MARTIN RANDALL TRAVEL

Romans & Carolingians
Germany from Augustus to Charlemagne

22–29 April 2026 (мм 917)
8 days • £3,680
Lecturer: Dr Hugh Doherty

Magnificent remnants of some of the greatest Roman cities north of the Alps.

Roman remains include standing buildings and many outstanding artefacts and artworks.

The achievements of Charlemagne and the revival of empire is the other theme.

Insight into the Carolingian Renaissance with its learning, arts, and large-scale buildings.

The lands around the Rhine and Moselle remain a remarkably beautiful corner of northern Europe, beauty that was praised by poets and courtiers who lived under the Roman Imperium and during the time of the recreation of that empire under Charlemagne (AD 768–814). The region is also host to some of the greatest standing remains, artworks and artefacts of both empires in Europe.

The decline of the Roman Empire in northern Europe and the transformation of governance and lifestyles have puzzled and unsettled successor inhabitants since the Renaissance. Scarcely less surprising is how a Frankish king, Charles – better known as Charlemagne – succeeded recreating something of the Empire.

Over the course of his 46-year reign, he created a single administrative unit encompassing much of western and central Europe. More than mere territorial expansion, this was a conscious attempt to revive the glories of the Roman paradigm. He had himself crowned Emperor in Rome in AD 800, strove to re-establish learning and scholarship, and spread education throughout his lands.

The precious material remains of his achievement are few but fascinating and moving. Charlemagne's achievement and influence was greater than they suggest; the myth became more important than the man as he came to be seen as the ideal Christian king and a model for European rulers throughout the Middle Ages and even, in the case of Kaiser Wilhelm II, into the 20th century.

Stunning Roman remains constitute an apposite counterpoint to the enthralling story of the Carolingian Renaissance. The tour explores the growth of settlements such as Mainz from military installations into towns of status and prosperity; the emergence of the sophisticated urban space and mercantile hub

Cologne, early-19th-century aquatint.

that was the Roman city of Cologne, largest city north of the Alps; and the transformation of Trier, in the early fourth century, into a capital of befitting and beguiling grandeur for Constantine and his family.

Along the way, we encounter world-class collections of Roman antiquities, some of the most splendid tombs of the imperial era, and, in Mainz, the remains of those very ships that plied these river systems and underpinned Roman civic pride and prosperity.

Itinerary

Day 1: Trier. Fly in the morning from London Heathrow to Luxembourg (British Airways) and drive to Trier (Germany). Here see one of the great sights of late antiquity, the Porta Nigra, a massive gateway rising its original 40m height, and the Cathedral of St Peter which, uniquely in Europe, incorporates walls from the 4th-century church in the medieval structure. First of two nights in Trier.

Day 2: Trier. The Aula Palatina is another astonishing survival, a vast Basilica which is one of the very few roofed Roman buildings. The 'Kaiser' baths are among the largest ever built, an outstanding collection of Roman material is displayed in the Landesmuseum, the Cathedral Museum has a painted ceiling from the Constantinian palace and the superb Schatzkammer shows an astonishing Constantinian intaglio.

Day 3: Ingelheim, Speyer, Mainz. Built under Charlemagne and his successor, the walls of a uniquely compete fortified court and ecclesiastical centre erupt throughout the little town of Ingelheim am Rhein. Speyer Cathedral is the burial palace of the Salian emperors and the largest of the Rhenish Romanesque churches. First of two nights in Mainz.

Day 4: Lorsch, Michelstadt-Steinbach, Seligenstadt. The classical gatehouse at Lorsch Abbey is one of the most complete examples of Carolingian architectural design. Drive to the village of Steinbach to see the remarkable Carolingian church built in the 830s by the emperor's biographer. Seligenstadt is home to another of Einhard's works, a former Benedictine abbey founded in 828.

Day 5: Mainz, Cologne. Since Roman times, Mainz has been a major trading city (particularly wine), and six Roman ships (including two warships) are displayed in the excellent Museum für Antike Schifffahrt (currently closed for restoration work). Should the museum still be closed in 2026, the visit will be replaced with the Landesmuseum Mainz, which holds a superb collection of Roman antiquities, early medieval treasures and Napoleonic art loot. Drive north, tracking the Rhine. Cologne was the largest Roman city north of the Alps, and had a similar status in the Middle Ages. St Gereon is one of the dozen major Romanesque churches here, and

its unique ten-sided nave dates from the 4th century – Roman work can be seen embedded in the 13th-century structure. First of three nights in Cologne.

Day 6: Cologne. Cologne Cathedral is one of Europe's greatest Gothic buildings and it possesses one of the most revolutionary devotional and artistic objects of the early Middle Ages – the Gero crucifix. Spend the afternoon in the world-class Roman-German Museum, which in the range and quality of its collections surpasses even Trier.

Day 7: Cologne, Aachen. A converted Romanesque church is the setting for the Schnütgen Museum, a large collection of medieval sculpture. Then by train to Aachen. Begin with a walking tour of Charlemagne's palace before exploring his great hall. The Cathedral Treasury has an unparalleled assemblage of early medieval treasures including what is almost certainly Charlemagne's sarcophagus. We finish with his palatine chapel, the finest surviving architectural achievement of the era.

Day 8: Cologne. A little free time to explore Cologne, or visit one of its excellent art galleries or museums. Return to London by train, arriving around 5.45pm.

Lecturer

Dr Hugh Doherty. Lecturer in medieval history at the University of East Anglia. He was taught at the Universities of London, Cambridge, and Oxford, and was a research fellow at Jesus College, Oxford. He specialises in the period, 700–1200, and publishes on western kings, secular élites and their records. He is a keen believer in the value of exploring and understanding the architectural fabric, material culture and landscapes of the past.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,680 or £3,410 without flights/trains. **Single occupancy:** £4,030 or £3,760 without flights/trains.

Included: flight (economy class) with British Airways and train/Eurostar (first class/standard premier); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts, and 5 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Park Plaza, Trier (parkplaza-trier.de): 4-star, 10 minutes' walk from the cathedral. **Hyatt Regency, Mainz** (hyatt.com) 4-star on the banks of the Rhine. **Hotel Mondial am Dom, Cologne** (all.accor.com) 4-star close to the cathedral. *Single rooms throughout are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? The tour involves a lot of walking and standing in museums and churches. A good level of fitness is essential. You will be on your feet for lengthy stretches of time. Average distance by coach per day: 70 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.