

Photographs by author



Tourists hang out around the Renaissance buildings in Stuttgart

WAYFARER ▶ From wine trails to swanky automobile museums to shopping streets — Stuttgart is a charmer, says **Aruna Rathod**

A Teutonic summer

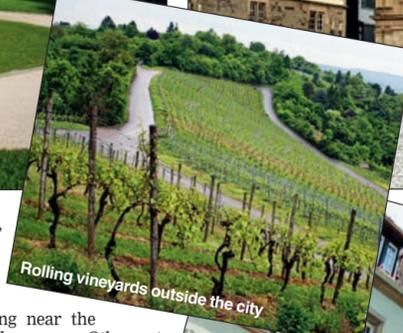
From fast Mercs and Porsches to the super-fast Deutsche Bahn trains — Germany is a land of superlatives and Stuttgart, with its rich culture and beauty, symbolises the best that the country has to offer. And South Germany, where Stuttgart is situated, has something for everyone — the dream-come-true Mercedes Benz and Porsche museums, quaint wine taverns

and beer gardens to chill out in, museums and buildings steeped in history, shopping streets, spas, amusement parks and more. Summer in Stuttgart — which extends till September — is a season for celebration. The capital of Baden-Württemberg region is home to the Königstrasse (King's Street) — one of the longest shopping areas and a popular haunt for tourists. After a bout of rain, the sun shone bright and warm upon my visit. I had a

beautiful time, watching couples, children and families soaking in the sun, cycling around and lazing near the fountains at the palace square. Others sat in cafés lingering over beer and wine, nibbling on bread or meat, drowned in hearty conversation.

Stuttgart was once home to Georg W. F. Hegel, the famous philosopher. His house is now a museum with his manuscripts, pictures and documents on display. The main square in Stuttgart is steeped in history too. It has a castle, which used to house the dukes and counts of Württemberg, an old granary with a pointed roof, Renaissance buildings and modern glass structures. The old granary is visible from everywhere, towering into the sky. It is now a museum for musical instruments, while the castle is the State Museum with a lovely courtyard where concerts are held.

Walking around the square is the best way to get a feel of the city. I was lucky to experience the commotion of traditional markets, held on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays in the Marketplace and Schiller Square. It was the season for fresh asparagus, which was being sold on carts along with other veg-



Rolling vineyards outside the city



◀ A giant pig welcomes visitors to the Schweine Museum

▶ Ready reckoner

■ **Getting there:** There are regular flights to Stuttgart from Calcutta, via Vienna and London. Return airfare per person begins from Rs 48,000.

■ **Staying there:** There is a range of accommodation in Stuttgart ranging from youth hostels to five-star hotels.

■ **Exchange rate:** 1.00 EUR = 59.24 INR



Map not to scale



The old granary is now a museum for musical instruments

gies. A few feet away was the colourful flower market. There is also a permanent market for exotic grocery and home products, housed in the Market Hall across the road.

The S-bahn (suburban rail) and the U-bahn (underground rail) are well connected with all parts of the city. Depending on how long you will be in Stuttgart, pick up a three-day ticket or a single day pass that enables you to travel unlimited.

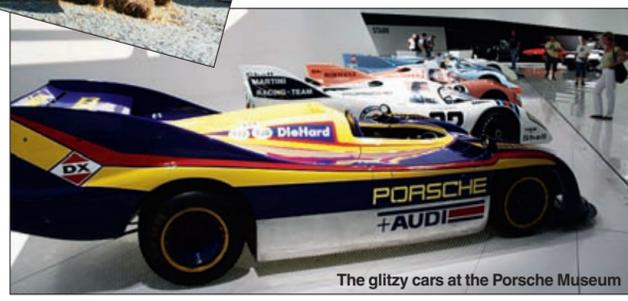
Another feather in Stuttgart's cap is its history of automobiles. A short distance from Stuttgart station is the Porsche museum, which opened only last year. An imposing white structure, it houses around 80 beauties, right from the earliest models to the super-sleek Panamera.

