

**On my nightstand** sits a photograph of my parents, taken during their three-year tour in Germany before I was born. My mother is beautiful, with her long dark bangs swept to the side. She's gazing at my father, a handsome young first lieutenant in full dress uniform. They are standing in front of a garden of roses.

Since I was old enough to remember, this photo—along with the treasures my parents brought home in 1969 (a long-haired daschund, crystal goblets, a sporty two-door Volvo P1800)—helped shape my mental picture of Germany. I imagined a place teeming with sleek designs, hounds and flowers.

I made my first trip to Germany this summer and discovered that the vision was right. All that I'd imagined was found in the heart of Bavaria: Munich.

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

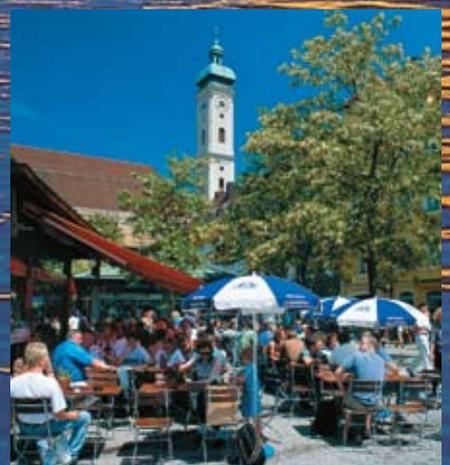
# Dream



ANDREW COWIN (2)



MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN



Ranked among the most livable cities in the world, Munich feels more like a village of 1.3 million than a bustling metropolis. Yet the capital of the state of Bavaria is one of Europe's leading centers of art and culture (with 58 theaters and 45 museums) and has an extraordinary public transportation system.

München, as the Germans call it, was founded as a town in 1158, and residents are proud of their history. A number of annual festivals celebrate the local heritage and culture, including the world-famous Oktoberfest and ballet week, the annual film festival and the opera festival.

The city's heritage is displayed daily in storefronts, concert halls, restaurants and attire. A history teacher named Gudrun, who takes me on a walking tour of the city, says the rain kept her from donning her dirndl, the traditional Bavarian dress.

"With a dirndl, you never have to think, 'What am I going to wear?'" Gudrun says. "You're always dressed—for dinner, opera, theater or just a walk." This is the fabled Munich: the accordion player in the street; the men wearing lederhosen; the yodeling at Hofbräuhaus, the gigantic 419-year-old beer hall.

But as my parents learned 40 years ago, Munich is more.

## Fine Design

My adventure with exceptional German design begins even before I board my flight—nonstop from Washington Dulles International Airport to Munich Airport—with a visit to Lufthansa's swank new Senator and Business Class Lounge. My meals on the flight (starting with spinach-stuffed gnocchi with crimini mushrooms and pine nuts) can't justifiably be called "airplane food," since Ritz-Carlton chefs took over the



# TOWN

**Munich** might be the biggest small town on the planet, with cozy cafés, impeccably clean neighborhoods and a cycling culture to match its Bavarian spirit.

## WHERE TO STAY



**Hotel Cocoon** (Lindwurmstrasse 35; 49-89-599-93-907; hotel-cocoon.de; standard double, \$124) is a new hipster hotel with pod-like rooms and platform beds that are easy on the back and the budget. There are iPod docking stations and DVD players, but bring your own shampoo and alarm clock.

The **Advokat** (Baaderstrasse 1; 49-89-21-63-10; hotel-advokat.de; standard double, \$231) was Munich's first boutique hotel, opening in 1998. The décor is simple and bright, with fresh flowers and art throughout. After you've taken a bite out of the city, come back to your room for a bite of the polished apple on your pillow.



Elegant and tranquil, the **Charles Hotel** (Sophienstrasse 28; 49-89-544-555-0; charleshotel.de; standard double, \$671) is the latest five-star hotel from the Rocco Forte Collection. Most of the 160 rooms have views of the Old Botanical Gardens or Munich's historic build-

ings. The hotel is also home to one of the best Italian restaurants in the city.

