

For more than a millennium, Aachen's thermal waters have attracted royalty, including Charlemagne, who made the city what it is today. His main legacy here is the cathedral, which holds some of the greatest treasures north of the Alps. The Rathaus, too, still contains remnants of Charlemagne's palace. Visitors come to see Charlemagne's Aachen, but also enjoy the numerous fountains and museums throughout the city, although many find that the best tourist attraction is the city itself. A university town, Aachen has an active nightlife and numerous popular restaurants. Many find that this ancient place has a modern, edgy feel.

Hotels & Lodging

Because Aachen attracts many visitors as a spa town, it has many local hotels that offer a wide range of spa amenities. The Dorint Sofitel Quellenhof, a luxury hotel located in a former country estate, has a Turkish bath, Finnish sauna, and other spa and relaxation treatments, in addition to two on-site restaurants.

If you're looking for more affordable lodgings that still offer spa benefits, Art Hotel Aachen has a swimming pool, fitness room and steam room. It also offers massage, and beauty treatments, and afterwards, you can relax in either the restaurant or the summer terrace. €65-231

Restaurants & Dining

Paella is hugely popular with the locals, who enjoy sitting outside on summer nights eating tapas and sipping cocktails. Paella has a lunch buffet on weekdays, offering a variety of Spanish delicacies. Reservations suggested for dinner.

Kockerellstr. 22, <http://www.restaurant-paella.de>, 49-(0)-241-401-0757, daily from 12pm, €5.50-13

Van den Daele Printenhaus is the oldest café in Aachen, operating for over 180 years. While they are known primarily for Printen (Aachen's special gingerbread) and cakes, they also serve light meals. If cake is what you're after, come early.

Büchel 18/Ecke Körbergasse, <http://www.van-den-daele.de>, 49-(0)-241-35724, Mon-Thu & Sat 9am-6:30pm; Fri & Sun 11am-6:30pm

Aachener Brauhaus serves typical German cuisine in Europe's smallest pub. Locals consider it a tourist trap, but the food is said to be excellent. Standards like wurst, schnitzel, potatoes, and sauerkraut rule the menu, along with wheat beer. Reservations suggested.

Kapuzinergraben 4, <http://www.aachener-brauhaus.de>, 49-(0)-241-36017, Mon-Sat 11am-1am, €9-12

Attractions & Things to Do

See the Treasures of Charlemagne at Aachener Dom

Aachen's cathedral, with its octagonal-shaped dome, was built by Emperor Charlemagne in the 9th century. All the Holy Roman emperors were crowned here from 936-1531, which is why Aachen's Domschatzkammer is the most important cathedral treasury north of the Alps. Tourists come here to see such highlights as Charlemagne's throne (seen only with a guide), the shrine that holds his bones, and his bust in the treasury, which contains a piece of his skull.

Cathedral: Klosterplatz 2, <http://www.aachendom.de>, 49-(0)-241-477-090, Apr-Oct: daily 7am-7pm; Nov-Mar: daily 7am-6pm (except during services and functions), free admission, Domschatzkammer: Klostersgasse, 49-(0)-241-4770-9127, Apr-Dec: Mon 10am-1pm; Thu 10am-9pm; Tues, Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun 10am-6pm; Jan-Mar: Mon 10am-1pm; one Thu per month 10am-10pm; Tue-Sun 10am-5pm, €4

Tour the 14th Century Rathaus

Aachen's Rathaus stands on the site of Charlemagne's palace, which is completely gone, save for the Granus Tower on the east side of the town hall. Some visitors find the outside more remarkable than the inside, with the statues of 50 German rulers (31 of whom were crowned in the Dom) decorating the façade. The second floor of the Rathaus features the Imperial Hall, where coronation banquets were held in the 14th through 16th centuries.