The Mercedes Benz Museum too is a class apart — the building is in the form of a double helix, a nine-level display housing everything from the first automotive engine up to modern day models. One of the sections showcases Mercedes cars owned by celebrities, with the car owned by the late Princess Diana among them. The Queen didn't approve of the Princess owning a German car and she had eventually returned it to Mercedes.

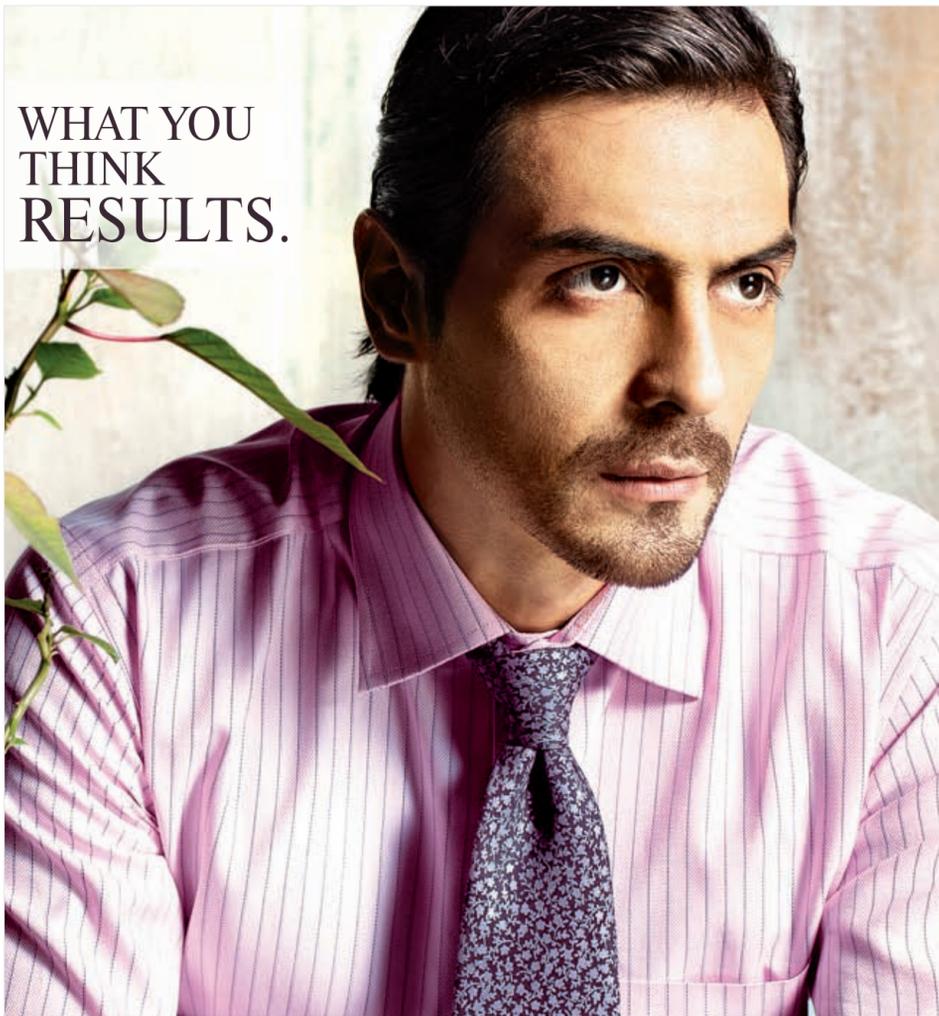
Stuttgart is also famous for its wines. A few miles outside the city you will find gentle rolling hills of grape vines arranged in neat rows. Make sure you visit the Neesenbach and Neckar valleys. History has it that as far back as 300 AD Roman Emperors cultivated vineyards here. Check out the wine trails in Ulhbach and visit the Stuttgart Viniculture museum to know about wine-making. Watch out for *besens* which are temporary wine taverns run privately by vine cultivators and have a broom (*besen*) hung outside their entrance as a welcome sign for guests. There are more than 300 *besens* in Stuttgart.