Go directly to the roof at **Hotel Bayerischer Hof** (Promenadeplatz 2-6; 49-89-2120-0; bayerischerhof.de; standard doubles start at \$547, including breakfast), where the Blue Spa Bar & Lounge offers a pool in the summer, a fireplace in the winter and spectacular panoramic views year-round. The hotel was opened in 1841, because King Ludwig I wanted a comfy place for his guests to stay. The only room that survived the war unscathed is Falk's Bar in the famed Spiegelsaal (Mirror Hall).

**Alpenhof Murnau** (Ramsachstrasse 8, Murnau; 49-800-17-17-177; alpenhof-murnau.com, standard double, \$270, including full breakfast), a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World, sits adjacent to the Murnau Moor nature reserve, one of the largest in Europe. Alpenhof, an hour south of Munich in the foothills of the Alps, just opened its Yavanna Wellness & Spa, which includes a Finnish pine sauna, footbaths and ice fountains.

## GETTING THERE

Nonstop daily flights on **Lufthansa German Airlines** and **United Airlines** from Washington Dulles International Airport.

menus this spring. These are meals worth writing home about.

I arrive in Munich just before lunch. My tour with Gudrun covers the city's main attractions—including the glockenspiel at Marienplatz and the onion-shaped domes atop the two towers of the Frauenkirche, the Gothic cathedral. But I'm surprised to learn that many of the historic-looking buildings are just decades old. Munich was all but destroyed by Allied airstrikes in World War II, Gudrun tells me, "but the city was careful to rebuild in the same style, not like other German cities that are very modern now." She says only one out of 220 churches survived the war.

That night I dine late with an acquaintance near posh Maximilian Street. Her big news of the day is that she's just purchased a BMW bicycle. I suddenly know what I want to ship home as a souvenir.



Munich's Olympic Park

The next day I take a quick subway ride north to the Olympic Park and BMW compound. The **Olympic Park** (olympiaparkmunchen.de) was home to the 1972 Games, tarnished by the killing of 11 Israeli athletes and coaches by Palestinian terrorists. Today it's beautiful and vibrant, with walkways, lakes, bicycle paths, concert and sports venues and restaurants.

After a swim in the Olympic pool—which sits under one of the distinctive tent-style roofs—I spend an hour strolling through the park. I pass a flea market, a medical convention, a temporary museum exhibit and picnickers. Visitors can even reserve a spot to climb onto the roof of the Olympic Stadium between April and November (rope and snap hook provided), or for the more conventional tourist, there are daily tours of the stadium and the 955-foot Olympic Tower.

Next door is BMW's headquarters, factory, museum and

showroom, a glass and steel structure as impressive as the motor masterpieces housed inside.

The **BMW Museum** (bmw-museum.com), which reopened last year after a renovation and expansion, tells the company's history from its beginnings in 1916, through its cars, motorcycles, design and technology. The **BMW Plant** tour (bmw-plant-munich.com) takes place in German and English; reservations are accepted up to six months in advance. Finally, **BMW Welt** (bmw-welt.com), or world, offers one of the planet's largest permanent automobile presentations, including car components that have been turned into art.

The bicycles in the BMW store make me weak in the knees with their sexy lines and seductive German engineering, but even before I convert euros to U.S. dollars, I know they're out of my league.

