

FIRST CLASS

# A RAILWAY ADVENTURE *THROUGH THE UPPER RHINE VALLEY*

*Discover unexpected gems as a train takes you through breathtaking  
portions of Germany, France, and Switzerland.*

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BY LISA LUBIN





# FIRST CLASS



Franz Wehrheim,  
Dr. Wehrheim Winery  
Pfalz, Germany



Strasbourg, France

**W**e wander through rows of vineyards as the orange sun hangs low in the sky. Leaves crunch under our feet and the air feels crisp. This isn't Sonoma or even France's famous Bordeaux region. We're on the German Wine Road, a 50-mile stretch established in 1935, which runs partly through the Upper Rhine Valley. You may think of Germany as a beer-drinking, schnitzel-eating kind of place, and you wouldn't be wrong. But it's also becoming one of Europe's best wine-growing regions. And this area, which encompasses a gorgeous slice of Germany, France, and Switzerland, is a great center point from which to explore the surrounding countryside and go hiking, cycling, and, of course, wining and dining.

"Our process is just assisting what grows naturally outside," says Franz Wehrheim, the winemaker at Dr. Wehrheim Winery. "We care about our wine; the soil, the grapes. We see what comes in and what goes out."

Tall, striking Wehrheim has been going to wine tastings since he was 15. His family's vineyard, just outside of the charming town of Landau in the Pfalz (one of Germany's largest wine-producing regions), goes back four generations. The award-winning winery produces about 120,000 bottles each year of mostly dry white wines, including Riesling and Pinot Blanc and some reds, showing travelers that this area is more than just Riesling. Almost 40% of the vineyards are planted with red varieties like Pinot Noir, thus this is also Germany's largest red wine-producing region. The harvest kicks off in September marked by the world's largest wine festival held each September in nearby Bad Dürkheim. After a day of tastings, we settle in at the century-old Villa Delange, an inn lovingly restored and run by John and Karin, who transformed it from a winery building just a few years ago.

After hopping back on the super efficient Deutsche Bahn (German Rail line), we head toward the Black Forest, home to cuckoo clocks, black forest cake, and luxurious spas. The summer capital of Europe during the Belle Époque era and a rendezvous for the well-heeled, Baden-Baden is a popular stop in the Upper Rhine Valley and has been for more than two thousand years when the Romans were already bathing in its curative waters. Today, this chic town welcomes the elite (from President Obama to Victoria Beckham) to its luxurious spa hotels like the five-star Brenner's Park Hotel that just opened a brand new, innovative spa in the historic Villa Stéphanie next door.

The traditional spas themselves are quite affordable. The two biggest are Caracalla and the Friedrichsbad Roman-Irish spa. Mark Twain knew they had something going when he wrote, "Here at the Friedrichsbad you lose track of time within ten minutes and track of the world within twenty." Keep in mind, the Germans can be a bit less self-conscious and bathing here is completely nude. Not ready to bare all? Head to Caracalla where bathing suits are just fine. Twelve natural springs rise from depths of around 6,500 feet and provide an unforgettable experience in this 4,000-square-foot glass temple with marble columns and turquoise blue pools.

It's not all about the spas—the entire town was built with a relaxed atmosphere in mind. If the weather is warm, have a bite to eat on the sunny terrace at Rizzi restaurant. For a peaceful stroll, wander the Lichtentaler Allee, a historic, narrow park that winds through town with about 300 types of native and exotic plants and trees. And even if you don't gamble, take a peek inside the Corinthian-columned Kurhaus, one of the world's most beautiful casinos.

Just across the Rhine, is Strasbourg, France, the largest city in the Alsace region and the first city center in France to be placed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Strasbourg oozes of medieval charm while combining some of the best traits of France and Germany. It feels like a storybook land thanks to its world-famous cathedral (don't miss the astronomical clock inside), cobblestone streets, and cozy half-timbered houses in the oldest part of town, La Petit-France. For a treat, duck into Pain D'Epices for some ginger bread goodies and gifts where Mireille Oster, the friendly



# FIRST CLASS

and charming owner, is likely to take care of you. In the evening, hunker down for some wonderfully satisfying Alsatian food—think spaetzle, sauerkraut (choucroute in French), and pork in all its many forms. For some authentic (read: meaty and heavy) local specialties, try Le Tire-Bouchon with its traditional wood paneling and checkered tablecloths.

Car lovers must stop in Mulhouse, France to visit the largest car collection in the world. More than 500 cars are on display here at the Musée National de l'Automobile. Even for non-auto lovers, it's a neat escape back in time to some of the most striking autos from the '30s to the '60s and includes two Bugatti Royale (of only six produced)—the largest, most expensive car in the world.

For a great finale to the journey, our train ride ends in beautiful Basel. Literally on the corner of France, Germany, and Switzerland, this cosmopolitan Swiss city (and the home of Roger Federer) is a great base as both France and Germany are just 10 minutes away, and it's only three-hours by train to Paris. The heart of Basel is one of the best-preserved old towns in Europe with charming medieval houses and squares. At the same time, the city is a showcase for modern design with several Pritzker-Prize winning architects such as Herzog & de Meuron and Renzo Piano. Don't miss the daily food market at the Marktplatz overlooked by colorful City Hall. Just up the street, duck into Café Confiserie Schiesser to sample some decadent Swiss chocolates and then head upstairs for a coffee break and old-world café atmosphere. Drool over all the gourmet food at Globus, Switzerland's famous upscale department store. Later on indulge in a meal in the garden at Kunstshalle Restaurant just beneath the art museum. For a great view of the city, we head uphill to the Cathedral. After admiring the Gothic church, we head behind it to the Pfalz, the terrace with one of the best vistas over of the Rhine and just take it all in.



Gilgen bakery  
Basel, Switzerland



City Hall Basel,  
Switzerland

SHERIDAN ROAD 61

## GETTING THERE & AROUND

**FLY** United non-stop, roundtrip flights from Chicago to Frankfurt start around \$800 depending upon departure date.

**RAIL** Brand new for 2015 Eurail passes: Children ages 4 through 11 travel for free with a paying adult. And youth (under age 26) can now travel in first class. Plus, families of two or more receive 15 percent off with a Saver Pass. For schedules (accessible on and offline), download the free Eurail App. [eurailgroup.org](http://eurailgroup.org)