

# Mountains, pristine villages surround Munich

John Wetstone, 54, operates John's Bavarian Tours ([www.johnsbavarian-tours.com](http://www.johnsbavarian-tours.com)) in Munich, Germany, where he has lived since 1978. He grew up in Atlanta.

## FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE

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within an hour or two by car. They're not well-known and aren't tourist areas, but they will blow you away. These are impressive places that date to between 900 and 1200.

**Q:** Can you name a couple cool villages?

**A:** Landshut, Landberg. If you

go over the border to Austria, which isn't far, there are a lot of tiny, tiny villages. One place, Ratzenburg, is very impressive.

These medieval towns are a little off the beaten path and still have a romantic flair. People come to Europe to "visit the old country," and you can do it in these villages.

I've had really impressive experiences at places in the middle of nowhere — especially at churches. You can see music students playing songs that are 700 years old, or people reading aloud from books printed in the 1500s.

**Q:** What about must-sees in Munich?

**A:** The main place is the Hofbrauhaus — the famous beer hall. It's very popular with tourists, but no Munich person would probably go there.

Beer gardens are popular. A lot of people want to go to the Olympic Tower: You can see the whole city from up there.

The center of Munich is filled with impressive churches, mostly rococo and very decorative. You can go in

them for no cost, and they have impressive artwork. Plus, they're all within walking distance. If I'm not working, I just don't drive. I find I can ride a bicycle around central Munich and get where I'm going just as fast. You can rent bicycles for a very reasonable fee. Just get a good map of the city and take off on two wheels. There are bike paths everywhere.

**Q:** Does Neuschwanstein — Bavarian King Ludwig II's fairy-tale castle — live up to its billing?

**A:** The castle itself is very, very impressive, but you have to be fit to go there because you'll climb stairs and walk hills. You shouldn't go if you have a hard time walking.

The most impressive way to visit is to first go to the castle of his parents — Hohenschwangau, which was bought and restored by Ludwig's father, Maximilian II. This is where Ludwig grew up and spent most of his life. From there, he looked out through a telescope and watched his castle of Neuschwanstein being built.

You can get tickets for both places at the Hohenschwangau ticket office. You'll have to coordinate your time a little bit — there's about a two-hour gap between tours. And keep in mind that during the summer season, it can get very busy.

**Q:** What's the minimum length of stay needed to really get a flavor of the Munich area?

**A:** Allow at least one or two days for the city, and realize that Monday



Neuschwanstein — Bavarian King Ludwig II's castle — is close to Munich.

is the day that most museums are closed in Germany. If you really want to enjoy your visit and aren't in a hurry, allow a week to 10 days. Most guests are with me three or four days. In four days, you can cover a lot, but you'll need to do it with a car. Traffic can be a nightmare if you rent a car. Get tips on avoiding rush hour jams when you get your car.

*What's it like to live in a far-off place most of us see only on a vacation? Foreign Correspondence is an interview with someone who lives in a spot you may want to visit. John Bordsen is travel editor for The Charlotte Observer.*