



Top: Orangerie and Park, site of the annual Rococo Festival and concerts during Bach Week. Courtesy Ansbach Tourism. **Above:** The Banquet Room, one of the most impressive rooms in the Residenz Ansbach. Courtesy Zac Steger.

Ansbach—City of Franconian Rococo

The Hohenzollerns, Kaspar Hauser, and fascinating architecture all come together in this small town in Bavaria.

BY ZAC STEGER

Ansbach lies on the Rezat River on the Castle Road that extends across southern Germany from Mannheim towards Prague. Easy to explore and filled with beautiful architecture and fascinating history, this charming small town is appropriately found in the heart of “Romantic Franconia.”

Ansbach started as the site of a Benedictine monastery by Gumbert, a member of the regional nobility, in 748. Originally known as Onolzbach, it was first recorded as a town in 1221 and came under control of the Hohenzollern family about a hundred years later. By the fifteenth century it had become a beautiful residential town under Albrecht III, also known as Albrecht Achilles, of the *Markgrafschaft Brandenburg*, a major principality in the Holy Roman Empire. Despite his many feuds, including a failed attempt to take over Nürnberg, the town prospered.

The city shared the same fate as others in Germany during the Thirty Years’ War, though it was spared total destruction. In the seventeenth century, it was rebuilt under Margrave Albrecht and Margrave Johann Friedrich, whose daughter, Caroline of Ansbach, became Queen-consort to George II of Great Britain.



Clockwise from left: Buildings in Ansbach's Altstadt. Courtesy Zac Steger. Modern art mixes with historical architecture throughout Ansbach. Courtesy Zac Steger. The Fish Fountain, another example of modern art found throughout the old town. Courtesy Zac Steger. Margrave's bedroom. Courtesy Zac Steger.



Several distinguished architects were called upon in the eighteenth century under Margravine Christiane Charlotte and her son Carl Wilhelm Friedrich, who would become brother-in-law to Prussian King Frederick the Great. Leopoldo Retty, Gabriel de Gabrieli, Karl Friedrich von Zocha, and Johann David Steingruber dressed the city in what is now known as “Ansbach Late Baroque,” as well as some excellent Rococo. The architecture of this period still defines the city today.

The Margrave's Palace is arguably the most important site in the city. Originally a fourteenth-century moated castle, it was expanded into a Renaissance palace in the sixteenth century by Gideon Bacher. The architecture seen today has remained unchanged since the eighteenth-century work of Zocha, de Gabrieli, and Petty.

The palace interior features Retty's beautiful “Ansbach Rococo” style through the twenty-seven rooms that can be toured by visitors. Among the highlights are the *Spiegelkabi-*

nett (mirror room), the *Tafelzimmer* (tile room), covered in roughly two thousand eight hundred detailed tiles made at the Ansbach Fayence Manufacturer, and the *Audienzimmer* (Margrave's audience room), featuring a majestic porcelain chandelier, a gift from Frederick the Great. The most impressive display of Rococo is found in the two-story *Festsaal* (festival hall) with its beautiful ceiling, rich ornamentation, and magnificent chandeliers. An excellent collection of porcelain is located in the *Gotische Halle* (Gothic Hall).

An interesting blend of modern art mixes with the classic baroque facades throughout the old town, starting directly across from the palace entrance. The “Anscavallo” (1993) is a famous horse sculpture by Jürgen Goertz representing Ansbach's riding tradition. The fountain and “*Ansbachantin*” (a wine-drinking woman of Ansbach), its wheels symbolize the pulse of the traffic.

The three steeples of the St. Gumbertus church immediately come into view upon entering the small old

town, making it the landmark of Ansbach. Located at Johann-Sebastian-Bach-Platz, it is without a doubt the most important church in the town. Its Chapel of the Knights of the Swan houses many items from the south German branch of the “Order of the Knights of the Swan” that was founded by Albrecht Achilles. The eleventh-century Romanesque crypt is one of the oldest in Franconia, constructed between 1039 and 1042. The remains of twenty-five margraves from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are located in the appropriately named Margraves' Tomb, having been transferred there from the fifteenth-century Johanniskirche in 1975.

St. Gumbertus also features a recently restored organ built by Johann Christoph Wiegleb in 1738. Every other summer the church becomes a popular concert venue during *Bachwoche Ansbach* (Bach Week).

