knowledge of where the major sites are located to direct travelers according to their cultural-historical interests.

### People in the Medieval World

The European Middle Ages were determined by many different groups, peoples, powers, languages, and cultures, though there are only relatively few Jewish synagogues left from that time (such as in Erfurt, Thuringia, Germany, or in Worms on the Rhine, south of Frankfurt), or Muslim baths (such as in Girona, Catalonia, Spain). Most of the world north of the Alps was basically controlled by the Catholic Church, although pagan cultures in Norway or Ireland maintained some presence in the background. So, anyone searching for medieval culture or architecture would have to realize that there was a homogenous world because Jews lived mostly in small ghettos right next to the medieval cathedrals and were often pretty much repressed or persecuted. Once a pogrom had happened, such as in Nuremberg in 1349, the ghetto was razed making room for a market square and the erection of a church, in this case the delightful St. Mary's church (Frauenkirche).

As dark and depressing the history of the medieval Jewry certainly was, we must confront it, and hence also appreciate the Jews' desperate struggles to survive in a highly hostile, Christian environment. Many times, the few remaining traces of their culture consist of nothing but street names or names of city quarters near the cathedral, such as in Heidelberg, Venice (Italy), and Breslau (Poland).

In particular, the example of Regensburg in southern Bavaria deserves to be mentioned here for numerous reasons. The Jewish population was expelled not until 1519, when the synagogue was also destroyed. Today, however, tourists can visit the underground parts of that building, the basic ground floor having been outlined above. Moreover, Christian citizens raided the Jewish cemetery and used many of the valuable tombstones for their own buildings. Scattered throughout the city, we can still identify them in the walls or ceilings because the side with the Hebrew scripture was placed facing the viewer below. In Regensburg, to add an

additional point, we also find a small sculpture depicting the so-called "Judensau" (the Jewish pig), placed on the south side of the cathedral, where Jews are shown sucking the pig's teats - a most insulting iconography targeting the Jewish population. There are numerous other sculptures of that type, especially in Wittenberg, Saxony-Anhalt, which are preserved until today not because there might be an intent to continue with this egregious antisemitism, but, as various courts have decided in repeated law cases, because they are historical monuments and need to be kept on site as a reminder of the most ugly face of this hatred of Jews in the past.

Muslim monuments or artwork are basically only preserved in Spain, especially in Córdoba and Granada, Andalusia, because Islamic rulers held those parts of the Iberian Peninsula until 1492 when the Spanish Reconquista achieved its final victory, the conquest of Granada. Southern Italy and Spain also offer valuable examples of Islamic culture, whereas Eastern Europe was mostly influenced by the Greek-Orthodox Church. All this hence leaves us with a primarily (Catholic) Christian culture in the rest of Europe, first determined by the Romanesque style (such as St. Michael's in Hildesheim ("Michaeliskirche"), St. Michael's in Fulda, or St. Jacob in Regensburg, then by the Gothic style. The Protestant Reformation was going to change all that since 1517 and following, with the rise of a whole new Christian Church, so our quest for Medieval Europe will be limited by this framework.

We need to consider the following major types of medieval buildings that deserve to be studied and visited by any tourist who is interested in the history of that continent.

- a) Cathedrals: churches, chapels, monasteries, and other religious constructions.
- b) Castles in their many manifestations and functions.
- c) City halls, city buildings, and city walls. Of course, anyone more dedicated to the study of that past period also ought to consider museums and archives for the relevant visual objects (paintings, altarpieces, sculptures, stained glass windows, music instruments, etc.) and beyond that, s/he should consider medieval and early modern literature, chronicles, religious texts, and historical documents.

However, for the standard tourist, buildings and paintings always prove to be the most accessible and impressive objects, wherever we might turn.