Another hotspot is the Schweine museum — possibly the world's only pig museum. A rather eclectic idea of a single collector, it has 28 thematic rooms with pigs in all shapes, sizes and materials — from piggy banks and soft toys, to pigs in art and culture and myths and legends. Displayed over two levels, it houses a whopping 40,000 exhibits!

Wrap up your Stuttgart experience with shopping. Not for nothing does all of Germany flock to the small town of Metzingen on the outskirts of Stuttgart. Every big brand worth its name has an entire building to itself, each selling wares at a minimum discount of 30 per cent. What began with Hugo Boss opening a discount store for its employees, is now the most happening value-shopping destination of Germany. You just can't miss it!



The glitzy cars at the Porsche Museum



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My favourite holiday

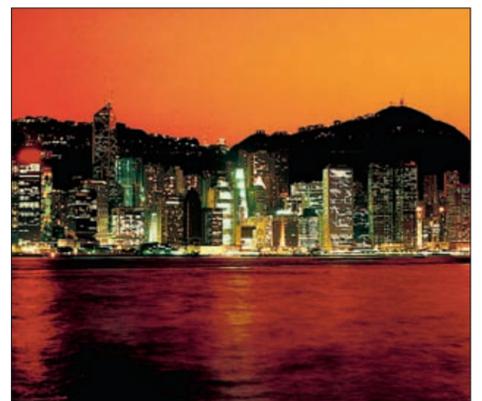
SWAGATA MUKHERJEE, actor

I always love visiting hill stations no matter where they are located. But my most memorable vacation was a trip to Kashmir which I took with my family years ago when I was young. It is something that I will never ever forget. From Sonmarg to Gulmarg to Pahalgam and the Dal Lake, I enjoyed every single place that we visited there. There was snowfall and I especially remember our *shikara* rides and also the little ponies that we rode. The food was awesome as was the people. In fact, every little bit of that trip is etched in my memory. It was indeed heaven on earth. I've visited lots of places since and even been to the Niagara Falls, but nothing ever seems to beat that beautiful holiday in Kashmir.



TUSCAN DELIGHTS

■ If you've been planning a trip to Italy, Away and Beyond, a Mumbai-based travel agency, has an exciting trip to Tuscany, a region in central Italy, up for grabs. The trip leaves on October 9 and you can book until seats are available (currently very few left). At Rs 1.35 lakh per person on twin sharing basis for 7 nights and 8 days, the package includes return airfare (ex-Mumbai), accommodation at the luxurious villa of Casale Sodini in Lucca, breakfast, all transfers as per itinerary, visa charges and insurance. The cost excludes other meals and extra charges. The trip packs in plenty to give you a taste of the region — from a walking tour of the Renaissance city of Lucca, to visits to the medieval towns of Siena and San Gimignano, wine tasting at a Chianti wine cellar, a tour of Florence and much more. Don't forget to indulge in the delicious wines and soul-satisfying cuisine of the region. Mail to suchna@awayandbeyond.in or call 9820027272 for details.



MUM'S THE WORD

■ Looking for some serious bonding with your mom? Well, Women on Wanderlust (WOW) has just something for you. WOW's Mom n Me package to Macau and Hong Kong is a 5-night and 6-day trip ex-Delhi that will begin on October 11. You'll spend a night in Macau and the rest of the time in Hong Kong. Tagged at Rs 67,000 per adult on twin sharing basis, the package includes 4-star accommodation, return airfare between Delhi-Hong Kong, transfers by ferry to and from Macau, insurance and visa, excursions, entrances, surface transfers and meals as per itinerary. If you pay the full amount by August 30, you'll get a discount of Rs 3,000 (so you better hurry). On the other hand, if a mother with a child below 12 years shares the room with another mother with a child under 12 years, each mother/ child pair will have to pay Rs 1.15 lakh which is less than the adult tariff. And if a payment of Rs 75,000 is made by August 30, this package gets further discounted by Rs 4,000. Explore Macau City and in Hong Kong visit the oceanarium. Also in Hong Kong, spend an entire day in Disneyland, not to mention the sojourn in the Ngong Ping 360 theme village. The last date to book the trip is September 25. Call 9891655054 or mail me@wowsumitra.com for details.