

DEUTSCHES REINSHEITSGEBOT / GERMAN PURITY LAW

beer ingredient: die Bierzutat, die Bierzutaten

GERMANY'S HOP ROAD

Hop To It! Germany's Hallertau Hops Region

If you enjoy a good beer, you owe a great deal to this region of Germany—home to the world's largest production of beer's magic ingredient.

Germany's Hop Road

"WHAT'S *THAT?*" asked an American college student on a bus tour in Bavaria during his first year of study abroad.

He was pointing to fields full of tall, dark brown wooden poles, lined up in neat rows, with lush green vines growing on wires attached to them.

"That's a telephone-pole field, you idiot," said his companion, an older-and-wiser student who had lived in Germany for the past year. "Haven't you ever seen one before?"

"Gee, we don't have anything like that in the U. S.," replied his friend. "Germany's really an interesting place!"

You might be laughing, but it's a true story. Of course what he was actually seeing were the seemingly endless hectares of hops fields in the Hallertau region of Bavaria.

Although hops are grown in several parts of Germany, the Hallertau region (or Holledau, as it's known locally) is at the top of the hops list. It's the largest single hops-producing area in the world, covering seventeen thousand one hundred seventy hectares (more than forty-two thou-

sand acres) of hops fields in eastern Bavaria. A pastoral region of rolling hills planted with hops, barley, and wheat—essential ingredients of Germany's great beers—the Hallertau is bounded by the cities of Ingolstadt on the west, Kehlheim (near Regensburg) in the north, Landshut on the east, and Freising to the south.

The fifty-kilometer (thirty-mile) Deutsche Hopfenstrasse (German Hops Route), runs along highway 301 through the middle of this agricultural area, between Freising and Abensberg. And in the heart of the Hallertau, you'll find the Deutsches Hopfenmuseum (German Hops Museum) located in the little market town of Wolnzach, just off the Autobahn between Munich and Regensburg.

Known as "the green gold of Bavaria," hops have been a major agricultural product in the Hallertau for several centuries. So it's fitting that this particular plant has an entire museum devoted to the history, cultivation, harvesting, processing, marketing, uses, and culture of hops throughout the ages. However, don't envision some musty old museum

with dusty displays of dried plants under glass. This sleek modern building is filled with fascinating exhibits designed to attract both children and adults. And if you haven't already seen plenty of hops growing in the fields around Wolnzach, you can get up close to the vines planted right outside the entrance to the museum.

On a visit to the German Hops Museum last summer, I learned that Germany is the world's largest producer of hops, accounting for more than two-thirds of the hops grown in Europe and one-third of all the hops grown on the globe. Three-fourths of Germany's crop is exported to other countries, mainly the United States, Japan, and Russia.

Like grapevines, the rootstocks of hops can live up to fifty years. Every year after the harvest, the vines are pruned back. In spring, the new hops shoots poke out from the ground around the vines' roots—and the tendrils from some of the shoots are trained around the wires attached to those tall wooden (or sometimes concrete) poles standing in the fields. The plants can grow up to thirty