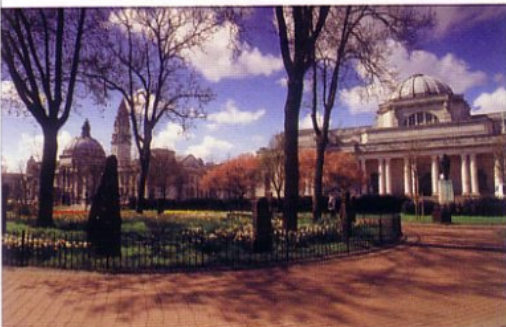


48 HOURS

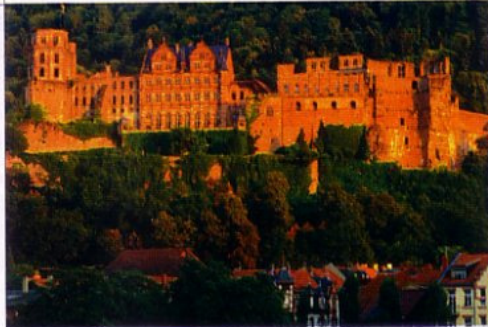
Cardiff

Travel time 2hrs 10 mins



Heidelberg

Travel time 2hrs



Vicenza

Travel time 4hrs



Immerse yourself in culture in Wales's historic capital. Cardiff's old castle is slap bang in the centre of town, and pretty **Victorian arcades** dot other parts of the city. The Wales Millennium Centre on the waterfront at Cardiff Bay provides entertainment aplenty, matching the locals' hospitality and gusto to a tee, while impressive **food markets** offer Welsh specialities when hunger strikes. Stroll around Heidelberg, Germany's oldest university town, to discover a city with a history as **lively and lyrical** as its youthful population. Chart a path through the old town's winding, cobbled streets to find centuries-old churches and the **pretty hilltop castle** which is perched above. Reward your efforts with a stop or two for delicious *kaffee und kuchen*. Or retreat to romantic Vicenza, where you can drink in the impressive Renaissance architecture as well as the **traditional Veneto grappa**. Bustling and vibrant, this north Italian gem boasts one of Europe's **oldest working theatres** and lofty views of the region, from Monte Berico convent 192 steps above the city. Make your descent safe in the knowledge that artisan cheeses and pressed hams await your ravenous return.

HIGHLIGHTS OF HEIDELBERG INCLUDE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): THE PRETTY SHOPPING STREET OF HASPELGASSE; THE NECKAR BRIDGE (AND CENTRE); HOTEL ZUM RITTER ST GEORG; HEIDELBERG AUTUMN FAIR ON KORNMARKT SQUARE; NECKAR CASTLE AT SUNSET; PAVEMENT CAFES OUTSIDE THE HEILIGGEISTKIRCHE

HEIDELBERG

The historic German city, with its imposing castle ruins and renowned music festival, is kept young at heart by its large student population, as Helen Alexander reveals

Why go? Immortalised in verse and paintings over the centuries, picture-perfect Heidelberg owes much of its beauty to a labyrinthine old town and hilltop castle. However, it's not all about history. Breathing life into the red sandstone buildings and centuries-old squares is a bustling student population – Heidelberg is home to Germany's oldest university – and thriving 'Kaffee und Kuchen' culture. Embark on a romantic riverside walk, or grab a chair at an outdoor bar and snuggle up under a rug while enjoying a warming glass of *glühwein*. The city's jam-packed schedule of annual events leaps into action in March with Heidelberg Spring. The international music festival is now in its 14th year and sees concerts and performances take place throughout the city.

