

ROTHENBURG ob der TAUBER DESTINATION GUIDE



Rothenburg ob der Tauber

Rothenburg ob der Tauber, or “Rothenberg above the Tauber,” is located in the region of Franconia in the German “state” of Bavaria. The town derives its name from its strategic location, built in the Middle Ages on a bluff above a huge “S” curve in the Tauber River.

Today, Rothenburg’s 12,000 residents hold jobs mostly in the tourism industry.

At least 2.5 million tourists a year are drawn to this medieval town’s enduring charm, character, and quaintness. By day, Rothenburg is loaded with one tour group after another dumping into town for a few hours, then getting back on their big bus and heading to another destination.

To really enjoy the town, spend the night! I love to take a late evening or early morning stroll, when no one is on the streets. Stepping through one of its six city gates and walking the cobbled streets, I feel transferred back 400 years to the Middle Ages.

Notably, Rothenburg is one of the few cities in the world still surrounded by its ancient stone walls. These ramparts, although constantly under restoration, date back as far as the 10th C. The town itself also retains its historic heritage. Except for the Town Hall's arcade (built 300 years ago) nothing inside the city walls dates later than 1595!

Taking a walk on the walls is a great way to explore the city and provides breathtaking views of the valley beyond.

Rothenburg's Top Sights -a walking tour

Begin in the MARKET SQUARE and look around—

The Town Hall (Rathaus) sports the tallest tower in town. At 200 feet, it was an important architectural achievement during the “gothic” period of the Middle Ages. Climb this 13th C. tower and join the spectators in the black top for beautiful views of the city... if you're up for all 215 steps! The stairs begin through the middle arch of the new Town Hall (approx. 2€ April to October).

The Councilors' Tavern is at the top of the Market Square. This was the home to the rich and famous "city council" during the Middle Ages. Back then the councilmen would gather here to make laws and rules for the people... but mostly they just met here to drink! Today it houses the Tourist Office and the somewhat famous "clock show."

Be sure to be in the square at 11:00, 12:00, 13:00, 14:00, 15:00, 20:00, 21:00 or 22:00 to watch the clock show, and more importantly, to watch the tourists watch the clock show. Flanking the clock are little wooden doors, dating to 1910, from which wooden characters emerge replaying the Meistertrunk story.

In 1544, the Rothenburgers, influenced by Martin Luther's Reformation movement, decided to protest the Catholic Church's methods. During the Thirty Years War, Rothenburg was besieged and captured by Catholic forces in 1631.

The Meistertrunk story chronicles Rothenburg's narrow survival: Catholic commander Johan Tzerclaes von Tilly threatened to execute the city council members and raze the town. But on a whim, he decided to spare the Rothenburgers if one of them would drink an enormous ceremonial flagon of Franken wine in one go.

The mayor of the time, Georg Nusch, rose to the occasion, and with one Meistertrunk, or

“master draught,” saved the day by downing over three liters of wine. To this day, the legendary deed is a much-celebrated event; every Pentecost, the town continues to host an annual commemorative Meistertrunk festival renowned for its period costume parade and grand army march.

Leave the MARKET SQUARE and follow the major thoroughfares — (HERRNGASSE and HAFENGASSE)

Not only do these side streets offer more picturesque views of the city’s medieval charms, they also house many of the town’s most popular shops. Find **Kathe Wohlfahrt’s Christmas Shop** nestled on Herngasse 1, worth a look no matter the season! This impressive store astounds visitors with its replica Christmas Village display and rooms of traditional German Christmas decorations.

On OBERE SCHMIEDGASSE and on HERRNGASSE across from the Franciscan Church, are two of the town’s most notable historic houses owned by prominent noble families.

The **Master Builder’s House**, or das Baumeisterhaus, on Obere Schmiedgasse was built in 1596 and served as the home and work studio of Master Builder, Leonhard Weidmann. Today the house is a converted cafe where weary travelers can rest in the courtyard while admiring the ornate and detailed craftsmanship of this

talented artisan.

