

Clockwise from top: the skyline glistens in the Maschsee at dusk; Hanover Opera House; touring the many museums and buildings, including Leine Palace with its pretty bridge; grand designs at the gardens of Herrenhausen; bars and bites around town

# HANOVER

The capital of Lower Saxony, this city was redesigned for the motor car. Equally easy to explore on foot, its parks, palaces and lakes are royally good, says Alex Allen

**Why go?** More manageable than Munich, greener than Hamburg and with royal connections Frankfurt can only dream of, Hanover is the misunderstood middle child of Germany's urban centres. Art, theatre and some grand historic architecture bring colour and creativity to this bustling business hub. The beer's not bad either.

**What to do** You may be vaguely aware of a royal connection between the UK and Hanover somewhere down the line. The source of the link in fact lies down a different kind of line – northwest out of the city centre by tram. The jaw-dropping grounds of Herrenhausen palace are on a scale to rival those of Versailles, and the royal gardens were the dream of Sophia of Hanover, mother of King George I. (For 123 years, the Kingdoms of Great Britain and Hanover were ruled by a single monarch, and 2014 marks the 300th anniversary.) A set of golden gates lead out to baroque labyrinths, Greek statues throwing poses, and fountains that shoot clear above the treetops. After a look around the new museum, take the Stadtbahn back into town – you'll surface at Kröpcke, the near-geographic centre, and heart of the shopping and snacking district. A couple of pretzel-fuelled paces away you'll find Hanover Opera House, a 19th-century neoclassical theatre that also hosts ballet, concerts and musicals (*oper-hannover.de*). From here, either head west to the old town, where Bavarian-style *brauhauses* (brew pubs) adorn the cobbled streets, or south to lake Maschsee. While in the depths of winter you may find the surface of the Maschsee populated by skaters, in the summer its grassy shores are perfect for picnicking. Looking across it, the Sprengel Museum houses one of Germany's largest collections of modern art (*sprengel-museum.com*). The river Leine also makes for a waterside escape, and on its banks the pretty Leine Palace was once the seat of Hanoverian kings.

**Where to stay?** Located opposite the central station, Grand Hotel Mussmann (00 49 511 36560, *grandhotel.de*) occupies Hanover's top spot for seeing the city. Its spacious rooms have that German

high-quality about them, with leather lounge chairs, chrome Hansgrohe fittings and soundproof windows. You'll nod off while gazing at photographs of the city that look down from the ceiling. The breakfast buffet has the regular fare, but is unusually good. At Kastens Hotel Luisenhof (00 49 511 30440, *kastens-luisenhof.de*) rooms are luxuriously decorated, with thick-pile carpets and tasteful colours. Leos bar is all dark wood and red leather – perfect for either a nightcap or just watching the world go by.

**Where to eat and drink?** The food in Hanover largely reflects the personality of its citizens; honest, loyal to tradition and best accompanied by a stein of beer. That last trait may not be true of all, but is certainly so at restaurant and brewery Meiers Lebenslust. Its copper fermentation tanks are polished like the engine parts of a showroom Porsche, and the small list of brews include a chocolate-hued beer that is a perfect match for the overnight-roasted duck, which is both wonderfully crispy and tender (*meiers-lebenslust.de*). In the shadow of the striking market church, one of the few pre-war buildings to have survived largely intact, is the market hall. Nicknamed 'The Belly of Hanover', it's where butchers, bakers, cheesemongers and grocers line up alongside coffee bars, beer stands and food stalls, serving everything from fresh-baked pizza to paella, from seafood to sausages. It's great value, so be sure to arrive hungry. On the other side of the church, Broyhan Haus (00 49 511 323919, *broyhanhaus.de*) is sticking with tradition, serving up hearty regional classics in cosy, oak-timbered surroundings. If you're after something a little more chic, Clichy (00 49 511 312447, *clichy.de*), in the cute Leine neighbourhood, is a good bet.

**Time running out?** Take the sloped elevator up to the dome of the New Town Hall (with its elegant Gartensaal bistro, pictured) for views that stretch to the Harz mountains.

**Trip tip:** NextBike is a great scheme available throughout Germany, and with cycle lanes provided along almost every street, Hanover is well suited for two-wheeled tourists. *nextbike.net*

## Travel information

Currency is the euro. Hanover is one hour ahead of GMT. Travel time is 1.5 hours.

### Getting there

**British Airways** (*ba.com*) flies direct to Hanover daily from London Heathrow.

**German Wings** (*germanwings.com*) flies from London Heathrow to Hanover via Stuttgart Sunday to Friday.

### AVERAGE DAILY TEMPERATURES AND RAINFALL

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Min °C	-2	-1	0	2	6	10	11	11	8	5	1	0
Max °C	3	4	7	12	18	21	22	21	18	12	7	4
mm	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1

### Resources

**German National Tourist Board** (*germany.travel*) offers useful online guides and advice for planning a trip.

**Visit Hannover** (*hannover.de*) is the city's own tourist office.

### Further reading

**Sophia of Hanover** by JN Duggan (Peter Owen, £14.99) gives a royal insight, as chronicled in Sophia's memoirs and letters.

