

NORTHERN BLISS IN HAMBURG

You may have your eyes set on Germany's ever-popular capital, but look further northwest and you may just find everything you could wish for in Hamburg, the Hanseatic port city boasting North German good looks, scrumptious *Fischbrötchen*, and culture aplenty. Top it all off with a generous dose of parkland and waterways, and you'll tick off more than you had expected.



Words by **Monica Suma**
Publicity photos, by
Monica Suma, *iStock* and *Alamy*

Moin! is the cheery salute with which most locals will greet you in Hamburg, so a reset on your *Guten Morgen* or *Guten Tag* may be advised as you set out exploring here. Airy, elegant, and surrounded by water, this northern metropolis is Germany's second-largest city and one of its most beautiful. In fact, it's one you may find yourself visiting again and again due to its distinctive blend of scenic beauty and architectural legacy. It gives off the feel-good impression of being cosmopolitan but isn't overwhelming. It's in equal measure sophisticated and alternative, innovative and provocative, with state-of-the-art design leaving its mark in the HafenCity district as well as the Reeperbahn enticing visitors for a night out in the well-known red-light district.

As the country's biggest port (and Europe's second busiest), Hamburg first and foremost embodies maritime heritage. Securing its place as a bustling shipping hub – marked as 'HH' on local car license plates for Hanseatic City of Hamburg – all roads lead to the mighty Elbe River that connects the city to the North Sea.

You might be surprised to learn that Hamburg has more bridges than Venice. That's because what was once the Alster River was divided into two lake-like stretches of water – Inner (*Binnenalster*) and Outer Alster (*Außenalster*) – dividing the city in two. The quintessential Hamburg experience thus starts and ends on the water, paddling on the Alster's canals. Boats are lined up, rowers gear up, and bikers and joggers gladly stride by along the Alster banks. It all makes for an abundance of canals, streams, and yes, bridges. Around 2500 in fact, more than London, Amsterdam, and Venice put together.

In summertime, sailing on the Outer Alster is so treasured by Hamburgers that as soon as temperatures rise, picnic blankets go down. It's no wonder locals are happiest by the water, watching cruise

ships go by and soaking in every bit of sunshine. You'll surely want to join them.

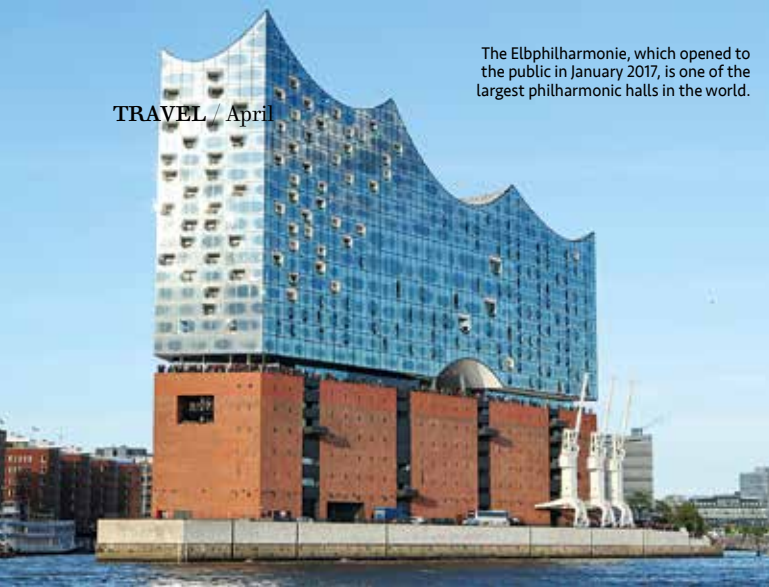
Depending on how much time you have in Hamburg, make the most of it with a variety of activities. This is where the city's different neighbourhoods come into play, offering everything from historical grandeur to upmarket tree-lined streets to young, bohemian vibes.

