

Why I love Hamburg

Before I begin my advertisement of Germany's second largest city, let me just briefly state my own opinion: Hamburg is the most beautiful city in the world.



There, I said it. Now, if you ask someone from Hamburg why it is the most beautiful city (and most people will agree that it is), you might not get a straight answer. Some might say because it is so liberal and refer to the red light district and the "Schanze" where everything seems possible. Some might say it's the beauty of the landscape, the rivers (Hamburg actually has three rivers with two of them flowing towards the Elbe) or maybe the easy-going mindset of the people. But if you want to truly understand the love for the city, you have to spend most of your time in its Harbor City. Hamburg was founded on the basis of sea trade, the harbor district and the historical "Speicherstadt" are the most important parts of Hamburg's self-understanding as an international, independent and successful city.

The wind, the smell of oil, fish and the faint taste of salt in the air – these are all symbols for freedom and for a citywide ideology that always faced towards the rest of the world. The landing bridges were once called "the gateway to the world" and this sense of freedom, of escape and of innumerable opportunities still reverberates in Hamburg's harbor district.

But there is also a certain feeling of decadence in the streets of the city. The prestigious city hall is fitted with gold and copper, the "Alsterarkaden" are the entryway to one of the most-exclusive shopping streets in the world and the houses along the "Außenalster" harbor some of the richest people in Germany. But it is this decadence compared with the Nordic down-to-earth no-nonsense attitude that makes Hamburg so special. The city was founded by craftsmen and consequently, craftsmanship is still highly valued. Royalty never played a particular role in the city's history and even the university is one of the youngest universities in Germany (since the city didn't even want high education for the better part of its history).



My personal insider tip for a nice, long afternoon walk in Hamburg is the “Elbe Wanderweg”. Between Övelgönne and Blankenese, this trail passes old captains houses and the better part of the Elbe beach on its way along the riverbank. The transport with the ferry boats is included in every day or three-day ticket for public transports and exploring the waterways of Hamburg is always a highlight. The city also offers many cultural experiences, of course. Between the numerous museums and the three musicals in town are also numerous smaller theaters and productions, especially along the “Red mile”, as we usually call the “Reeperbahn”. Long ago, this red light district offered entertainment for lonely sailors, but nowadays the bright lights and intriguing rumors are mostly a tourist attraction.

Hamburg also offers many possibilities for sports fans. Somewhere between the city's two football clubs, successful handball and hockey teams and numerous yearly events, such as an ATP tournament and traditional horse racing, everybody should be able to find something to do. If it rains, and it does so much less than some people might think, numerous indoor shopping malls can be used to fend off boredom.

One of my favorite places to have breakfast is “Café Paris” right in the city center, which reminds its visitors of the simple elegance of Parisienne cafés in the 1920s. At around 7 – 12 € per breakfast variation, it is not necessarily the cheapest place to eat but well within reason in the city center.

For a more traditional eating experience, just grab a “Fischbrötchen” at one of the numerous little booths in the harbor or visit the “Kramer Amtsstuben”, the oldest still standing building in Hamburg right next to the St. Michaelis church to try out the local cuisine. Another crowd favorite are the numerous different ethnological restaurants in the so-called “Portuguese quarter” between the church and the harbor, where Italian, Brazilian and Spanish restaurants surely offer something for every taste.

(text & picture: Carolin Schmitt)