

# North Rhine-Westphalia



With a population greater than that of Austria and Switzerland combined, North Rhine-Westphalia feels almost like a country unto itself. Cobbled together in 1946 by the Allies from two Prussian provinces and a little fiefdom called Lippe-Detmold, it harbours within its boundaries flat, windswept expanses and forested hills high enough to hold onto snow during winter. Villages sweetly lost in time contrast with frenzied metropolises habitually on fast-forward. There are places whose looks have remained largely unchanged since the Middle Ages and others fashioned completely from scratch in the wake of WWII. And through it all carves the muscular Rhine, fed by tributaries such as the Ruhr that gave an entire region its name.

The industrial age has shaped North Rhine-Westphalia more than any other German region. For about a hundred years, coal and steel fuelled the growth of Germany into one of Europe's most powerful nations. But starting in the mid-1960s, lower demand forced the region to focus its energies elsewhere. And so it did, banking instead on hi-tech, media, retail and culture.

Must-sees include Cologne with its lofty Dom (cathedral), Bonn with its Beethoven legacy and fabulous museums, the Unesco-listed baroque palaces in Brühl, and Charlemagne's imperial capital of Aachen. The lively Ruhrgebiet and placid Lower Rhine are best for off-beat experiences. There are historical cities like Münster, where the treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War was signed, and elegant ones like Düsseldorf, the state capital. Paderborn and Soest are treasured for their churches and the Sauerland is the place to get your nature fix.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Spiritual Delight** Feel like an ant when looking up at the majestic loftiness of Cologne's Dom (cathedral; p551)
- **Party Town** Toast your health with a glass or 10 of refreshing *Altbier* (old beer) in a characterful and character-filled Altstadt beer hall (p546) in Düsseldorf
- **Palace Dreams** Learn about life at court on a tour of Schloss Augustusburg (p561) in Brühl
- **Off-Beat Adventure** Free-climb and dive in a former iron works in Duisburg, now the Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord (p579)
- **Quirk Factor** Visit a Rapunzel-style palace and a nuclear power plant turned theme park in Kalkar (p549)
- **Culture Fix** Visit Bonn (p561) to pay your respects to Beethoven and see how Germany's old capital has reinvented itself



■ POPULATION: 10.7 MILLION

■ AREA: 34,080 SQ KM



## Getting Around

For getting around North Rhine-Westphalia by public transport several ticket deals are available. The **SchönerTagTicket** is valid for one day of travel anywhere within the state on local and regional public transport from 9am to 3am the following day (midnight to 3am the next day on weekends). You can only use RE, IRE, RB and S-Bahn trains as well as buses, U-Bahn and trams. The ticket costs €21 for single travellers and €27 for groups of up to five people (or one or both parents or grandparents plus all their children or grandchildren up to 14 years). There's also the **SchöneFahrtTicket** (€13.20), which is good for any one-way trip within the state. Tickets are available at train station ticket offices and from vending machines.

## THE RHINELAND

### DÜSSELDORF

☎ 0211 / pop 572,000

Düsseldorf, the state capital, dazzles with boundary-pushing architecture, zinging nightlife and an art scene to rival many larger cities. It's a posh and modern city that seems all business at first glance: banking, advertising, fashion and telecommunications are among the fields that have made Düsseldorf one of Germany's wealthiest cities. Yet all it takes is a few hours of bar-hopping around the Altstadt, the historical quarter along the Rhine, to realise that locals have no problem letting their hair down once those Armani ties come off.

The Altstadt may still be the 'longest bar in the world' but it's increasingly getting competition from the Medienhafen, a redeveloped harbour area about 1km further south. Not only is this a feast of international avant-garde architecture by the genre's boldest and brightest (Frank Gehry among them), the area is also evolving into a chic and sleek place to hang out after dark.

If you're more into high-brow culture, you'll likely more than get your fill at the many top-notch art museums and the renowned opera house, theatre and orchestra hall.

### Orientation

The airport is about 7km north of the Altstadt (old quarter), see p547 for details about getting into town. The Hauptbahnhof (main train station) is on the southeastern edge of the city centre. From here it's about a 20-minute walk along Bismarckstrasse and Blumenstrasse to the Königsallee, with the Altstadt just beyond. Alternatively, take any U-Bahn (underground train) from the Hauptbahnhof to the Heinrich-Heine-Allee stop to be right in the heart of things.

### Information

#### BOOKSHOPS

**Buchhaus Stern-Verlag** (☎ 388 10; Friedrichstrasse 24-26; ☎ 9.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-6pm Sat) Three floors of books, with a café and internet access.

#### DISCOUNT CARDS

**Düsseldorf Welcome Card** (single per 24/48/72hr €9/14/19, group €18/28/38) Available at hotels and the tourist offices, this card buys unlimited public transport and discounts for museums, tours and cultural venues.

#### EMERGENCY

**After-hour medical emergencies** (☎ 192 92)

**Dental emergencies** (☎ 666 291)

**Municipal Lost & Found** (☎ 899 3285)

#### INTERNET ACCESS

**Buchhaus Stern-Verlag** (☎ 388 10; Friedrichstrasse 24-26; per 15min €1; ☎ 9.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-6pm Sat)

#### MONEY

**American Express** (☎ 385 0069; Immermannstrasse 65b; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Inside the Hauptbahnhof tourist office.

**Reisebank** (☎ 364 878; Hauptbahnhof; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Sat, 8am-9pm Sun)

### POST

**Post office** (Konrad-Adenauer-Platz 1; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat)

### TOURIST INFORMATION

Extended hours apply during major trade shows.

**Altstadt tourist office** (☎ 1720 2840; Burgplatz; ☎ 11am-6pm)

**Finanzkaufhaus tourist office** (☎ 1720 2841; Berliner Allee 33; ☎ 10am-6pm)

**Hauptbahnhof tourist office** (☎ 1720 2844; Immermannstrasse 65b; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm)

### Dangers & Annoyances

Düsseldorf is a safe city overall, although the area around the Hauptbahnhof attracts a murky element, especially after dark. The same is true of the city parks. Just pay extra attention and you should be fine.

### Sights

#### ALTSTADT

Düsseldorf's quaint Altstadt, a mostly pedestrianised web of lanes hugging the Rhine, is rightly (in)famous for its raucous nightlife. Fortunately, it also brims with charming and quiet corners, a smattering of museums and historical sights, and good shopping.

At its centre is the historic Marktplatz, framed by the Renaissance **Rathaus** (town hall; 1573) and accented by an equestrian **statue of Jan Wellem**. The art-loving elector lies buried nearby in the early baroque **Andreaskirche** (Andreasstrasse 27; ☎ church 7.30am-6pm, mausoleum 3-5.30pm Mon-Fri), a bright, galleried church founded by Jesuits in 1629. The mausoleum, life-size apostle sculptures and fanciful stucco-ornamented ceiling are all fine features. Free organ concerts take place on Sundays at 4.30pm.

A few steps west is the memorial **Mahn-und Gedenkstätte für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus** (Memorial Exhibit to the Victims of the Nazi Regime; ☎ 899 6205; Mühlenstrasse 29; admission free; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Fri & Sun, 1-5pm Sat), with an important but academic exhibit on local persecution and resistance during the Third Reich. Leaflets in English may be borrowed at no charge.

North of here looms the twisted tower of the 14th-century **St Lambertuskirche** (Church of St Lambert; Stiftsplatz), which is filled with treasures from several centuries. Look for the Gothic tabernacle, the Renaissance marble tombs, baroque altars and modern windows.