A good place to get acquainted with the Hanseatic city is in Hamburg's Altstadt, or Old Town. The oldest remaining street here, Deichstraße, is popular thanks to its eateries and specialty coffee locales. The adjacent Nikolaifleet canal is flanked by the sole remaining 17th- to 19th-century buildings to survive the Great Fire of 1842 and the Second World War. Next, head to the Rathaus (Town Hall), whose vaulted hallway is worth a look. Right behind, the symmetrical marvellousness inside Hamburg's Chamber of Commerce will awaken the *Instagrammer* in you. Back in Rathaus Square, the Alster Arcades delight visitors with their poise and elegance as the city's oldest shopping destination.

Minutes away, the Port of Hamburg beckons with an exciting juxtaposition of the old and new. Then make your way towards Speicherstadt, considered by many to be Hamburg's actual epicentre. The iconic red bricks of this historic warehouse district and UNESCO World Heritage Site stand out most marvellously in the glitter of the sun, as boats glide through the canals below the very bridges you stroll on. Take a minute and soak it all in before setting out closer to the river.

Don't miss the expressionist Chilehaus nearby, which is one of Hamburg's most noteworthy brick buildings. Its form alludes to a ship's bow, and the building is also on the UNESCO World Heritage Site list alongside the Kontorhausviertel, a trading-house district filled with architectural highlights.

The Elbphilharmonie, which opened to the public in January 2017, is one of the largest philharmonic halls in the world.



The House of Photography at Deichtorhallen, housed in a historic market hall, is currently under reconstruction.



© Henning Rogge / Deichtorhallen Hamburg



Paddling on Außenalster towards the Langenzug Bridge, which connects the Uhlenhorst and Winterhude neighbourhoods.

THREE NEIGHBOURHOODS NOT TO MISS IN HAMBURG

HAFENCITY

HafenCity, Hamburg's newest district and Europe's most ambitious development project of the past decade, lies at the junction of historical and modern Hamburg. This futuristic cityscape built into the Elbe River competes with pioneering cities such as Barcelona, Sydney, and San Francisco.

A long-neglected port area turned into a postmodern architecture site, HafenCity's inner-city transformation plans on extending the city centre's margins by 40%, including thousands of housing units, as well as creating some 45,000 workplaces.

HafenCity's 'lighthouse project' is without a doubt the glistening Elbphilharmonie concert hall that juts out on the horizon with graceful panache. The stunning wave-like glass volume built on top of the 70-year-old Kaispeicher warehouse is tailor-made to capture the colour of the sky. Particularly magical to visit and photograph around sunset, Hamburg's new star attraction since 2017 is also one of the most acoustically advanced concert halls in the world.

Designed by renowned architecture firm *Herzog & de Meuron*, the structure includes two concert venues, the *Westin Hamburg Hotel* and The Plaza viewing platform. The complex also hosts several restaurants, bars, luxury apartments, and more.

Despite several years of delay and a price tag four times higher than originally estimated, the contentious Elphilharmonie is architectural eye candy for anyone visiting and a huge treat for concertgoers. Concert tickets are not always easy to secure, but you can visit The Plaza on the 8th floor by booking a two-euro ticket online or getting a free same-day ticket on a first-come, first-served basis. Design buffs should not miss the Inner and Outer Plazas, which offer a rewarding tour of harbour life, brilliant architectural features, and shimmering effects from up above. Making your way up through The Tube, an 82-metre-long curved escalator with dazzling lighting along the way, is a fantastic experience in and of itself.

For a bite to eat with panoramic harbour views and specialty craft beer, reserve a spot at *Störtebeker Elbphilharmonie*, which also features live music from time to time.

Also not to be missed in the harbour area is Deichtorhallen Hamburg in the creative Oberhafen neighbourhood next to HafenCity. The expansive former market halls and architectural monuments house contemporary art and photography in three separate buildings, with the new Phoxxi exhibition venue set up until 2025. Phoxxi serves as a temporary home for the House of Photography while the southern hall is being renovated.

While you're there, if you enjoy authentic cuisine, plan on dining at *Oberhafen-Kantine*, a quirky (and crooked) brick building serving regional specialties since 1925, such as *Labskaus*, a seafarer's dish of beef, beetroot, and potatoes served with pickles, egg, and herring filets. Right nearby, *Hobenköök* serves a similar offering of seasonal and regional foods in a unique restaurant and market venue located in a historical warehouse. Here you're certainly spoiled for choice, so wander around until you find what most tickles your appetite.

