

## DEUTSCHES REINSHEITSGEBOT / GERMAN PURITY LAW

beer ingredient: die Bierzutat, die Bierzutaten

## GERMANY'S HOP ROAD

centimeters (nearly twelve inches) in a single day, climbing as high as seven or eight meters (twenty-three to twenty-six feet) along the wires to the tops of the poles. It takes only seventy days for the plants to fully develop, before being harvested in August and September.

Until the introduction of mechanized harvesting in Germany in the mid-1950s, hops were picked off the vines entirely by hand. Even with the improvement of harvesting machines during the past half century, hand-picking is still practiced in many parts of Europe. Today, many of the harvesters employed in the Hallertau are seasonal laborers from Hungary and Poland, who come to Germany to earn extra money working in the hops fields.

Only the cone-like female part of the plant is harvested for use in beer brewing. I already knew that hops are the ingredient that gives beer a slightly bitter taste. However, at the museum I learned that hops are also added for their natural preservative properties. And they even help retain the head of foam when the beer is poured into a glass.

In addition to all the interesting exhibits on two floors of the museum, there is a museum shop with the largest selection of hops-related products I've ever seen under one roof. I had no idea that so many items were made out of hops plants themselves, or with hops designs painted, printed, or embroidered on them: porcelain and pottery cups, bowls, plates, and plaques; jewelry and belt buckles; hand towels, T-shirts, and baseball caps; Easter eggs, candles, wreaths, and gift-wrapping paper; bath salts, body oils, and soaps; linen



Road signs guide you along the German Hops Route.



The German Hops Museum in Wolnzach.



Exhibit on hops harvesting (at the German Hops Museum in Wolnzach.)

sachets and pillows stuffed with dried hops; a variety of liquors made from hops, and the glasses to drink them from; hops tea, and marzipan candies shaped like hops cones.

However, there's more to do in the Hallertau region than spending all your money collecting hops paraphernalia. Hike-and-bike trails and bridle paths criss-cross the region. At Wolnzach you can follow the Hallertau *Lehrpfad*, a four-kilometer (two and one-half-mile) walking path through an open-air educational exhibit about the agriculture and ecology of the region. You can book a farm-stay holiday for your family, go cross-country skiing in winter, and take brewery tours year round.

Many of the towns and villages also host colorful events at various seasons of the year, from spring Carnival before Lent to Christmas markets in December. August and September are especially good times to visit the Hallertau, when you can see the hops being harvested, drink freshly brewed beers at beer festivals, and watch the crowning of the Hallertau Hops Queen in Wolnzach. Check with local and regional tourist offices (see sidebar) for the specific dates of events held in Geisenfeld, Rohrbach, Rudelzhausen, Wolnzach, Mainburg, Abensburg, and Au in der Hallertau, as well as the larger cities bordering on this region.

Both alcohol and hops are known to stimulate the appetite. Maybe that's why Hallertau breweries, hops producers, and restaurants team up to offer special "culinary weeks," from springtime for the "hops sprouts" and asparagus season, through autumn for wild game from the nearby forests and fields. Restaurants offer