



Frankfurt's famous neighbor



A Mosel's gem

Straddling both banks of the Mosel River is Traben-Trarbach, an architectural treasure set in the ancient landscape of Germany's Mosel Valley—historically one of Europe's largest wine trading districts.

by Cindy-Lou Dale



Just over an hour from Frankfurt, driving through rolling pastures and green meadows, heading west, towards the much-acclaimed Mosel Valley, are sights that would quicken the pulse of any wine lover—vistas of amber vineyards interspersed with snug villages overlooking the shifting reflection of the Mosel River. Along the way are centuries old castles, forts, and churches with tall steeples and always a tolling church bell.

THE HEART OF RIESLING COUNTRY

Here the soil is soft and mossy with a permanent lick of ground-mist hanging above it; a place where people perform the art of creating food in the fields. In one such hamlet, I stop for a glass of Riesling which, my kindly hostess, Anna, claims, is the noblest of all grapes. She explains that the Mosel is the heart of Riesling country with near vertical Amphitheater-like slopes, swathed in vines, which cling to every centimeter of the hillside.

Anna holds up her glass to the azure blue sky, critically examining its color. She speaks of this wine's heritage going back to medieval times of the Mosel, claiming a history predating Charlemagne. She takes a long slow drink from her frosted glass and sighs, satisfied with her selection.

We sat like this for a while, contemplating the spectacular view and watching an old man, a young boy and a dog, shepherd a flock of sheep down a steep mountain road, through the village, to a field beyond. A few of the sheep wore little bells about their necks, and the tinkling of these, along with their bleating and the sounds of their trotting, momentarily blends with the pealing of the 10 am church bells. I felt certain that this was where my spirit would meet my soul.

A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

I continue onto the baroque, riverside town of Traben-Trarbach, festooned with ivy-clad terraces and oozing class and charm. Initially, Traben and Trarbach, which span the Mosel, came together at the turn of the 19th century to form Europe's second largest wine trading district, after Bordeaux. For this purpose, a design competition was held to find an architect to build a bridge connecting Traben and Trarbach. It was won by renowned architect Professor Bruno Möhring, who went on to create the town's grand art-nouveau style buildings, resulting in no lack of bow windows, domed towers, gables or stained glass.



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Traben-Trarbach's taverns, restaurants and bistros are a rendezvous for local culinary pleasures, including Weincräwes (pork ribs with sauerkraut and bacon), Mosel Wingertspool (grilled neck-end of pork, marinated in spices), Schoales (potato and meat casserole) and of course, river fish like trout and pike. From sidewalk cafes and gourmet fine dining experiences to rustic wine growers' meals, customarily served with a glass of Riesling, each has a different feel, and a different menu—but all are of the highest standard.

WINE AND FUN

Festivals are an significant part of the Mosel experience, and as one would expect, most focus on the regions produce and see wine growers opening their cellar doors, inviting wine connoisseurs to sample their tangy Rieslings and delicious foods. Some winegrowers offer guided walks through their hillside vineyards followed by a tasting—which is a great way to find your favorite local label.

In the second weekend of July, the Mosel Wine Festival presents culinary and cultural specialties from all over Europe under the theme of Europe a la carte. On July's last weekend, the Guild of Wine Hauliers hold their traditional St. James's Day celebrations and crown the town's new wine queen. The happy atmosphere continues until the middle of September then resumes at the wine harvest festival in early October.

GETTING YOUR MOSEL ON

There are many ways to discover and experience the region—a half-day riverboat cruise, cross-country Nordic walking or mountain biking the Veltro route, as well as themed trails and footpaths. Should you be partial to water, the Mosel offers boating, canoeing, sailing, windsurfing and water-skiing. For something more adventurous take to the sky in a glider or light aircraft from the Mont-Royal airfield.

For culture buffs, there are three magnificent castles in a direct one-hour drive from Traben-Trarbach. The first being Schloss Grevenberg which dates to around the 1350s. While there's not much left of the castle—it's merely a ruin—in a way, that makes it more fun. There is nothing like a ruined castle for the fertile imagination, so pack a picnic and enjoy the views. Some 330 ft above the Mosel, about 40-minutes further, you'll find Schloss Cochem, an 11th-century gothic castle that looks like a romantic fairy-tale citadel is set on a hilltop. Twenty minutes later there's Schloss Eltz which has been standing there adding nobility and grandeur to the landscape for near on 900 years.

Secure an English-speaking guide via the local tourism office to arrange for a two-hour walking tour through Traben-Trarbach's historic town center and visit the Middle Mosel Museum, the Icon Center and the toy museum. Mysteries lurk behind ancient doorways and concealed alleyways where designer stores and art galleries are secreted away. Surprises are at every turn, like the cellars of the ancient village church which act as a maturing room for locally harvested grapes after picking. And of course, there are always locals to add further color to the day.

While unwinding on Hotel Bellevue's patio, watching the swans silently glide by on the gently flowing Mosel, take a moment to reflect on the times when the town was frequented by early 20th-century gentries like Baron von Thyssen, Count von Anhalt and Baron von Richthofen (the Red Baron). Nothing much has changed.

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Must stay: Weingut Trossen is a working vineyard with a spacious guesthouse on the steep slopes overlooking the town www.winzermeister-trossen.de. For a special occasion, there's the luxury Hotel Bellevue, with its panoramic view across the Mosel. www.bellevue-hotel.de.

Must do river cruise: Every half hour a white fleet river cruise boat departs/docks on a 2-hour cruise. www.mosel-schiffstouristik.de

Must eat: The Golden Traube is a small family run restaurant (and hotel) serving traditional cuisine and a selection of superb local wines. www.goldenetraube-hotel.de

Traben-Trarbach tourist office www.traben-trarbach.de



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WOW

The Mosel Valley is a pilgrimage for any lover of good wine, authentic food and stunning natural views. WOW air will get you to Frankfurt, and from there it's just a short drive to the paradise that is the Mosel Valley.