Hiking Germany’s Rhine Valley: A Cultural Journey

May 16, 2020 – May 28, 2020 (trip# 2021)

The Rhine bends sharply at the famous Lorelei cliff: Katz castle in the foreground

**The Rhine Valley:** The Rhine is western Europe’s largest river. It flows the entire length of Germany along its western border, from Switzerland to the Netherlands. For a millenia boats and barges carrying merchandise have sailed up and down the Rhine. This led to the development of many small towns populated with charming half-timbered houses and gothic churches. On the river banks are dozens of castles, a greater concentration than found anywhere else in the world. The favorable climate and steep sides of the embankments led to the planting of extensive vineyards featuring Riesling as well as other wine varieties.
The area we will explore: Our focus is the portion of the Rhine that starts in Mainz and continues to Koblenz. It is the “Romantic Rhine”, whose beauty was lauded by European poets (e.g. Lord Byron) and painters of the early 19th century. Famous is the song “The Lorelei” with lyrics by Heinrich Heine: a beautiful maiden sits atop the most dangerous bend in the river and lures boatmen to their doom by distracting them from their urgent duties. The Rhine valley’s unique landscape was recognized in 2002 by UNESCO as a World Heritage site.

How we will hike: In general we will walk on the paths on the eastern bank (“Rheinsteig”) but we will also ferry across the river as appropriate to examine points of interest on the western side. The hiking trails are predominantly wooded paths on undulating terrain. They lead hikers through forests and vineyards past castles and monasteries to spectacular overlooks and points of interest. The Rheinsteig was recently voted the most beautiful trail in Germany at a outdoors trade show. At the end of each day’s description is a summary of the hike in terms of booktime (moving time, excluding breaks), distance, elevation and loss.

How we will travel: Comfortably! - three star hotels with two persons/room and luggage transfer between hotels. The trip price includes all lodging, all breakfasts, all boat transport within the dates of the trip, and all but two dinners. Your trip leader Steve Cohen lived in Germany and speaks fluent German. The trip is rated vigorous with typical daily hikes traversing 12 miles with a 2,000’ elevation gain while carrying a day pack.

Trip highlights include:

- a guided tour of the historic town of Mainz in the morning and independent visits to its famous cathedral and the famous Gutenberg museum in the afternoon
- the Eberbach abbey
- the Vollrads vineyard including a private wine tasting
- overlook of the Lorelei, the bend in the river that was the terror of the Rhine boatmen
- tours of several famous castles: Rheinfels, Marksburg, Rheinstein, etc
- exploration of the well-preserved townships of Rudesheim, Bacharach, and Boppard
- Rhine river cruise between St. Goar and Boppard
Detailed itinerary

Day 0 (Sat May 16) Depart US  The most convenient arrival airport is Frankfurt.

Day 1 (Sun May 17) Arrive Mainz.  From Frankfurt airport it is only a 30-45 minute direct train ride to Mainz.  We will meet up for a group dinner this evening. (group dinner)

Day 2 (Monday May 18)  Mainz  Mainz was founded over 2,000 years ago by the Roman empire. The construction of its magnificent cathedral, over 1,000 years old, is the focal point of the town’s historic architecture.  We will enjoy a guided tour of Mainz in the morning.  The afternoon is free to further explore the city on your own.  Particular points of interest is the Gutenberg museum, the central Roman-Germanic museum, the rococo mansions, and the outdoor cafes.  (dinner on your own)

Day 3 (Tuesday May 19) - Mainz to Schlangenbad  We begin our great adventure by taking a boat ride across the Rhine.  In the morning we will spend some time exploring Wiesbaden.  The features of the colonial style given to all Prussia’s acquisitions after 1866 survived World War II only in Wiesbaden.  We continue onto the “Rheinsteig”, the eastern bank’s primary hiking trail, to Schlangenbad, a resort town.  Its thermal swimming pools are heated to 80 degrees - bring a bathing suit and try them out!  (group dinner)  [4 hours 10 miles  1200’ up/500’ down]

Day 4 (Wednesday May 20) - (Schlangenbad to Oestrich-Winkel)  Today we visit two remarkable sites: 1) the Eberbach monastery was founded in 1135 AD as a religious institution. Today it is best known as a producer of wine and as a hotel where one could sleep in rooms formerly inhabited by monks.  We will have an in-depth tour of this ancient institution.
2) Dating from approx. 1330 **Schloss Vollrads** is one of oldest and most prominent vineyards along the Rhine. We will enjoy a private wine tasting on the estate. (group dinner) [4 hours 9.5 miles  1500’ up 1600’ down]

Day 5 (Thursday May 21) - Oestrich-Winkel to Rudesheim Along the path to Rudesheim we will visit the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Hildegard, a convent whose roots run ~1000 years deep. As we approach Rudesheim we visit the enormous **Niederwald monument**, built in the 1870’s to celebrate the unification of Germany. Rudesheim itself is a beautifully preserved old town with many stately homes, cafes, and wine shops. [4 hours 9 miles  1260’ up 900’ down]