BLANKENESE

Given Hamburg's ample access to water, a day trip to Blankenese should come as no surprise. In fact, it could well become the cherry on top of your visit, a joyful escape from the big city into what was once a fishing village directly on the Elbe River.

Hop on the S-Bahn from Hauptbahnhof, the main train station, for a one-hour direct journey to Blankenese, a well-heeled, residential district brimming with half-timbered fishermen's houses and stately pre-war villas where captains and pilots used to live.

As you arrive, you'll be transported into a chic, maritime charm with white houses dotted alongside the river and up the hill, awash with perfectly manicured gardens setting the scene. It almost looks Mediterranean – certainly not Hanseatic, as you'd expect, still being in Hamburg.

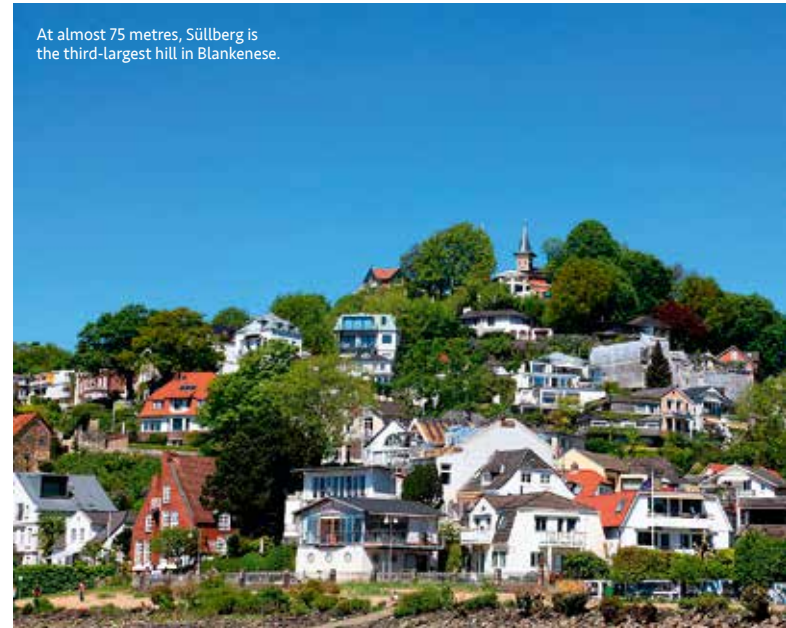
You're in for a good workout as you explore Treppenviertel with its crisscrossing stairs, winding alleys, and picture-perfect old-town looks. This neighbourhood is very quaint and provides a sharp contrast to the dynamic city centre, although not located very far from it. Here you'll be pausing often enough, either to catch your breath (Did I say stairs? Yes, about 5000 of them!) or to take yet another picture of this idyllic part of western Hamburg.

A treat awaits after climbing to the top of 72-metre-high Süllberg. For the undisputed best view of the Elbe, head towards the five-star *Hotel Louis C. Jacob* on scenic Elbchaussee. With a history going as far back as 1625, the iconic property has delighted Blankenese visitors for centuries. Its most beloved, enduring legacy is to be found under a canopy of linden trees on its famous Linden Terrace. There's no better place for a glorious sundowner as ships roll by on the Elbe. Don't miss Max Liebermann's impressionist painting of the terrace or the exquisite dishes prepared by celebrated Chef Thomas Martin at Jacobs Restaurant, a marvel of culinary art with traces of the Hanseatic ways. And with container ships passing by and the huge *Airbus* industrial facility in the background, the views could not be more captivating.

Upon descending, grab a coffee or dessert at one of the beach cafés, the most celebrated being the *Beach Pearl*, and meander along the long Elbe Beach. Make your way towards the lighthouse for panoramic views of the river from up top.

