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## TRAVEL FEATURE



### Take A Dip In Bad Homburg

by Kevin Raub

**While it may not be on the typical tourist's map, there's a resort just outside of Frankfurt that's been making a splash for years.**

King Chulalongkorn of Thailand, who ruled the Thai kingdom for a 42-year stint beginning in 1868, loved its healing waters so much, he donated a genuine Thai Sala to its spa gardens (perhaps one of the first such Siamese temples outside Thailand). Not to be outdone, Czar Nicholas II, who reigned over the Russian empire at the turn of the 20th century, personally laid the cornerstone on the gold-domed Russian church he had built nearby to accommodate his summer residence here. German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe waxed poetic about its "morning mists" in 1773. Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky (of Crime and Punishment fame) went broke here in 1867. So why the heck haven't you heard of Bad Homburg?



Ever since the ruins of a Roman bathhouse were discovered here in the late 1800s, this German playground nestled at the foot of the Taunus Mountains (30 minutes from Frankfurt by train) has hosted a virtual who's who of international celebrities, dignitaries, and others of the upwardly mobile ilk, all of whom come to town to immerse themselves in the city's natural healing waters. Bad Homburg's 109-acre Kurpark, or "spa park," features numerous mineral springs — all believed to be spouting forth water that is nothing short of miraculous. It was also here that Europe's first tennis courts opened in 1876, as well as Germany's first golf course, built in 1889. Needless to say, the well-to-do have been decompressing here for ages.

Not much has changed in Bad Homburg since then. Stroll its fashionable streets, flush with sidewalk-crowding cafes and white-tableclothed restaurants, and you quickly see that this resort city attracts Frankfurt's rich and famous like the Hamptons lure New Yorkers. There is a sophisticated, country-club air about the place — minus the pretension.

#### Bad Homburg

##### Bad Homburg Tourist Information Office

Kurhaus, Louisenstrasse 58

011-49-61-72-178-110

[www.bad-homburg.de](http://www.bad-homburg.de)

##### Golf Haus Restaurant in Kurpark

Kaiser-Friedrich-Promenade 84a

011-49-61-72-1829-0304

[www.golfhaus-restaurant.de](http://www.golfhaus-restaurant.de)

##### Kur-Royal Day Spa

Kaiser-Wilhelms-Bad

011-49-61-72-178-178

[www.kur-royal.de](http://www.kur-royal.de)

##### Taunus Therme

Seedammweg

011-49-61-72-406-40

[www.taunus-therme.de](http://www.taunus-therme.de)

Bad Homburg's marriage of modern luxe and regal history is everywhere, though nowhere more so than inside the Kurpark.

Though impeccable continental cuisine is served at the Golf Haus Restaurant, and the historical casino where Dostoyevsky went bust remains a large draw to this day, it is the spa park's holistic hot springs — said to ease rheumatism, liver problems, you name it — that keep Bad Homburg afloat. The most important public medicinal spring, the Elisabeth Spring, dates to 1622 and was "rediscovered" in 1834. Shrouded by a columned temple, it is a thing of beauty indeed. In addition to drinking straight from its tap and others in the park (many people do), there are two wildly different ways to experience the Kurpark.

Ground zero within the park is Kaiser-Wilhelms-Bad, a stunning neo-Renaissance bathhouse built in 1890 with a bronze statue that honors the Prussian King Wilhelm II, the last of Germany's emperors, and all of his rich and influential friends. Today, it houses what just might be the world's coolest spot for a reawakening, the \$4.6 million Kur-Royal Day Spa, a lavishly restored den of decadence and healing that opened in late 2002.

Once inside this nearly 27,000-square-foot facility (a two-hour admission runs around \$33), it doesn't take long to realize this isn't your average day spa. There are no lavender-infused spritzers, no jasmine candles — this place is all about curing what ails you. While all the usual spa suspects are offered at an extra cost (hot-stone massages, Thai reflexology, and the like), it's the unique all-inclusive facilities, ranging from hopelessly relaxing to pleasantly trippy, that beat a visit to the doctor's office any day.

You can hop from the Sand & Light Bath, designed to simulate a full day on the beach (sunrise, sunset, and sand included) through sound and visual effects; to the Wave Dreams room, with a constant temperature of 86 degrees, funky music, and a somewhat psychedelic light show; to the Roman Caldarium, a steam bath that will leave you feeling like the Pontius Maximus. There are eight such treatments to choose from, including the communal Saltwater Relaxation Pool, heated to a soothing 93 degrees. It's a two-hour spa experience like no other. And although it may not actually cure your problems, it sure does make you forget about them.

Those looking for a more — how shall we put this? — revealing day at the spa should head across the Kurpark to the Taunus Therme. This Asian-themed water landscape employs the elements of water, fire, air, and earth to create a 15,000-square-foot aqua playground. Clothing is optional in a large portion of this coed park, including the entire second floor, which houses tanning solariums, several pools and Jacuzzis, and even a bar — giving a whole new meaning to the phrase "Belly up!" If you're European, this will come as no surprise, but Americans will never feel, er ... more American than when hitting the Jacuzzi here.

By now, you oughta be feeling like a million bucks, so hit the town. Bad Homburg is rife with medieval castles, half-timbered homes, and historical churches, all of which are easily navigable on foot. From almost anywhere in town, the 157-foot White Tower, part of the baroque Landgräfliches palace built for Count Friedrich II in the 17th century, soars above the landscape. Head that direction via the pedestrian-only Louisenstrasse, packed with high-end boutiques and charming cafes. Strolling just off the street's western end, you'll stumble upon the Hexenturm.

A guard tower built on medieval fortifications, it stands sentinel over the Ritter-von-Marx Bridge, which connects modern Bad Homburg with its Old Town, an original settlement known as Dietigheim and first mentioned on a deed in 782. Here, tiny half-timbered homes seem to defy foundation laws along narrow, twisted streets, making for a fascinating neighborhood walk.

All that walking, of course, can be a bit straining on the ol' steppers. You won't need the peppermint foot cream here, though. Rest assured: Tired feet are well taken care of at a spa just around the corner.

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**KEVIN RAUB** is a San Francisco-based travel and entertainment journalist. His work has appeared in *Travel+Leisure*, *New York Post*, *FHM*, and *Stuff*, among others. He kept his clothes on in Bad Homburg.

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