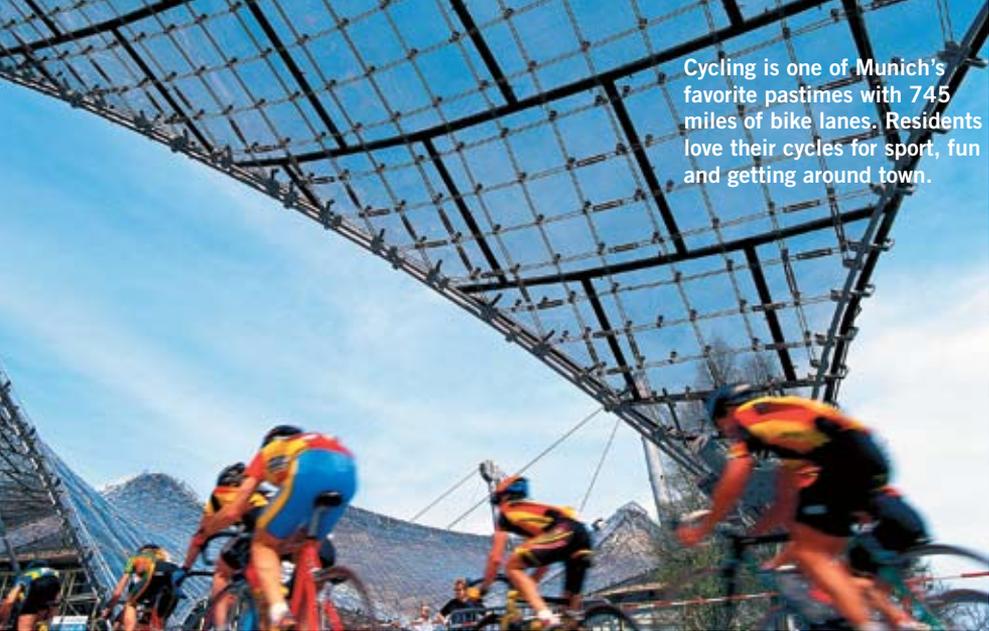
## On Two Wheels

It seems everyone rides a bike in Munich. In the city's 3-mile radius, you'll get around faster on a bike than any other mode of transportation. Munich supports an extensive network of dedicated bike lanes that cover 745 miles, and the city Web site (muenchen.de) has an interactive route planner that allows you to print maps. There are 22,000 bike stands, but you'll often see bikes leaning against a restaurant or store as riders dine or shop. Bikes are allowed on the trains (with a Bicycle Day Pass, \$3.50), except during rush hour, and Munich's bike lanes put cyclists in a commuter class that you rarely see in the States. (Avoid angry cyclists: Don't walk in the lanes.)

If you want a basic Munich cycling (and history) primer, **Mike's Bike Tours** (mikesbiketours.com) is a good place to start. The company's four-hour tour (\$33.50)—which includes a beer garden break—is a great way to get your bearings and work off that *bretzel* (pretzel) and butter sandwich.

Nearly as ubiquitous as bikes are small dogs. Walking from **Hotel Cocoon** to **Aroma Kaffeebar** (aromakaffeebar.com) one morning, I see a dog in a bicycle basket and think, this is so much hipper than Kansas. Dogs seem to be welcome in coffee shops, stores, beer gardens and sidewalk cafes, so I imagine Munich also ranks high as a livable city for hounds. The downside for dogs is that the city is unfathomably clean, so I doubt the pups ever

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Cycling is one of Munich's favorite pastimes with 745 miles of bike lanes. Residents love their cycles for sport, fun and getting around town.

JOCHEN KEUTE

find sidewalk scraps. (And the tidy city is getting even cleaner. Last year, Munich established a low-emission zone in the city center, where high-emission cars, trucks and buses are prohibited.)

Just a few minutes' walk from my hotel is the trendy Glockenbachviertel neighborhood, where flamboyant and Goth clothes fill shop windows, and East Village-esque restaurants and bars line the narrow streets. Meal after meal, I return to this district, safe and easy, and find bartenders and baristas who gladly translate menus for me. I also discover the last thing I thought I'd see in a region known for its bratwurst and *weisswurst*: **Kopfeck** ([kopfeck.de](http://kopfeck.de)), a vegetarian restaurant, which is so crowded I can't get a table.

I also adore **Viktualienmarkt**, the city's open-air market. Stands overflow daily with produce, flowers, spices, jams, meats, breads and cheeses. In the center is a beer garden, a great spot to rest with your bike and dog, fuel up and take in the atmosphere.

## Flora, Flora Everywhere

I spend my last day in Germany visiting Murnau, an hour south of Munich in the foothills of the Alps. The town, surrounded by warm lakes, is a popular weekend des-

tinuation for cycling, paragliding, climbing and winter sports. From my balcony in the Alpenhof, I see traces of snow on the mountain peaks.