Day 6 (Friday May 22)

**Rudesheim to Lorch** A morning ferry will take us to the west side of the Rhine where we will be hiking throughout the day. Along the way we will visit the privately-owned, beautifully restored **Rheinstein castle**. Founded originally as a toll collection station, it was rebuilt in the mid-1800’s. Towards the end of the day we ferry back to the eastern river bank [5.3 hours  12.5 miles 2500’ up and down]
Day 7 (Saturday May 23) - Lorch to Kaub  A ferry takes us to Niederheimbach where we continue our hike northwards. Our longest stop is in Bacharach, a charming old town set at the entrance to the winegrowing Steeger valley. The town’s medieval walls are still in place. In the afternoon a ferry takes us back to Kaub. In the late afternoon we will visit the Pfalzgrafenstein Castle located on a small island in the middle of the Rhine [4.8 hours 12.5 miles 2100’ up 2000’ down].

Day 8 (Sunday May 24) - Kaub to St. Goarshausen  As we traverse northwards we take note of the Gutenfels and Katz castles. We will stop at the visitor’s center atop the Lorelei cliff to learn more about this famous bend in the river and to take in the spectacular view from high above the river. (group dinner) [7 hours 13.4 miles 2500’ up and down].

Day 9 (Monday May 25) St. Goarshausen to Boppard  A light hiking day. We start by taking a ferry to St. Goar and walk a short ways to visit the huge, partially restored Rheinfels castle. Returning to St Goar we cruise almost ten miles up the Rhine up to Boppard, an ancient town with the best preserved Roman town walls in Germany. The narrow streets of the old town are crowded with noble homes, churches, and monasteries. There is an optional cogged
Day 10 (Tuesday May 26) Boppard to Braubach  After crossing the Rhine to Filsen we hike to the Marksburg castle. This is the only castle on the Rhine that was not destroyed fully or partially by the French in 1692/93. Sited on a hilltop far above the town below, it was unconquerable. The interior is very well-preserved and worthy of an extensive visit. (group dinner) [4.2 hours 9 miles 2100’ up and down]

Day 11 (Wednesday May 27) Braubach to Koblenz  We push on to our final destination, Koblenz, passing through the Rupertsklamm Gorge along the way. Our final stop is the Deutsches Eck, the confluence of the Rhine and Moselle rivers. (group dinner) [7 hours 13 miles 2800’ up and down]

Day 12 (Thursday May 28)  Depart for home or other destinations in Europe. Outside the boundaries of the trip, but close by, is Cologne with its famous cathedral. Also with a short train ride one can reach Belgium, Luxembourg, or the Netherlands.
PARTICIPANT PROFILE AND EXPECTATIONS

You should have a keen interest in breathtaking views and enjoy moderate to strenuous hiking. On an average day, we will hike for 5 hours and cover 12 miles. Daily elevation gain averages ~2,000 feet with a maximum of ~2,800 feet. On day hikes expect to carry 10-15 pounds including water and lunch. Make it a priority to help others on the trip and contribute to everyone having a great time. If you do that, you will have a great time as well.

At the start of this trip, you should be in proper condition for the challenges outlined in this prospectus, including being able to hike 10-15 miles with elevation gains of ~2,000 feet for several days in a row. You should be equipped with appropriate gear. Always be aware of the risks involved and conduct yourself accordingly. You are ultimately responsible for your own safety. Prior to your acceptance as a participant in this trip, you will be asked to discuss your capabilities and experience with us. We may also request references to confirm your fitness level and suitability for participating in trip activities.

The exact itinerary may require changes based on safety factors, transportation logistics, or lodging availability, and other unforeseeable circumstances such as weather considerations, natural disasters in areas to be visited, or recommendations of governmental agencies. The leaders reserve the right to make such changes as necessary, both before and during the trip.

It may happen on any trip that a trip member is or becomes unable to participate in one or more of the planned activities. Leaders in their sole judgment have the right and obligation to refuse participation in any activity to any group member for reasons of group or individual safety. Illness, injury or lack of proper gear or fitness for a particular activity are examples of some conditions that might result in a participant’s being unable to perform one or more activity. Leaders may try to find a substitute activity for the trip member, but this may not always be possible.

ACCOMMODATIONS

We will stay in three star hotels two persons (couples or same gender) per room. There may be two separate beds or two mattresses in a single bed frame. Luggage will be transferred between overnight locations. Most meals will feature a set delicious multi-course menu featuring local cuisine served by the hotel at which we stay. Vegetarians can be accommodated. If you have other dietary restrictions please inform the trip leaders during the application process.
SAFETY AND RISKS

Participant safety is a high priority for all AMC-sponsored events. Participants should be aware that there are risks associated with outdoor adventure activities, including but not limited to adverse weather and environmental conditions, remote locations of our trips, and transportation in vehicles or on foot. Aside from any personal medical problems, participants should be aware of the possibilities of bug bites, dehydration, sunburn and other heat or cold related problems. You should regularly use sunscreen, take care to be adequately hydrated and bring water on all day trips. There is a risk of lyme disease - you may wish to use insect repellent as appropriate.