### Churches, Cathedrals and Monasteries

As to significant church buildings, we would, of course, first think of the massive and awe-inspiring French cathedrals erected in the Gothic style, whether in Paris, Amiens, Chartres, Orléans, Toulouse, or Bordeaux. Gothic came to Germany in the early thirteenth century when the first Gothic church was built in the small town of Marburg north of Frankfurt in honor of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary or Thuringia. For the first time in the history of Germany, the entire church, from the ground to the very top of the spires, was built in dark red and brownish sandstone,

characterized by the elegant Gothic arches, windows, the west façade, pillars, and the apsis. Although the interior elegance is somewhat subdued typical of the early period of this style, the church still shows the medieval rood screen separating the space for the laity from the choir, which is a rarity today, especially since the Catholic Counter-Reformation in the middle of the sixteenth century had led to the removal of most of those screens throughout the world. Ironically, they continue to be present in many Lutheran or Anglican churches until today because the focus there tends to be the lay community in the first place, which made the choir less important.

The church in Marburg also contains the amazing shrine of famous Saint Elizabeth, the founder of one of the first hospitals in medieval Europe at that location. The visitor thus can study both a major Gothic church and much of medieval belief in sainthood and miracles. Marburg itself quickly turns out to be an ideal location for any tourist because of numerous other factors. Not only was Marburg the first Protestant university in the world (founded in 1527), but it is also topped by a highly impressive Renaissance castle (with a medieval foundation) that served the Landgraves of Hesse.

It functions today as a museum and offers classrooms for the university. Below the castle, there is the Protestant parish church, also built in the Gothic style (erected since 1222 for about one hundred years). In short, although Marburg underwent countless transformations throughout its history, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were of greatest importance and grant this small university town its unique character. But from the point of view of a foreign tourist, Marburg often tends to be ignored because it is not part of the standard repertoire of most organized tours, unless the focal point might be religious history. However, those tourists with religious interests visiting Germany trace major sites reflecting the Protestant Reformation, such as Worms, Wittenberg, Eisenach, or Eisleben.

After all, not only did Saint Elizabeth live here during the last few years until her death in 1231, after which miracles were reported having occurred at her shrine. Instead, during the Protestant Reformation, Dr. Martin Luther and the Zürich minister Ulrich Zwingli met there to discuss their religious differences in 1529 (Marburg Colloquy), particularly pertaining to their interpretation of the host during the Eucharist. They could not reach a compromise, so the Protestant Reformation split at this very point, leading to the Lutheran and the Reformed Church.

Marburg also deserves further attention because the city decided in 1973 to move all motor traffic out of the center and to transform it into a pedestrian zone, which has led to a tremendous transformation of the streets around the market square and in the vicinity to a most picturesque quarter with impressive half-timbered houses from various centuries, often documenting the history of the university. The city hall also stands out as an impressive Renaissance building, and there are many other opportunities to track the Middle Ages and the early modern age

in that somewhat sleepy town just one hour north of bustling Frankfurt am Main.

This then leads to a global observation of greater significance regarding the touristic value of smaller towns all over the German-speaking countries where modernity has not yet fully moved in and where for that reason many medieval buildings remain standing, and this for many good reasons (history, economics, aesthetics). There are countless examples in all directions, including in Austria and Switzerland. The true beauty and mystique of the past can still be recognized in those locations if the traveler is intrepid enough to deviate from the common route. Let us pick a Swiss case. Tourists might spend most of their time in Lucerne or Zürich, but there are many important and highly attractive sites that can only be found off the beaten path, such as in Fribourg or St. Gallen, in Chur and the truly fascinating village of Waldenburg just west of it with the fantastic frescoes in the local village.