The **Staudt House and Courtyard**, across from the Franciscan Church, was built in the “open-air” style, which was very popular among the nobility at the time. The house features a range of medieval architectural design elements including pillars, galleries, oriel windows and an impressive wooden staircase. One of the most beautiful patrician houses in the city, a visit here lands you among good company; inscriptions confirm that Emperor Charles V and Ferdinand I were also guests (approx.2€ to visit the courtyard).

On the west end of HERRNGASSE at 38, you’ll find the Rothenburg **Puppet Theatre** or Figuren-Theater. Since the town’s quaintness and tranquility provided the inspiration for Walt Disney’s 1940s classic, Pinocchio, it’s fitting that the city has its own puppet performers. These whimsical shows are humorous, lively, and accessible for all ages. Prices and show times vary by season.

The **Burg Gate and Gardens** are located just past the Puppet Theater. Once the sight of the Rothenberg Imperial Castle (destroyed by an earthquake in 1356) this area is now home to a lovely, romantic garden just steps away from the Burg Gate.

Take a meandering walk among the paths and return at sundown for outstanding sunset views

of the pastoral valley below.

When you're ready to re-enter the city, notice the Burg Gate: one of the many architecturally impressive gate entrances spaced along the walls. This entrance was heavily protected and built to withstand forceful attacks. At each side of the entryway are two round guardhouses from the 16C, and located at the top is a mask through which defenders would pour hot tar on approaching enemies.

Turn south and follow BURGGASSE—

If Rothenberg's historic preservation efforts allow tourists the rare chance to glimpse what the Middle Ages may have looked like, the **Medieval Crime Museum** at BURGGASSE 3-5 provides true insights into the experience of living in this society.

Given its renowned reputation throughout Europe as one of the most comprehensive museums detailing the legal history, social customs, and punishments structuring this society, the Medieval Crime Museum finds an unlikely home in this small town.

This rare collection is well-worth investigating, but if laws and customs don't interest you, skip to the attention-grabbing torture and execution instruments. Find out how bakers whose loaves were deemed too small were tortured and what happened to people who fell asleep in church.

€ 6-8 (<http://www.kriminalmuseum.rothenburg.de/>).

If you continue to follow the BURGAASSE south you'll happen upon the Seibers Tower and Plonlein. Stop in front of the archway and look back towards the city—

The Plonlein, or “Triangular Place” is more than a simple fork in the road into Rothenburg; it's the most popular view in the city and featured on many postcards sent home to tourists' families. Take a picture here and capture your own view.

The Siebers Tower (1385) was the main entrance into Rothenberg for 150 years. During this period, fishermen coming back from a day's work on the Tauber River would store their fish in cages next to the fountain.

On your way back north, pass the MARKET SQUARE towards KLOSTERGASSE —

At Klostergasse 15, **St. Jakob's Church's** bold gothic architecture towers above the surrounding buildings. Beginning in 1311, it took over 170 years to accomplish this marvelous structure, although its true treasure, The Holy Blood Altar, lies on the inside.

The altar, carved by master sculptor Tilmann Riemenschneider between 1499-1505, features an intricate depiction of the Last Supper and

is said to contain three drops of Christ's blood in the rock crystal capsule adorning the top.