PRICE

The trip price is $2,975 for AMC members. Non-members can join for $50, and get the same price. This will cover the following items:

- Lodging, breakfasts and dinners (with the exception of two dinners on your own in Mainz and Boppard) from the welcome dinner in Mainz through breakfast on the last day of the trip in Koblenz
- All boat and bus transportation during the trip
- Emergency medical and evacuation insurance coverage

Lunches, trail snacks, beverages (e.g. coffee/tea, mineral water, alcohol, etc.) and other personal expenses are NOT included. Transportation costs to Mainz and from Koblenz are your responsibility. The trip leaders will provide advice and will facilitate group travel. The most affordable way to get to Mainz is to fly to Frankfurt, Germany and then take a train. At this time, we estimate that the price for a round trip between the east coast and Frankfurt will be ~ $1,000. There are frequent trains between Frankfurt and Mainz with a typical duration of 30 minutes.

The final trip price is based on the actual costs incurred. Any savings or cost increases will be passed back to you, the participant. The cost estimates in this prospectus are conservative, and so a refund is considerably more likely than a price increase.

AMC Adventure Travel trips are run on a non-profit basis. Leaders are volunteers who are not compensated except for their travel costs associated with the trip. The advertised trip cost includes a surcharge which goes toward the administrative expenses of the AMC Adventure Travel program.

The trip fee includes emergency medical and evacuation insurance coverage, which is required by the AMC. It does not include insurance for travel delay, interruption, or cancellation, or for baggage loss. If the possibility of such problems concerns you, individual travel insurance is suggested. The AMC has a recommended vendor whose material will be sent to you if your application is accepted.

Any unspent funds will be refunded to the participants.
REGISTRATION and CANCELLATION

To apply, you must complete and submit the application, confidential medical form, supplemental medical form (if appropriate) and waiver form. You can download them from this website: Application Documents. Mail the registration deposit of $1,000 and all required forms to Steve Cohen at 2802 Arbor Drive #2 Madison, WI 53711. You will not be accepted, and your check will not be deposited, until the leaders have determined by telephone conversation with you that you and the trip are a good match. The final balance of $1,975 is due November 1, 2019. Deposit checks from waitlisted applicants will not be cashed until they are accepted AND they confirm continued interest in joining the trip. All payments by check should be payable to the Appalachian Mountain Club.

Our cancellation policy is based on several considerations. Cancellation will not be allowed to raise the cost to the other participants or to the leaders. You may cancel without penalty until you have been told affirmatively that the trip will run on schedule as planned. After that date the minimum penalty is $200. If actual costs (expenses already incurred on your behalf, and any unavoidable future expenses that will be incurred as a result of your registration and cancellation) are higher, they will be assessed instead, unless they can be applied toward another acceptable participant.

This trip is likely to fill quickly. If you are interested, you should apply as soon as possible. When registration is complete, we will send all participants the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all those going on the trip.

In the unlikely event that the trip is cancelled because not enough acceptable participants apply, everything you have paid will be refunded in full.

QUESTIONS

A link to the application documents is immediately above in the registration section. If you have any questions, please contact Steve or Mike.
Steve: 617-997-6861 before 9PM eastern time zone, or at scohen1234@gmail.com.
Mike: 301-881-7068 before 9PM eastern time zone, or at mike.darzi@gmail.com

LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The romantic Rhine valley
Gutenberg Museum
Mainz Cathedral
Rheinsteig Trail
Eberbach Monastery
Valley of the Lorelei
Rheinstein Castle
Marksburg Castle
TRIP LEADER

Steve Cohen has planned and led nineteen hiking/trekking-oriented Adventure Travel trips to such destinations the Haute Route (from Chamonix, France to Zermatt, Switzerland), the Alta Via II through the Italian Dolomites, the tour of the Jungfrau region (Switzerland), Patagonia, the high mountains huts of Austria, etc. He lived in Europe for four years and is fluent in both French and German. Steve is currently chair of Adventure Travel.

CO-LEADER

Mike Darzi has led outings for the AMC Potomac Chapter and the Sierra Club for about 20 years. Since retiring a few years ago, he spends much of his time (planning &) leading outdoor activities and as advocate for environmental issues. He has led numerous multi-day trips in the northeast and mid-Atlantic U.S. He has recently led or co-led AMC Adventure Travel trips to Morocco, the French and Swiss Alps, and the Dolomites. He has traveled extensively for work and adventure, and is fluent in French.