### Hidden Treasures

Traveling from Milan in the Lombardy, northern Italy, toward the Alps one should aim for the Italian town of Como and the Swiss town of Lugano, both beautifully situated at Alpine lakes. On the way further north of them, there is the amazing town of Bellinzona in the Canton Ticino, fortified by three castles and a city wall extending almost throughout the entire valley. It is possible to drive up the mountain slope to visit the two castles high up, and then down again to the city center with its massive castle as the main point. From there, on the way northwest, the medievalist can aim for the tiny town of Giornico where, between the highway and the railway, is nestled the ancient Romanesque church of San Nicola, most rustic, simple, and incredibly powerful in its tranquility and beauty, with astounding Romanesque heads in stone, arches, and the altar, not to speak of the interior frescoes that talk their own language for the illiterate laity in the early Middle Ages. Even most medieval art historians might not be familiar with this truly charming parish church although it represents its own early medieval culture in a pure, authentic, and naive form.

Throughout Europe, there are similar architectural treasures that only wait to be rediscovered, but they tend to be small, unknown, disregarded, plain, yet powerful in their simplicity and aesthetic and religious appeal. The entire area is studded with small chapels from the Middle Ages, so-called oratorios, but it is difficult to reach them without a small car. Nevertheless, they prove to be the truly valuable medieval sites that represent Christian spirituality as practiced by the rural population in its purest form. Of course, we also find massive constructions throughout the continent, such as the many cathedrals or major castles, such as in Carcassonne, southern France, or Burghausen in southeastern Bavaria.

The same applies to monasteries across medieval Europe, from Ireland to Poland, from Estonia to Sicily. As a medievalist, I

find those to be the most appealing for anyone on a quest for the authentic past and willing to go on a kind of pilgrimage to discover those remote destinies. Until today, there are many Benedictines, Cistercian, Franciscan, Dominican, Carmelite, or Augustinian monasteries, some still operating, some having been transformed into social spaces.

Of course, there are thousands of modern-day pilgrims who walk the Camino de Compostela in northwestern Spain, by now a highly popular tourist attraction [3]. But we do not need to travel that far and follow this touristic trend, when we can easily find some of the most appealing medieval treasures right next to major traffic arteries but hidden from the public view. Interestingly, the same kind of discoveries can be made also in bigger tourist centers such as Lugano, to stay in the same area. While many tourists enjoy the lake, the pleasant downtown area, or the cathedral up on the hill next to the train station, the attentive observer will discover, in the small church of Santa Maria degli Angioli along the lakeside promenade, the late medieval masterpiece, the "Passion and Crucifixion," by the Italian painter Bernardino Luini (1480-1532), a disciple of Leonardo da Vinci. Without going into details here, it suffices to recognize here how much true medieval or early modern artworks can be found in many unexpected locations. In short, anyone willing to step away briefly from the main routes will be easily rewarded with stunning artworks from the pre-modern era, astounding architecture, and brilliant interior designs that all contradict the popular notion of the dark ages, whatever that ignorant term might imply.

Turning to castles, the same observation can be made regarding the most beautiful and attractive castle in Germany, Burg Eltz, hidden in a valley of the river Elzbach not too far away from the Moselle, in the equidistance between Cochem to the west and Koblenz on the east on the Rhine. This castle, having been inhabited continuously for ca. 900 years, has never suffered from a siege and has been preserved in its present form and shape since ca. 1500. It is so iconic that its image was used on the bills for 500 Deutschmarks. While the foundations are from the early Middle Ages, the upper living quarters date from the sixteenth century and present rather pleasant spaces used by three noble families until today.

Of course, most castles from the Middle Ages have not survived hundreds of years of warfare, changes in military strategies, innovations of the social and economic structures, and the cultural reorientations toward urban life. For almost a millennium, however, castles - not palaces - have served many different purposes and bellicose intentions. The vast number of castles along the Rhine, for instance, can be explained with the intense economic trade on the river, and each nobleman along the stretch from, say Cologne down to Basel wanted to take his toll and thus to profit from his advantageous location next to this central route for merchandise from the south in Switzerland to the Channel and hence to England.

