

Grand Circle Cruise Line's

CURRENTS



The newsletter for Inner Circle members from the leader in Small Ship & River Cruising



Valley of Legends: The bountiful banks of the Mosel

by Philip McCluskey

It's difficult not to be spellbound by the beauty of the Mosel River. Each bend introduces new charms: pastoral panoramas of quaint villages, and verdant, rolling hills. Gaze upward as you drift along this serpentine sibling of the Rhine, and you're likely to spot the region's famous steep vineyards that produce some of the world's best wines. Oenophiles from around the globe travel here to sample the superb vintages, most notably from the Riesling grapes that make up more than 50 percent of the plantings.

Dig a little deeper along the banks of this winding river, however, and you'll realize this is much more than just a wine region.

Communities with ancient roots

Winding from the Vosges Mountains in France, through Luxembourg, before meeting with the Rhine in Germany, the Mosel River has been drawing people to its bountiful banks for millennia. There is evidence of settlement in the region as far

back as the Neolithic period (approximately 5,000 BC), and recorded history here dates back more than 3,000 years.

As travelers discover lush countryside, remnants of the region's storied history emerge. Cobblestone villages exude medieval charm far below the shadow of dignified castle ruins. As the river unfurls, a story unfolds: of ancient cities, brilliant poets, world-changing philosophers, and a landscape that has inspired them all.

Luxembourg: Remembering the fallen

In addition to being one of Europe's tiniest countries, Luxembourg is also known for its high standard of living—it has one of the world's highest gross domestic products per capita, coming in at triple the European Union average.

This 1,000-square-mile country sandwiched between France, Germany, and Belgium

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#1 "World's Best River Cruise Line" for the second year in a row!

See page 34 to learn more about this honor from *Condé Nast Traveler*

Left: The Mosel River is renowned for fruitful vineyards, and quaint medieval towns.



Despite the appearance of Berncastel's "Pointed House," the building is quite sound: It has been standing since 1416, and today houses a wine tavern.

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Plus: architectural marvels, your letters & stories, French recipes, and more

was at the heart of one of modern history's most famous and pivotal conflicts: the Battle of the Bulge.

This was one of Adolph Hitler's last counter-offensives in his efforts to turn the tide of Germany's battleground descent. Though it was ultimately a victory for the Allied Forces, they suffered devastating losses in what Churchill called "the greatest American battle" of the war. Luxembourg American Cemetery and Memorial is a dignified reminder of the sacrifices American troops made in their liberation of Luxembourg.

Trier: Birthplace of a revolutionary mind

Another impressive stop along the Mosel is Trier, the oldest city in Germany. Established by the Roman emperor Augustus, the city has a wealth of Roman monuments. The amphitheater here—which dates to AD 100—is among the best preserved in the world, and the *Porta Nigra* (Black Gate) is an impressive 90-foot-tall reminder of the city's heyday before Pax Romana crumbled.

Many centuries later, German philosopher and economist Karl Marx was born here. Credited as the father of communism, Marx spent his formative years in Trier, and, before becoming a serious and influential ideologue, he displayed a fondness for rabble-rousing. He even became president of the Trier Tavern Club drinking society.

The polymath of Kues

A storybook aura pervades Bernkastel-Kues, where half-timbered homes like the 15th-century "Pointed House" leave visitors reaching for their camera. The town of Bernkastel—meaning "Bear Castle," of which you'll be reminded as you wander by the city's ursine sculptures—merged with the nearby town of Kues in 1905. Back in the 1400s, however, the city was independent, and was home to one of the foremost minds of the era: Nicholas of Kues.

A noted philosopher, astronomer, mathematician, and theologian, Nicholas also attained the rank of cardinal within the Roman Catholic

Church. His seminal book, *De Docta Ignorantia* ("On Learned Ignorance"), made an argument for the limits of human knowledge and received widespread praise. His work influenced such luminaries as Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, and Johannes Kepler.

Cochem's heroes

Heading north along the river, you'll find yourself in Cochem, home to Reichsburg Castle. Towering more than 300 feet on a hill above the Mosel, the castle has a history dating back to the eleventh century. It has since been attacked, destroyed, rebuilt, abandoned, and ultimately revitalized, and

now it is open for tours so that visitors can learn about the fortress' 1,000-year history.

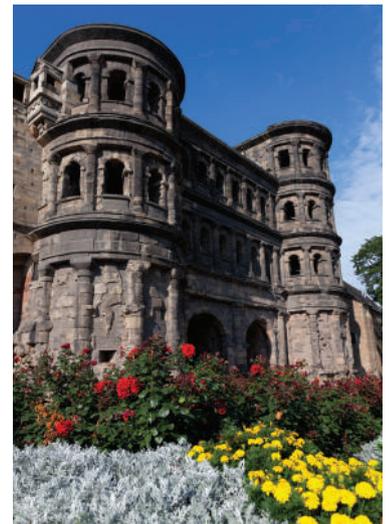
One legend is of a castle servant who, as he was walking to visit his beloved, overheard a band of armed strangers planning an attack on the castle. The servant ran back to the castle

to warn the castle's knights of the impending assault, and the warriors valiantly fought off the marauders. The lord of the castle was said to be so pleased with his men that he gave them the day off, and decreed that their actions would be celebrated from that day forward. So every year, a week after Easter Monday, Cochem residents gather in a meadow called "Tripp" to fete the loyalty and bravery of those men of long ago: an event known as Tripp Monday.

Toast to the legends of long ago

Charming towns and idyllic vineyards are reasons enough to visit the Mosel River Valley. Yet perhaps the rich history of this sliver of Europe—a region that has seen Roman legions and German tanks, and has produced world-famous thinkers, artists, and revolutionaries—is just as compelling a reason to travel here.

So if you find yourself cruising down the Mosel, be sure to raise a Riesling to the legends that once lived along the banks of one of Europe's grandest rivers. ✕



Built in the second century, the Porta Nigra ("Black Gate") is so named because of the dark hue of its stone.



Left: In spite of a tumultuous history, Cochem Castle still stands as a testament to the indomitable spirit of the town it overlooks.



Luxembourg American Cemetery is the final resting place of many U.S. soldiers, including General George Patton.

Discover the Mosel River's fertile banks and rich history with Grand Circle Cruise Line on *Romance of the Rhine & Mosel*: www.gct.com/sab2014.