It's also worth having a look over at the Oevelgönne Harbour Museum, an interesting display of sailing ships and boats from the 19th and 20th centuries moored near the colourful little houses where sailors used to live. While you're still on this side of the city, take a stroll through Jenischpark as well. Designed in the late 18th century as an English garden for the family of a senator by the same name, the park includes the Jenisch House and Ernst Barlach House museums.

At almost 75 metres, Süllberg is the third-largest hill in Blankenese.



Exploring the Treppenviertel with its picturesque fishermen's houses.



A foot path in the beautiful Jenischpark.



The Centro Sociale, a social cooperative and meeting place in Hamburg's Karoiviertel.



The Centro Sociale is supported by people and organisations from the Karoiviertel, Schanzenviertel, and the neighbouring St. Pauli quarter.



The popular Vintage Gallery shop at Marktstraße 27.

KAROLINENVIERTEL

For a decidedly different feel, join the locals for a relaxed exploration of Karolinenviertel. This is the perfect spot to start the weekend off right, at a hip café. There's nothing like a hearty brunch followed by some smart shopping, and on Marktstraße you can do exactly that. The dollhouse-style *Gretchens Villa* café is a must and a fan favourite since 2010. Filled with darling little shops, one-off labels, and vintage finds, this neighbourhood is your best bet for boutique haunts.

From a rather shabby and tired part of the city in the 1980s and 90s housing students and working-class residents, Karoiviertel, as it's referred to in short, has blossomed in recent years as an alternative district with much-improved housing and a slew of independent stores. With quirky design shops such as award-winning *Lockengelöt*, where oil drums are repurposed into cabinets, coffee tables, and home bars and vinyl records are turned into wall sconces (and much more), this area is as Brooklynite as its army of thrift stores.

For more spending nirvana, satisfy your appetite for knick-knacks at the Flohschanze flea and antique market held every Saturday (but make sure to check before going) next to the decommissioned Neuer Kamp slaughterhouse. Hagglng here is part of the fun – and expected by merchants – so try your best at securing some treasures to take back home, be it an art print, a piece of jewellery, or a lucky find of vintage fashion.

Nightlife here comes with many rewards for music lovers, in particular at Lattenplatz, the square in front of the *Knust* live music club, where many Hamburgers love to hang out. Located inside an old abattoir, *Knust* is where many international rock and pop artists hold concerts; the venue also hosts disco nights and the odd football game on television.

With its narrow streets and intimate atmosphere, Karolinenviertel merges with adjacent Schanzenviertel, another neighbourhood that exudes an arty, creative vibe. Previously divided between the districts of Altona, Mitte, and Eimsbüttel, Schanze – as locals call it – is most popular with young people looking for the more authentic counterculture it's known for.

For a pop of green amidst the independent record stores, street art, and hip boutiques, go for a walk in Schanzepark, a retreat in the middle of bohemia.

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Lockengelöt, a hip furniture and design shop at Marktstraße 114.



Quirky side street prints on display in the Schanzenviertel.

WHAT TO DO IN HAMBURG IN APRIL

On April 3, be on the lookout for **Shopping Sundays**, a rare occasion in which Hamburg shops open their doors for some Sunday-afternoon shopping.

Also on April 3, runners gather in Wilhelmsburg for the **Wilhelmsburg Island Run**, with a selection of marathons to choose from. Here you'll be running through some of the most scenic areas of the island. Sign up on the event's website at wilhelmsburger-insellauf.de.

On April 24, the prestigious **Haspa Marathon** takes place, with some 25,000 runners from all over the world making their way past Hamburg's most scenic attractions. It's a stimulating 42-kilometre (or 21-kilometre, or relay) journey for runners and spectators alike.

Alternatively, Hamburg is a great city to explore by bicycle. Simply rent a bike, or join a city tour to discover the port city on two wheels.

On April 20–24, the **Dokumentarfilmwoche Hamburg** film festival screens dozens of documentary films at a number of small local cinemas (dokfilmwoche.com).

Beginning on April 28, music lovers can relish in the return of the **Hamburg International Music Festival**, which takes place at the Elbphilharmonie and Laeiszhalle until June 1. Check the website for tickets. A word of advice – they sell out fast! (elbphilharmonie.de)

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