Am Markt, 49-(0)-241-432-7310, daily 10am-1pm & 2pm-5pm, €2

Test the Waters at Eisenbrunnen

The neoclassical Eisenbrunnen (Elisa Fountain), built in the early 19th century, now houses the tourist information office and a restaurant, as well as two fountains where thermal water bubbles up from below the ground. The sulfur-rich water is said to have healing properties. Most people compare the water's taste to hard-boiled eggs. If you decide to imbibe, you're following a tradition in which Charlemagne, Albrecht Dürer and Frederick the Great participated. Friedrich-Wilhelm-Platz

See 18th-19th Century Interior Design at Couven Museum

This villa, located among the shopping streets near the Dom, gives visitors a glimpse into domestic life in the 18th and 19th centuries. Couven Museum contains one of the region's best collections of antique furniture, as well as Italian stucco work, Dutch ceramics, and chimney pieces. Visitors find that the Adler-Apotheke (pharmacy), located within the museum, is a highlight, since it contains a reproduction of a small chocolate factory.

Hühnermarkt 17, <http://www.couven-museum.de>, 49-(0)-241-432-4421, Tue-Sun 10am-5pm (first Sunday of the month 1pm-5pm), €3

Insider Tips & Activities

Spend a Day in Monschau

The nearby town of Monschau sits in a valley in the Eifel, a low mountain region near the Belgian border. Monschau is full of half-timbered houses, small inns and restaurants, and the local glassworks and mustard mill that sell products in the village stores. Sights include the 18th century Red House, Felsenkeller Brewery Museum, Weiss Printing Museum, Photography & Film Museum, and Monschau Castle. Bring your German dictionary because most locals don't speak English.

<http://www.monschau.de>

Get Your Sugar High at Two Dessert Factories

If you're a chocoholic, visit the Lindt factory outlet in Aachen. It is within walking distance from the town center, and you can choose from many kinds of chocolate and purchase at a discount from retail prices.

Süsterfeldstr. 130, <http://www.lindt.de>, 49-(0)-241-88810

If you want to learn more about Aachener Printen, you can visit the Lambertz Printen factory. They have been making Printen for over 300 years and are one of the best-known companies internationally that produce German gingerbread.

Borchersstr. 18, <http://www.lambertz.de>, 49-(0)-241-89050

Entertainment & Nightlife

Pontstrasse—This street is full of bars and clubs that cater to Aachen's university students. Just about every place gets packed. Favorites include Café Madrid, Molkerei, Himmel und Halle, and B9. A couple times per year, there is a special night where you can get entrance to most of Pontstrasse's bars and clubs for one price. The atmosphere of Pontstrasse is laidback, and during the summer, you will find many tourists mingling with the students.

Just off the Markt, <http://www.aachen-pontstrasse.de>

Domkeller—Aachen's most popular bar (and one of its oldest) caters to a mixed crowd that comes to listen to the live acoustic pop, jazz and blues that are offered on almost a nightly basis. It gets rather lively in the evening, particularly in warmer weather, when patrons can sit on the terrace with a view of the Dom. Domkeller serves international beers, including German, Dutch and Belgian, as well as Guinness and Corona.

Hof 1, <http://www.domkeller.de>, 49-(0)-241-34265, Mon-Thu 10am-1am; Fri-Sat 10am-3am

Warnings & Advisories

Wear Your Walking Shoes

If you arrive to Aachen by train, be aware that the main station is not close to the town center. You will have to walk several minutes to get to most of the sights that people come to see. There are signs marking the way, but make sure to follow the ones for bicyclists and walkers. There are cobblestone streets once you get to the Markt. Make sure to wear appropriate footwear.

Validate Your Train Ticket

Deutsche Bahn has been cracking down hard on train travelers who fail to validate their tickets. If your travels are taking you by train elsewhere in Germany, make sure to stamp your ticket at one of the little yellow boxes on the platforms. It could save you from getting a hefty fine. Also, if you arrive in Aachen from somewhere else in Germany, make sure that your ticket is validated as you're coming into Aachen.