My guide, Fritz, picks me up at the hotel, and we drive into town. I remember an e-mail from my mother that described Bavaria's colored buildings and flower boxes, and her words come to life in Murnau's cobblestone-lined pedestrian blocks. Fritz takes me to the local brewery, **Griesbräu** ([griesbraeu.de](http://griesbraeu.de)), where we eat a traditional Bavarian meal. He explains how local culture—food, music and hospitality—is closer to that of Austria than Northern Germany.

"Bavarians are proud and have a history of independence," he says. "We have a strong dialect and a character of self-confidence." If Fritz is asked in other countries where he's from, he says he's Bavarian, not German. He doesn't want to be associated with his countrymen to the north. "Look at me," he says later as we walk through town. I stop to face him. He forces his lips into an exaggerated frown. "That's Northern Germany. Here, we are happier."

As we drive around in Fritz's green Subaru, up hills and around the Murnau Moor nature reserve, I realize that anyone could be "happier" in this idyllic town. We drive past ambling cows, adorned with bells that create a pleasing symphony in the valley. We pass houses bursting at the seams with geraniums, lace curtains blowing out of open windows. Fritz taps his horn to chase away tiny birds assembling in the middle of the road.

It's easy to see why the area served as inspiration to artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Gabriele Munter, who lived together at the beginning of the 20th century in what is today the Munter-Haus (also called the Russian House). There, they and their artist

## GETTING AROUND

Munich's public transportation system is clean and reliable. It consists of underground trains (U-Bahn), suburban trains (S-Bahn), trams and buses. Tickets are valid on any of these, and it's worth asking about multi-day passes. Just make sure to validate the ticket before your first trip. Although your ticket isn't often checked, you'll face a hefty fine from the ticket inspector if you're caught without one.

**Munich Airport** is 17 miles northeast of downtown. The airport bus leaves every 20 minutes for a 45-minute ride to the Main Train Station, which is convenient to most hotels. You can also take the S-Bahn trains (S-1 or S-8, depending on your destination), which depart every 10 minutes from the airport to the city center.

When you're getting around by foot, pay attention to signals and crosswalk signs. The biggest risk of jaywalking is not being hit by a car or being ticketed; it's the look of shock and contempt you'll earn from law-abiding pedestrians.

## MUNICH'S NEW HOT SPOTS

1. The **Brandhorst Museum** ([museum-brandhorst.de](http://museum-brandhorst.de)) opened in May, the newest attraction in the Kunstareal, or Art Quarter. It features modern and contemporary art from the Udo and Anette Brandhorst Collection.
2. The **Cuvilliés-Theater** ([residenz-muenchen.de](http://residenz-muenchen.de)), Munich's oldest and most beloved opera house, reopened last year with a staging of Mozart's *Idomeneo*, which had its world premiere in the theater in 1781.
3. The **Valentin Museum** ([valentin-musaeum.de](http://valentin-musaeum.de)), dedicated to the famous Bavarian comedian Karl Valentin, known as the Charlie Chaplin of Germany, reopened in 2008.
4. **GOP Variete Theater** ([variete.de/Muenchen](http://variete.de/Muenchen)) is a comedy theater that reopened after the former venue closed in 2007. Dine, drink and enjoy live variety shows, Bavarian-style.

—M.K.

friends sealed the region's standing as the birthplace of expressionist painting.

And it's also a cinch to recognize, at last, the scene in that photograph on my nightstand. It really could have been any flower garden in Bavaria, but I imagine my parents, south of Munich, enveloped by crisp Alpine air and the faint sound of cowbells. I picture them driving in their new Volvo, the dachhund's ears flopping in the wind, stopping to snap a picture in front of some roses.

So instead of dragging home a BMW bike, I carry with me another form of transportation: memory. It's portable, dependable and German-made, and the images will forever bring me back to the beauty of Bavaria. 🚲



With flower-kissed settings, it's hard not to feel a glorious Bavarian vibe.

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