

When we need a quick change of scenery from quiet Rheinland-Pfalz villages, my husband and I head to Saarbrücken. In the neighboring German state of Saarland, Saarbrücken has a bustling city vibe and hundreds of shops, restaurants and bars.



The Saarland Scene

By Genevieve Northrup

Shopaholics Central

Perusing appealing merchandise and bargain hunting are two of my favorite stress busters, and Saarbrücken is a great retail therapy setting. At the city's shopping locales, you can overhaul your wardrobe, kitchen or entertainment center.

Bahnhofstraße: More than a kilometer of chain stores, boutiques and sidewalk cafés line this pedestrian-only thoroughfare. Do not miss a chance to meander the three floors of housewares and apparel at discounter T.J. Maxx's European store, T.K. Maxx. If the German weather hinders your spending plans, head to the four-story, 200,000-square-foot Galeria Kaufhof.

Europa Galerie: Europa Galerie is across from the main train station, 200 meters north of Bahnhofstraße. Among the 100+ stores, you'll see famous American retailers Tommy Hilfger, GameStop, Fossil and the Body Shop, as well as prominent European brands, such as Jack Wolfskin, S. Oliver and Desigual. Fashion-forward, budget-conscious shoppers can browse the racks of New Yorker, H&M, Orsay and Ernsting's Family.

Art & Antik: The most important part of my wardrobe is bling, and the hidden gem for my habit is Art & Antik at Obertorstraße 1. The owners have a boutique of fabulous costume jewelry, including reproductions of antique bijoux, at good deals. I usually lust after half

of the store and model several pieces before taking home something sparkly.

In the adjacent shop, Art & Antik showcases big-ticket items. Admire the vintage gold and silver jewelry, art nouveau glassware, art deco artwork, and original paintings.

Food for Foodies

You can find just about any type of food at Saarbrücken's 300+ restaurants. There are still dozens I'd like to visit, but here are some that have satisfied my hunger and my taste buds.

Café Especial: Though not as spicy and complex as the dishes at some stateside cantinas, the fare at Café Especial is fresh, plentiful

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More Saarland Shopping & Dining Highlights

Neunkirchen

- **Saarpark-Center:** 130-store mall, including TK Maxx.
- **Grill au Bois:** Steakhouse serving various steak cuts, burgers, tartar and carpaccio.
- **Stumm's Brauhaus:** Daily food and drink specials, *Flammkuchen*, schnitzel, wild game and kids' plates.
- **Chillers:** Sports bar with custom burgers, wings, ribs and pizza.

Zweibrücken

- **Style Outlet:** Large outlet mall.
- **ESSlibris:** Award-winning Mediterranean restaurant for special occasions.
- **Asia-Restaurant Kinto:** Affordable sushi buffet on conveyor system.
- **Gleis 3:** Café serving shellfish, steak and pasta.

Saarlouis

- **IKEA:** Inexpensive housewares and furniture.
- **Schnitzelhaus:** 16+ specialty schnitzels.
- **Mellow Coffee:** Coffee shop with bagel sandwiches and pancakes.
- **Bistro L'Escargot:** Romantic destination for French cuisine and seafood.

Homburg

- **Saarpfalz Center:** 100,000-square-foot shopping center.
- **Market:** Antique and flea market near the *Rathaus* on the first Saturday of every month.
- **Homburger Brauhaus:** Brews, brats and other German must-haves.
- **Pizzeria-Ristorante Portofino:** Italian restaurant known for fabulous pizzas.
- **Petit Château:** Upscale French and German gastronomy.

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and provides a little taste of home. The Mexican consulate has recognized the café's adherence to authentic cooking techniques and promotion of Mexican heritage, so the food is as close as you can get on this side of the Atlantic.

After dinner, Café Especial's dining room becomes a late night hangout for bar hoppers to grab munchies (until midnight) and pick from 130 types of tequila, including top-shelf imports. You can even arrange tequila tastings for a group of six to eight.

Café Schubert: Case after case of truffles, filled chocolates, pretty petit fours, cakes and cupcakes will tempt you. For a custom cake, submit a request online at www.cafe-schubert.de and stop in for pick up.

Coyote Café: This is a great start, middle or end to a night on the town, open until 1 a.m. Sunday-Thursday, 3 a.m. Friday-Saturday. Coyote Café's Saarbrücken location has Americana classics, Tex-Mex flare, a dash of German staples and a huge cocktail selection.

Die Burgerei: Brave the crowds at Die Burgerei to get your hands on a delicious, juicy gourmet burger. The small menu, hodgepodge of flea market finds, and steady stream of college students remind me of late-night hangouts in Austin, Texas.

Die Burgerei has few tables and does not accept reservations, so be patient. I've sampled two burgers so far and assure you they are worth the wait. The Parma has the usual fixings plus Parma ham, balsamic cream, and Parmesan, and the Chili is garnished with a sweet-spicy pepper relish. Delish!

Grand Asia & Oishii: These two Asian eateries have similar all-you-can-eat concepts, allowing diners to have rounds two, three, four and more during a two-hour period. The best part? You don't have to locate your waiter; use the iPad to view photos and ingredients. Then



with the touch of a button, the kitchen receives your order. Bring your appetite and your friends to try sushi, spring rolls, pot stickers, meat kabobs, fried rice, teriyaki tofu, tempura shrimp and more.

Hashimoto Restaurant: For a birthday dinner, we've had the satisfying seven-course dinner at Hashimoto, a Japanese restaurant specializing in sushi and teppanyaki. We ate miso soup, sushi and tempura before the chef prepared meat, shrimp and veggies on our table's flat-top grill. The cuisine and hospitality are worth the spendy bill for an evening celebration.

Affordable bento boxes and sushi platters are available at lunchtime. Hashimoto's casual brasserie, across from Die Burgerei, also has lower prices for sushi and a few warm dishes.

Zum Stiefel: Zum Stiefel was named after a shoemaker who founded a guesthouse in 1700 (*Stiefel* means "boot"). Two years later, the Bruch brewery opened nearby. Today, you can have one of Germany's oldest beers and a hearty German meal under the same roof. The schnitzel here is one of the best I've ever had.

Pub Crawling & People Watching

We no longer party until the sun comes up, but we've found a couple of welcoming bars for celebrating birthdays and farewells in this college town.

Ovid: This lounge carries more than 100 types of vodka. If you've had a bad experience in the past, consider cookie dough, s'more, espresso or cake vodka. My advice — don't look at the vodka book; take a seat at the bar and choose from the bottles on the shelves.

Tempelier: Fans of Belgian beer can get their fix from the 40 served at Tempelier. Delirium, Liefmans, Guillotine, Kwak, Tempelier and several Trappist brands are poured into their matching glasses for you to imbibe. I prefer sipping coconut beer from the fruit's shell. Other flavors from Belgium include *frites* (fries), steamed mussels, savory crepes and Belgian waffles.

Saarbrücken is a 45-minute drive or hour-long train ride from Ramstein Air Base. Hop on the Deutsche Bahn, have a DD, or stay overnight to enjoy a day of shopping and a night on the town. ■