Adults 6€

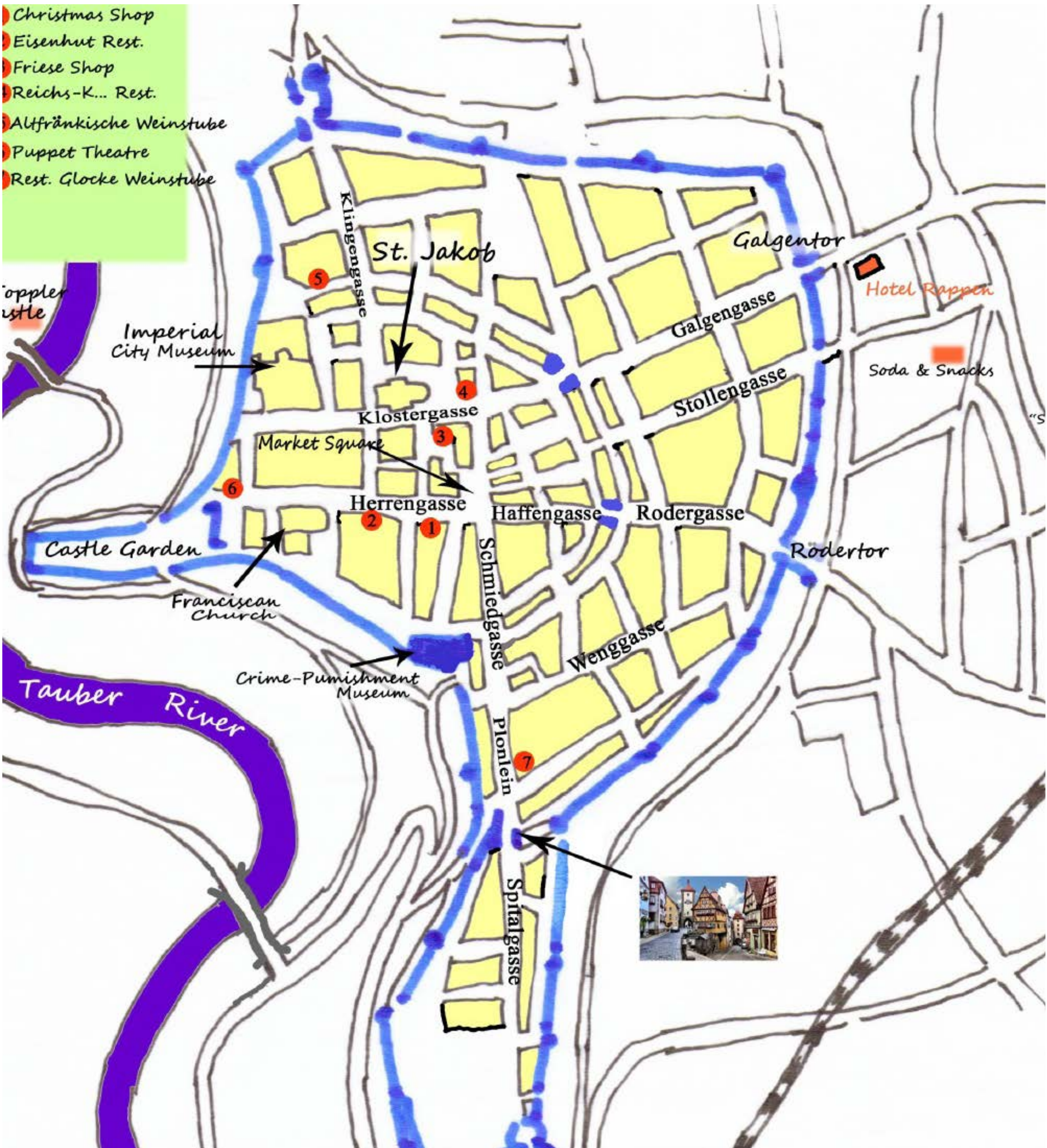
In a peaceful town not known for its wild nightlife, **The Night Watchman Tour**, or the newer Ghost Tour with The Executioner are entertaining ways to wrap up your stay. Walk along the town walls with your watchman or executioner guide who will amuse and inform you with stories about the villagers living here in the Middle Ages. Both tours can be booked in the Market Square. Adults around 8€.

Walking the Walls

There is no better way to spend a late afternoon in Rothenburg than walking the walls. The entire route (about 1.5 miles) is level with a minimal up-and-down stair climbing. Taking your time, it can be done in an hour or so. The views from the wall are excellent, giving a peek into backyards, neighboring buildings, lush valleys, and the lazy river.

Begin your walk at **the Spitator**, near the south end of the city. From there continue in a counterclockwise direction. Be sure your camera battery has a full charge because you'll find plenty of picture-perfect views. You can "get off" or "get on" the wall at almost any tower. The Rödertor is the only tower you can climb. Located on the wall near the train station, it requires climbing 135 steps for excellent views

of the city. The tower is open sporadically seemingly at the whim of the tower keeper. €2 or so for the entrance fee.



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