



FULL OF SURPRISES

Think Munich and thoughts stagger to its annual beer festival. But as Nicholas Holmes discovers, the German city has many secrets.

TO THE uninitiated, Munich seems an unlikely fashion centre. Fiercely traditional and more famous for beer than brands, it's hard to equate it with more glamorous European names such as Paris or Milan. But to stroll further afield than Oktoberfest is to discover an interesting mix of global design giants and local artisans.

Maximilianstrasse, a wide neo-Gothic thoroughfare in the centre of the city, is one of countless streets regularly described as a localised version of Paris' famous Champs-Élysées. Louis Vuitton (Maximilianstrasse 12/14) is a perennial favourite among visitors, and walking further along the street away from the centre yields the likes of Dior (Maximilianstrasse 18), Hugo Boss (Maximilianstrasse 21), Valentino (Maximilianstrasse 30), Bottega Veneta (Maximilianstrasse 11) and Gucci's largest German store (Maximilianstrasse 31), a 580-square metre flagship.

For a decent pair of shoes to accompany a catwalk-worthy ensemble, double back to Eduard Meier (Residenzstrasse 22/Brienner Strasse 10), a contender for the title of world's oldest shoemaker and a company that has been hand-making shoes for Munich's

residents, including the Royal Court of Bavaria, since 1595. The Residenzstrasse store is cramped and a little chaotic, but don't be put off by haphazard piles; they don't do justice to the beautifully crafted leather brogues, boots and loafers on offer here.

Around the corner is Funf Hoefe (Theatinerstrasse), one of the crown jewels of Munich's retail scene and rightly so - hidden behind an unremarkable façade is a mall where brand names seem to play second fiddle to the striking angles and dramatic verticals of the arcade's design. Baldessarini is an Austrian label characterised by muted colours and clean-cut lines, albeit with a hint of southern playfulness. A couple of doors down is Pfeifen Diehl, a tobacco shop lined with loose-leaf jars giving off a rich, earthy aroma.

The Bayerischer Hof (Promenadeplatz 2-6), one of Munich's oldest and grandest hotels, proves an excellent choice for a quick break. The seventh-floor Blue Spa is home to a chic rooftop café with glorious views of Munich, while the super-tense can book one of the short massages or treatments, ideally suited to revitalising weary legs (a Swedish massage costs HK\$660 for 35

THERE'S MORE...

WHAT: Hirmer

(hirmer-muenchen.de)

WOW: The largest men's fashion store in the world, Hirmer offers almost every brand under one roof.

WHAT: Gössl (goessl.com)

WOW: Its jaunty collections put a mainstream face on traditional Bavarian clothing.

WHAT: Ferdinand Greiner (ferdinandgreiner.de)

WOW: Shirts with uncharacteristically bright prints and a superb cashmere selection make this shop a top choice for office classics.

WHAT: Stierblut (stierblut.de)

WOW: One of Munich's original hipster hangouts.

WHAT: Thomas Schuhe (thomas-schuhe.de)

WOW: A great option for shoes, offering international labels.

WHAT: Ludwig Beck (ludwigbeck.de)

WOW: This department store is an institution.

minutes). For those in need of a trim, the Arnoldy & Traub salon on the second floor will gladly oblige.

Nearby Loden Frey (Maffeistrasse 7) is easily the best all-rounder in the city. Here, impeccably neat shelves hold everything from international labels to German classics Joop! and Windsor, but the loden products which gave this 169-year-old family business its name are still available on the third floor. Johann Baptist Frey, the founder's son, first developed waterproof loden wool fabric in 1878 and it remains a comfortable Munich staple.

The day ends at Wiesen Tracht & Mehr (Tal 19), which stocks a rainbow of traditional Bavarian clothes - *dirndls* for the girls and leather *lederhosen* for the boys - all year round. A full ensemble, with *lederhosen*, braces, shirt, shoes, socks and a scarf will set you back HK\$2,220, a store assistant explains. Anywhere else in the world this combination would seem preposterous, but like everything else in Munich, high fashion and old customs are woven together perfectly. **S**

Getting there: Lufthansa flies direct to Munich daily, starting from HK\$8,643.