The biannual *Bachwoche* festival celebrates the life and work of Johann Sebastian Bach, though he never actually lived or worked in Ansbach. Many of the city's most treasured buildings turn into ideal venues for his music, including the *Orangerie* and the *Prunksaal* in the Margrave's Palace. The next Bachwoche takes place from July 31st to August 9th, 2009.

Near the *Markgraf-Carl-Brunnen* (Fountain of Margrave Carl Wilhelm Friedrich) is the *Beringershof*. This courtyard within a former convent has a typical sixteenth-century



Far left: Fountain and Residenz Ansbach. Courtesy Ansbach Tourism. **Left:** St. Gumbertus Church organ, built by Johann Christoph Wiegleb in 1738. Courtesy Zac Steger.

staircase and is one of few examples of Renaissance architecture in the town.

The *Stadthaus* (1532) is situated behind St. Gumbertus and is where the mayor and city council have their seat, and is also the home of the tourist office. A series of coats of arms from Ansbach's past are found above the archway to the Rathaus (1623) nearby.

Though Ansbach no longer has a Jewish community, they have one of most significant synagogues in southern Germany. Built between 1744 and 1746 by Leopold Retty, it is a magnificent example of the "Ansbach Late Baroque." Luckily, it survived a planned destruction on *Kristallnacht* when the local fire department realized the synagogue's close proximity to neighboring buildings ensured the fire would certainly spread.

In 1947 it was used for the first time since the war for a Jewish service; the director of the newly established European Theater Signal School at Ansbach, Lt. Col. Reuben Abramowitz, held his son Benjamin's bar mitzvah there. It was the first bar mitzvah of a United States military dependant in Germany and was repeated with Benjamin's grandson in 1999.

The town's most famous resident was the enigmatic Kaspar Hauser, whose mysterious life and death continues to fascinate visitors and locals alike. Discovered on the streets of Nürnberg in 1828, the teenage Kaspar Hauser could barely speak and acted like a toddler. He held a toy

horse and a note from a man claiming to have raised him and the poor mother who could not afford to care for him, both in the same handwriting. Once he had learned to read and write, he told a story of living his childhood in isolation and soon after rumors began to spread that he was a prince from the House of Baden. He came to Ansbach in 1831 to live in the house of Johann Georg Meyer at Pfarrstrasse 18 after living with several families in Nürnberg. Two years later he was fatally wounded on December 17th, 1833, in the royal gardens. Some theories suggest Kaspar was an imposter, noting his tendency to lie, and that he had actually stabbed himself in an attempt to revive public interest.

A walking tour, several memorials, and a section of the Markgrafen-Museum are devoted to his story. The exhibit includes clothing, curls of his hair, and even the underwear he was wearing when he died. Blood found on the latter was used for DNA testing in 1996 that concluded he could not have been a descendant of the House of Baden. However, a more recent test with several other matching DNA samples (which did not match the blood on his underwear) shows that, though not identical, the difference was not enough to exclude a relationship. The Kaspar-Hauser-Denkmal on Platenstraße depicts Kaspar as a youth arriving in Nürnberg and a young man in Ansbach.

The *Orangerie* and charming *Hofgarten* (Royal Gardens) return us

to the days of the Hohenzollerns and provide a relaxing end to a tour of Ansbach. Built by Karl Friedrich von Zocha between 1726 and 1728, it is considered one of the most beautiful park palaces in Franconia. It is in this park that Kaspar Hauser was fatally stabbed and a memorial is found not far from the *Orangerie*.

The palace gardens are also the site of the annual Rococo Festival held over three days every July. This festival has gained worldwide attention by taking visitors back to eighteenth-century Ansbach with period costumes, music and unique dance performances. Several other notable festivals include the Ansbacher Altstadtfest (May), the Kaspar Hauser Festival (late July/early August) and the Weihnachtsmarkt.

Ansbach is located between the famous medieval cities of Nürnberg and Rothenburg ob der Tauber and can easily be explored on a day trip. It is also a good location to start exploring small towns such as Feuchtwangen and Dinkelsbühl in "Romantic Franconia." GL

Additional information can be found online at:

www.ansbach.de

www.bachwoche.de

www.schloesser.bayern.de

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