The older a castle, the more destruction it had to suffer throughout time in many cases. But in other cases, the rudimentary defense structures were expanded in the course of time, though then only to face yet another round of sieges and destruction. With the rise of the firearm i.e., the canon, above all, the time of the medieval knight was basically over, and only the major lords survived the paradigm shift to the Renaissance and then Baroque. Eventually, many major seats of a mighty lord transformed from being a castle (a purely military construction) into a palace, i.e., the aristocratic family's residence and the dynasty's representative seat. Since most castles were extensive buildings, we can observe until today clearly the various stages of building, which changed from period to period.

While both sides of the Rhine were studded with castles as mentioned above, other trading routes, such as between Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig, mostly followed the mountain tops because the valleys tended to be too muddy and difficult to travel through. Hence, we find numerous castle ruins along the way, such as Herzberg, Hauneck, Landeck, or Wasserburg. In the town of Schlitz (there is a direct connection with the beer brewing company in the USA), three noble families maintained their castles that still can be visited today. Of course, Germany experienced many wars, such as the Peasant War from 1525 or the Thirty Years War (1616-1648), and later the Napoleonic wars, to mention just a few, and medieval castles were then increasingly blown to smithereens. The same applies, most dramatically, to the church of the Benedictine monastery in Bad Hersfeld in northern Hesse, which is only a massive ruin today, which the city uses for open-air theater shows and musicals.

Nevertheless, the number of surviving castles is stunning, and every traveler can easily determine his/her own selection of sites to be visited, whether in eastern, southern, western, or northern Germany, and then of course in the neighboring countries. However, it is often not easy to find those castles because for security reasons they were commonly built on mountain tops or even in the middle of a lake, as was often the case in northern Germany. In the Spessart, a forested region between Frankfurt and Würzburg, for instance, the castle Mespelbrunn presents itself as a fantastic opportunity to explore this unique architecture not far away from the economic, financial, and industrial center of Germany.

### A Women's Convent: Wienhausen

Many times, medieval women's monasteries have survived until today because patriarchal society since the early modern age did not pay much attention to them. One of the most impressive, but mostly ignored example proves to be the Cistercian convent of Wienhausen near Celle in the vicinity of Brunswick, Wolfsburg, or a little further away, Hanover. Art historians have characterized the interior frescoes as comparable in quality to Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel [4,5]. Wolfsburg might be familiar to some

readers because it is the location of the Volkswagen Corporation. Brunswick enjoys a considerable reputation because of its medieval center with a castle and a church. Celle also deserves mention because its old downtown was preserved during the Second World War and can pride itself with its fantastic assembly of half-timbered houses - another impressive example would be, not far away, the towns of Wolfenbüttel, famous especially for its world-class Herzog-August Library, and Hildesheim. Wienhausen, though being nothing but a small village in the countryside, holds this stunning monastery. Amazingly, during the 1530s, the nuns forced to open their enclosure and to accept the Protestant faith, in return were allowed to maintain their institution, and it is still active until today, being, as an oxymoron, a Protestant monastery [6].

This institution offers some of the most beautiful interior frescoes north of the Alps, especially in the nuns' choir where every speck of the walls covered by images reflecting the biblical account and other religious motifs. Art historians have consistently praised it as one of the most stunning artworks in the late Middle Ages. Moreover, the nuns created a whole series of large-scale tapestries, such as the Tristan tapestry and the Heilsspiegelteppich (Mirror of Salvation Tapestry). The nuns in neighboring monasteries, such as in Lüne, were also active in creating major tapestries, but those served as floor covers, whereas in Wienhausen, they were all attached to the walls and can now be viewed daily in the recently renovated cloister museum. In nearby Ebstorf, also a Cistercian monastery, the nuns held one of the most famous world maps, a mappamundi, which proves to be highly detailed and amazingly informed about even very distant locations in the world (apart from the Americas, of course). Unfortunately, this map was destroyed during the Allied bombing in 1943, but based on photos and images, it could be recreated and is now easily accessible. Once the traveler has discovered those small architectural and artistic treasures, many other monastic sites beckon from all over medieval Europe.

