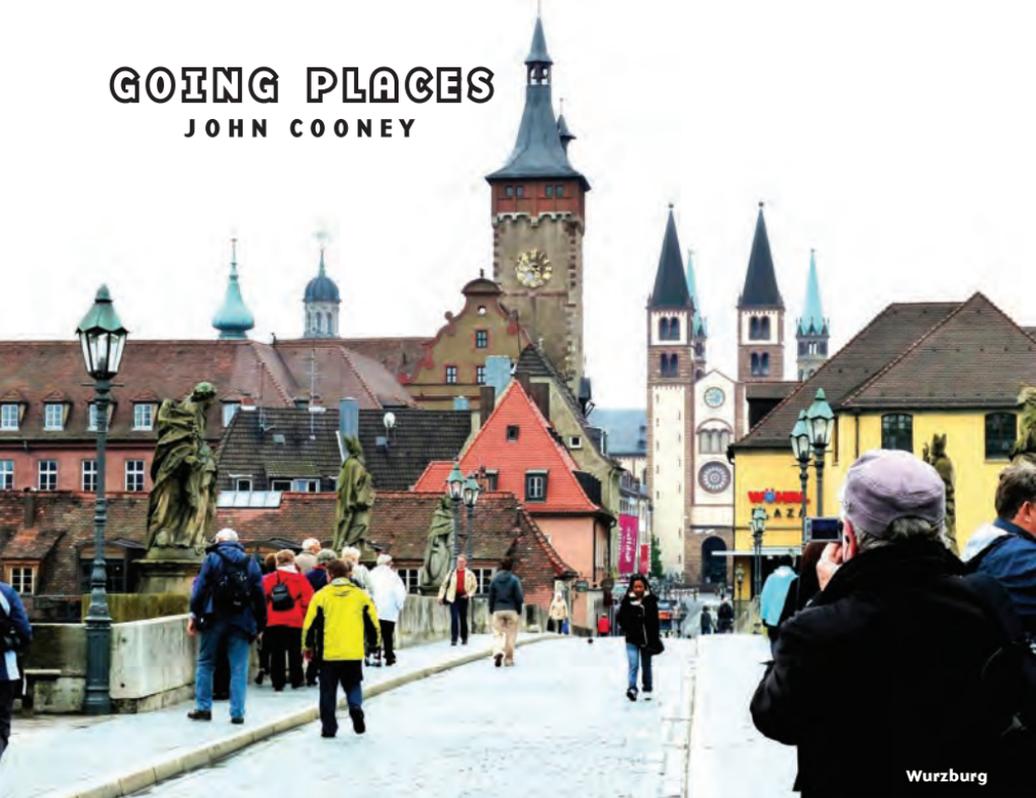


# GOING PLACES

JOHN COONEY



Wurzburg

## MEDIEVAL BERGS & BURG



If you've ever had a halfway-decent look around Germany, you're bound to have found yourself in a 'berg' or 'burg'. Back in the Middle Ages, it seems, every German town worth its salt was given a name that ended with one or the other – and the country is littered with them.

The two endings sound the same, but they mean different things. A 'berg' (for instance) is a *town on a hill*. And, during our recent OE, we stopped-off in some famous 'bergs' – like Nuremberg and Heidelberg.

A 'burg' (on the other hand) is a *town with a castle*. And other places we visited were famous 'burgs' – like Wurzburg and Regensburg.

Oh, one more thing: you may find a burg in a berg ... but you won't find a berg in a burg. Confused? Well, don't be. So long as you get the spelling correct, you should end up in the right place.

What were we doing in Germany, you ask? A river cruise, that's what ... along the Rhine and Danube, Europe's well-known waterways ... with history and culture, religion and art beckoning us from both banks.

We encountered our first medieval 'berg' one wet Friday ... when, after three pampered days aboard our floating hotel (with sightseeing and castle-spotting thrown in), we got up-close-and-personal with Miltenberg – a pretty, romantic village on a bend in the river. With its narrow cobblestone streets,



its gabled, half-timbered houses, and its Gasthaus zum Riesen (one of Germany's oldest hotels), it felt for all the world like it had been magicked straight out of the 14<sup>th</sup> century!

Early next morning, having sailed during the wee small hours (with an occasional bump-in-the-night reminding us we were passing through yet another narrow lock), we reached historic Wurzburg and went exploring on foot. This lovely old town, guarded by the hilltop Fortress

Marienberg, is home to the Residenz – a beautiful baroque palace built for Bavaria's prince-bishops.

From the outside, the Residenz looked like just another big, old, ugly building – but inside, oh boy! We traipsed through the gloriously decorated rooms and up the great marble staircase. And then we traipsed down into a vast underground cellar where we enjoyed some generous wine-tasting.

Following a yummy lunch back on ship, we then bussed along the high-speed autobahn to Rothenburg ob der Tauber – Germany's most beautifully-restored old town and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This 'jewel of the Middle Ages' was





Rothenberg

the country's second-largest city in its heyday, and 1000 years of history still echo off its great stone walls, looming clock-towers, and multi-hued houses.

Following grooves left by long-ago horse-carts, we wandered down cobbled alleys – past *biertagens* overflowing with

brightly-costumed minstrels and sword-carrying would-be knights.

A blast from the past? For sure! And oh so photographable ...

**A**s our ship cruised on upriver and we went exploring ashore, those 'bergs & burgs' became a bit of a blur:

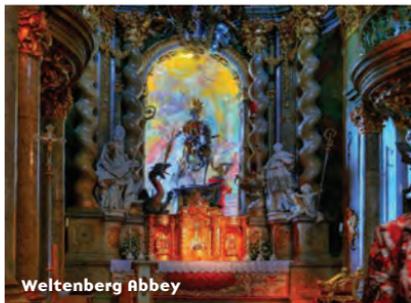
- like Bamberg, on the Main-Danube Canal – featuring one posh palace, one Gothic cathedral, one former fishing village ('Little Venice'), and nine different breweries brewing 50 different beers;
- like Nuremberg, with its Imperial Castle, 900-year-old ramparts, and gingerbread factories on every corner. This big old city was where Hitler held his fanatical Nazi Party rallies ... where



Gosthaus zum Riesen

6000 died during Allied bombing raids ... and where the War Crimes Tribunal sat in 1946;

- like Weltenburg, on a winding stretch of the Danube Gorge – and its famous Abbey, founded by monks in 620 AD. Above the altar is a giant sculpture of St George (the region's patron saint), bravely slaying the dragon. And next to the Abbey is *Weltenburger Klosterbrauerei*, the oldest monastery brewery in the world – where we bravely slayed some dark Dunkel beer;
- like Regensburg, more of the medieval same, where we eyeballed the *Porta Pretoria* (Germany's ancientest stone fort, built 179 AD), and a huge stone bridge which has spanned the Danube since the 12th century (and was the kick-off point for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Crusades).



Weltenburg Abbey



Regensburg St. Peter's Cathedral

For our final German night, before cruising on to Austria, we demolished a traditional Bavarian dinner – and watched a noisy, energetic performance by a Bavarian *oom-pa-pa* band.

Hard to think of a nicer way to say, “Auf wiedersehen!”

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