

STRASBOURG

1. Cathedral of Our Lady
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STRASBOURG

FRANCE

Geographical position: 48° 35' N / 07° 45' E

Av. alt.: 433 feet (133 m)

Area of the city: 30.2 square-miles (78.2 km²)

Population: 275,000

Region: Alsace (Bas-Rhin)

River: Rhine, Ill

Economy: Seat of EU organizations, heavy and service industries, printing, brewing, wine, inland port, administration, trade fairs, higher education, tourism



STRASBOURG - COSMOPOLITAN CAPITAL OF ALSACE

Strasbourg is a very special city. Throughout its history, its pivotal position between the spheres of French and German influence made its people fiercely independent, on the one hand, yet open-minded and cosmopolitan, on the other. In a nutshell, they knew how 'to make the best of both worlds.' The consequences of this complex outlook is symbolized by two buildings. The first is the city's frankly amazing Cathedral, which was no less than an effort to trump every other building in Christendom when it was (almost) completed in the 15th century. The other is to be found in a suburb of the city, namely the Palais de l'Europe, which reflects the role of the capital of Alsace in Europe's post-war striving for unity. While such monuments may emphasize Strasbourg's political and economic importance, visitors will also want to savor its more homely aspects. Because the city is a bastion of Alsatian cuisine and wines that attract culinary connoisseurs from all over the world.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT IN A NUTSHELL

From **12 BC** to **406 AD**, the city of Argentoratum at the confluence of the Ill in the Rhine was an important center of administration in Roman Gaul. The early historian, Gregory of Tours, mentioned the city of 'Strateburgum' in about **580**, and the city joined the 'Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation' in **870**. Strasbourg became an Imperial Free City in **1201** and joined the Rhenish League in **1381**. The next decades saw the completion of Strasbourg's west spire, the tallest structure in Christendom for the next five centuries. In **1570**, the first-ever Christmas tree was raised in front of Strasbourg Cathedral. After centuries of independence, Strasbourg was seized by Louis XIV's army in **1681** and became part of France. It was here that, in **1792**, Claude-Joseph Rouget de Lisle composed the 'Marseillaise,' the future national anthem of France. Invaded by German troops in **1870**, Alsace and its capital became part of Germany until **1919**. Another interlude of German rule followed during the Second World War in **1940-44**. The choice of Strasbourg as an administrative center of the European Union led to the completion of the Palais de l'Europe in **1972**.

MAIN POINTS OF INTEREST

1. Cathedral of Our Lady: In addition to its soaring spire (461 feet; 142 m), this wonderful building has many remarkable features. Take time to savor the west façade with its wonderful stonework and

three richly sculpted portals. Inside, the original medieval stained glass is superb, as is the pulpit, the carved 'Angel Column' in the south transept and the famous astronomical clock (16th/19th century).

2. Museum of Fine Arts: On the south side of the Cathedral, the former museum has some very fine Old Masters (including a portrait by Raphael), while the latter has original sculptures from the Cathedral that have been replaced by copies.

3. Kammerzell House: Its wonderful wood-carvings make this the finest half-timbered house in Alsace.

4. Alsatian Museum: This is the right place to find out more about local traditions and the history of Alsace.

5. Petite France: The former Tanners' Quarter on the River Ill is a delightful maze of lanes flanked by gorgeous half-timbered houses.

6. Covered Bridges (Ponts Couverts): These fortifications mark the western boundary of the Old City. Just beyond, the roof terrace of Vauban's 17th-century fortifications provides a classic view toward the Cathedral.

7. Museum of Modern Art: The new building of this museum is an ideal setting for provocative modern exhibitions.

8. Church of St. Thomas: This is worth a look inside for its stained glass, its Silbermann organ and some very interesting tombs.

ENJOYING THE LOCAL CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE

Serious shoppers will head north-west of the Cathedral to Place Kléber, where department stores and upmarket boutiques beckon. Those who prefer a little aimless window-shopping combined with a drink in a café or wine-bar (Winstub) will be better served in the lanes to the north of the Cathedral, where antiques, jewelry, confectionery and more unusual stores make for enjoyable browsing. Following the Rue Mercière toward Place Gutenberg, there are plenty of cake-shops where one might buy a traditional kugelhopf, a circular, semi-sweet cake, or some fancy chocolates as a souvenir. For a more lasting memento of the area, consider some of the products from Alsace's two famous pottery villages, Soufflenheim and Betschdorf. If hunger strikes, you could do worse than trying some escargots (snails in garlic butter) followed by coq au Riesling, a chicken casserole cooked in dry white wine. For a satisfying wine experience, consider a vendage tardive (made with late-harvested grapes) from villages like Riquewihr, Kaysersberg, Ribeauvillé, Eguisheim and Mittelbergheim.