Another major recommendation for that area would be the small town of Lüneburg also in northern Germany with its picturesque and crooked old street, half-timbered houses, the brick-stone church, and the Saltworks. Since Lüneburg belonged to the vast network of the Hanseatic League, one could easily trace the connections in that economic alliance, beginning with Hamburg, Lübeck, and Bremen, and from there extending to many other medieval towns in northern and northwest Germany, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, Russia, and even England to the West. To round off our discussion, let us briefly turn to Lübeck which will allow us to discriminate further between publicly promoted and commercially operated tourist sites and true treasure troves anyone interested in historical sites should visit.

Lübeck is a city that cannot be discussed in few lines because it is a location that requires several days to explore it fully. There is the famous city gate, the Holstentor, then the cathedral, various

major Gothic churches, the Renaissance city hall, numerous medieval quarters, remainders of the city wall, and then two prominent sites one would have to consider. First, since Lübeck was one of the founding cities of the Hanseatic League, there is the specialized museum retelling that history. It is highly attractive, particularly for families because of the many hands-on exhibit pieces. But in many respects, despite the very modern design and great care given to the development of this museum, it lacks the authenticity and historicity one might expect. Anyone who wants to learn more about that late medieval economic and political alliance, in many ways a precursor to the modern European Union, will profit extensively from this museum [7].

By contrast, as a medievalist, with an eye for the arts, I would rather recommend searching for the St. Anne's Museum, located in the former St. Anne's Priory founded in 1502. The museum is thus both an impressive site of late medieval Gothic architecture and an exhibit site for some of the best fifteenth-century art from northern Germany, such as the outstanding Passion altar piece of the Family Greve Rade created by Hans Memling in 1491 (his artworks can also be found in Bruges, Belgium, and Gdansk, Poland). The quality of the exhibited sculptures, stained glass windows, oil paintings, liturgical objects, and other works is formidable and will keep the visitor occupied for a long time.

For a unique perspective, one can easily go to some of the main churches in the city and use the elevator to reach the top of some of the towers for an aerial view. Strolling through the old downtown, ambulating along the river Trave, enjoying some of the culinary delights of the city (Lebkuchen, a sort of gingerbread), or taking the train up to the harbor town Travemünde ca. 30 minutes north for a visit of the Baltic Sea, all combined make the visit of Lübeck to an unforgettable experience. A short train ride east to the town of Wismar (formerly East Germany) also proves to be highly rewarding, especially because this medieval harbor city is not yet overrun by tourists.

A similarly striking example for a small town with incredible charm and much historical significance would be Bamberg in modern-day Franconia, northern Bavaria, with its impressive Renaissance city hall perched on a bridge crossing the Regnitz river, the world-famous Romanesque cathedral, and a medieval and early modern downtown. The St. Michael's monastery with its delightful ceiling frescoes depicting the many different plants and herbs in the monastic garden beckons from the hilltop overlooking the town. Bamberg also stands out for its culinary delights, including the unique smoked beer.

### Conclusion

Obviously, my attention here has regularly switched from one part of Germany (including Austria and Switzerland) to another. This paper has not outlined a systematic travel itinerary, but instead it has highlighted key points that would provide a keen visitor with great experiences. The focus has rested on the small

towns, of which there are countless examples, whether we think of Paderborn in the northwest of Germany or of Nördlingen southwest of Nuremberg, of Villach in southern Austria, or of Yvoire in southern Switzerland east of Geneva. Then the famous castle Chillon beckons from nearby on the northeastern coast of the Lake Geneva. I highlighted only a few major religious sites, but there are many other monasteries, churches, cathedrals, both from the Middle Ages and the following centuries. In fact, there will never be any shortage of unique medieval sites in the German-speaking countries. I have only barely touched on towns, castles, churches, monasteries, or cathedrals in the formerly Eastern German states, such as in the city of Görlitz right on the border to Poland, and anyone who wants to seek out additional sites not overrun by tourism and still pretty much preserved in the original form and shape will not have to look for a long time.