What to do Founded in 1386, there is no denying the important role Heidelberg's revered university has played within the social fabric of the city, so start your walking tour outside the institution's Renaissance-style library. While today's students are likely to be found in the cheap and cheerful canteens dotted around the city (Mensa Marstall on Neckarstaden is a particular favourite), during the 18th century there was a rather more competitive pastime – fencing. Scars were worn as a badge of honour and fraternities sprung up across the city, their colours and crests immortalised in the graffiti on show at the infamous student jail, founded in 1712. The Studentenkarzer offers a fascinating insight into the city's past. The city's historic churches should not be overlooked – the famous Heiliggeistkirche, which dominates the main square, the green spire of Peterskirche, and the striking white interior of Jesuitenkirche in Richard Hauser Platz, are particular highlights. But it is the alleyways that hold the city's secrets. Wander away from the delis and cafés of Hauptstrasse – Europe's longest pedestrian zone – and you will be rewarded with quiet cobblestone streets and magical glimpses of the castle. Having started life as a fortress, the sprawling building and grounds

were given a splash of Renaissance style during the early 15th century before being destroyed in 1689. The ornate ruins have captivated visitors ever since. If you don't fancy making your way to the castle on foot, take the Bergbahn funicular from Kornmarkt. For an art and culture fix, make for Kurpfälzisches Museum der Stadt Heidelberg (heidelberg.de/museum), the collection ranges from local archaeological finds to 20th-century paintings and sculpture. Marvel at the Romanesque facade of the Hotel Zum Ritter St Georg in Haspelgasse before crossing the Neckar River at Alte Brücke and embarking upon the Philosophers' Walk, which leads into the spectacular Neckar Valley.

Where to stay The thoughtfully designed Heidelberg Suites (00 49 6221 655 650; heidelbergSuites.com) offer a luxurious home from home on Neuenheimer Landstrasse, with mini kitchens, living rooms and sumptuously cosy beds, as well as a roof terrace and on-site spa. The spacious and stylish rooms at ArtHotel (00 49 6221 650 060; arthotel.de) are housed in a striking old-meets-new building on Grabengasse. In the heart of the old town, Hip Hotel on Hauptstrasse (00 49 6221 20879; hip-hotel.de) offers contemporary rooms individually decorated with an international flavour – pick a country of your choice.

Where to eat and drink When it comes to coffee and cake, Schafheutle (cafe-schafheutle.de) is an institution. Stop here for a slice of something sweet before hitting the shops that line Hauptstrasse. Must-visit foodie haunts include Chocolaterie Roco (alles-schoko.de) and Alte Brennerei (altebrennerei.com) with its delicious fruit liqueurs, olive oils and preserves. For a smart lunch, Romer at the ArtHotel serves a regularly changing, seasonal menu.

Time running out? Head to Haspelgasse to buy 'Student Kiss' chocolates, devised by 19th-century pastry chef Fridolin Knösel as a discreet romantic token and exchanged by lovers ever since.

Trip tip Buy a two-day Heidelberg Card (€17). It includes free bus and tram transport and admission to the castle.

Travel information

Currency is the euro. Heidelberg is 55 miles from Frankfurt, which is a one-hour flight from London.

Getting there

Lufthansa (0871 945 9747; lufthansa.co.uk) has daily flights from Heathrow and London City to Frankfurt City airport.

Ryanair (ryanair.com) flies to Frankfurt Hahn from Stansted. TLS Transfer Service (00 49 6221 770 077; tls-heidelberg.de)

connects Frankfurt City airport and Heidelberg. The journey takes one hour. The Hahn Express (hahn-express.de) bus runs from Frankfurt Hahn airport to Heidelberg main station.

Resources

German National Tourist Board (020 7317 0908; germany-tourism.co.uk). **Heidelberg Tourist Office** Willy-Brandt-Platz 1 (00 49 6221 19433; heidelberg-marketing.de).

AVERAGE DAILY TEMPERATURES AND RAINFALL

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Min °C	-1	1	1	5	9	12	14	13	10	6	2	2
Max °C	3	5	10	15	19	22	24	23	20	15	8	4
mm	1	2	1	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2