There are, of course, also many wonderful nature parks, forests, hiking paths, beaches, lakes, rivers, and creeks. Certainly, the German-speaking lands are highly industrialized and very modern in many ways. However, all three countries, like their neighbors, continue to command a marvelous display of medieval sites, both large and small. Of course, Heidelberg and Rothenburg ob der Tauber appeal to the common tourists from all over the world because of their urban charm (see also Colmar near Strasbourg, Freiburg im Breisgau just north of the border to Switzerland, Habsburg near Aargau or Murten, both in Switzerland, Landshut near Munich, Erfurt in Thuringia, Greifswald in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern on the Baltic Sea, among many others). Other cities with fabulous medieval sites not mentioned so far are Ulm (with the tallest church spire in the world, which can be climbed), Paderborn, Osnabrück, Göttingen, Magdeburg, and Stralsund. Medieval sites can be discovered everywhere.

The critical approach for a full exploration of medieval Europe and the German-speaking lands would certainly be to consider its history and to trace it through the surviving architecture, artworks, city walls, or Church buildings. Following a bucket list would serve only for bragging rights but would not take the conscious and curious, open-minded traveler to the true treasures of the Middle Ages. In short, despite the massive destruction during World War Two, the pre-modern period is still much present today, even if only rebuilt, such as in Hildesheim, and offers fascinating insights into older building methods, aesthetic principles, religious ideals, social values, ethics and morality.

The eclectic selection of cities, churches, cathedrals, and castles might confound readers at first sight. But the purpose here was not to project a pragmatic travel itinerary. Instead, this paper has highlighted what opportunities there exist to discovery the Middle Ages in many parts of the German-speaking lands and in neighboring countries. Many of the true pearls exist in distant locations away from the main traffic. But anyone who is willing to study that older period with better insight and understanding will certainly enjoy the wide gamut of options outlined here. One can

easily zigzag from here to many other locations.

I could have concluded with long lists of cities and towns with major medieval remnants, but this could become endless. Instead, I only need to emphasize finally that in the German-speaking countries there are countless possibilities to discover medieval buildings such as city halls, city walls, parish churches, chapels, cathedrals, urban dwellings (often, the medieval cellars have remained intact), and then also castles and monasteries. Whoever is willing to look beyond the classical bucket list and leaves aside the traditionally major sites such as Cologne, Heidelberg, Nuremberg, and Munich will be easily rewarded and can dive deeply into the past which continues to be well preserved in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Many times, we can discover an ensemble of many different styles in one building, if we consider major cathedrals, which were often founded on ancient Roman structures, were then erected in the Romanesque style, subsequently added Gothic features, which finally gave way to Renaissance and then Baroque elements. The more the traveler turns to the countryside and visits smaller locations where the resources had been limited and where hence major reconstructions had not been possible, the more one can discover buildings even from the early Middle Ages (seventh to the eleventh century). In the case of many cities along the Rhine, for instance, there are countless Roman ruins, upon which medieval churches and entire cities were erected.

Of course, visiting the famous and highly picturesque town of Rothenburg ob. der Tauber southwest of Nuremberg makes it particularly easy to enter the medieval world since so much of the original buildings have survived until today, including the mostly rebuilt city wall and the most famous Tilman Riemenschneider Holy Blood Altar in St. Jacob. But the list of other towns with fantastic medieval sites, such as near-by Nördlingen, Schwäbisch

Gmünd, Schwäbisch Hall, and from there down to Constance, Schaffhausen, or most charming Merseburg etc., is simply too long to continue here. Altogether, the Middle Ages are very much alive and present in the German-speaking lands until today. Massive efforts to restore those medieval buildings and to protect the surviving artworks and manuscripts for many decades by now have guaranteed that any tourist can encounter a fascinating, meaningful, and intriguing world from the past. The superior infrastructure in those three countries makes it very easy for any visitor to discover all those hidden treasures; the Middle Ages are simply there to be explored by anyone today.

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