

A Guided Tour to

Marksburg Castle

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A detailed booklet in English is available at the gift shop.

Attention:

Visitors are kindly requested to stay with the guide; for safety reasons you are not permitted to visit the castle on your own. Furthermore, you will not be able to see the locked rooms without your guide.

Most notably: Please do not smoke or eat inside the castle. Do not take any cans or bottles with you either.

The Marksburg (St. Mark's Castle) is one of Germany's must see castles. It is the only medieval stronghold on the hills along the Middle Rhine never to have been destroyed, a rare example of history, virtually undisturbed by the march of time.

While there were many hostilities around the area and many threats to the castle, it was never in any real danger, partly due to its well-placed location on top of a steep rock and partly because of preparation - and luck. Due to this the castle was never conquered. The most damage done to the castle prior to World War II was from earthquakes. In fact, the only serious damage the Marksburg ever suffered in hostilities occurred 1945 when it was shelled by US-artillery from the west bank of the Rhine.

Every other castle along the Rhine was destroyed sooner or later during the centuries and fell to ruins - either by devastation (most of them only during the Palatine War of Succession in 1689) or through disuse.

Nowadays, they are either ruins or they have been rebuilt in the 19th century, during the Age of Romanticism, e.g. Stolzenfels Castle on the opposite bank of the Rhine. It is the fact, that Marksburg Castle has survived in its entirety, which makes it so valuable. The castle was continually modified to meet the needs of the ever-improving weapons, and new walls, gates and towers were added throughout the centuries.

Schartentor (Arrow-Slit Gate)

We are now standing in the ward or bailey of the third gate, in front of the Schartentor (so-called 'slit gate'). Altogether we have four gateways: the drawbridge-gate with the post-medieval tunnel-gate, the so-called Foxgate, the Arrow-Slit-Gate here and the Iron Door. In the Burgvogt's Tower on top of the slit-gate, the castellan of the castle used to live.

This is where the riders' steps start. The knight in armour could ride on his mount right up into the inner castle. That is the reason for the large gateways too. They were made smaller during the "Thirty years War" in the 17th century when it was no longer necessary to pass them in heavy armour on horseback - and smaller gates were easier to defend. Above the gate is a machicolation - a projecting gallery from which stones could be thrown straight on to the heads of the enemy if they tried to force their entry into the castle with a battering ram.

The big stone ball behind the second gate, the Foxgate, was attached on a stand by a chain, and this kind of a machine was used to break gates and walls by shuttling against them.

Riders' Stairway

Late Romanic/early Gothic bricklaying (fish-bone-pattern) can be seen in the Schartentor beneath the Castellan's Tower.

In the Middle Ages, these steps, which are broken into the solid rocks, weren't there. The "Rider's Stairway" looked just like it can now be seen on the sides of the hewn steps. The way up to the centre of the castle was intended for horseback-riders, because the stable for the horses is further up in the castle. The steep steps are not medieval, we guess the Hessian soldiers hewed them into the bedrock.

Coats of Arms

The **coats of arms** show the various different owners of Marksburg Castle; the different owners are associated with certain specific architectural styles.

The village of Braubach was already mentioned by documents in the 7th century. In the early 12th century records mention the **Noble Freeman of Brubach**, even though the castle itself is first referred to in 1231. It is they who must have had a castle here on the rocks. They must have built the lower part of the keep.

The **Lords of Eppstein** built the Romanesque castle complex with its triangular layout, which is very characteristic of the Staufer era. The Eppsteins were amongst the most powerful families at that time; four of them were archbishops and electors of Mainz, and one of them held the same positions in Trier.

In 1283 the castle was bought by **Count Eberhard II of Katzenelnbogen**, a son-in-law of the lord of Eppstein. These counts belonged to one of the wealthiest line-ages in the Rhineland and were a famous noble family - in 1422 they were mentioned 3rd in the German Royal Roll among the counts, and at that time they owned 225 villages, 11 castles and strongholds and 9 towns in that region. These counts built the Gothic part of the castle, giving the Marksburg its striking form.

The two sons of the last count of Katzenelnbogen died in younger days, so when he died in 1479, the castle passed by inheritance through the marriage of the heiress Anna to Heinrich of Hesse together with the village of Braubach to the **Landgraves of Hesse**. They tried to turn Marksburg Castle into a hill fortress with artillery batteries and ramparts in its outer defences ("Gunpowder-Corner", "Sharp Corner", "Poterne"). This work was mainly carried out by Johann "the Valiant".

When the old German empire broke up in 1803 under the influence of Napoleon Bona-parte, the Marksburg was given to the **Duchy of Nassau**. During this period, from the end of 1803 until 1866, our castle was only used as a state prison.

In the Prussian-Austrian War Ducal Nassau fought on the side of the Emperor of Austria, who lost. As a result of this War the ducal was conquered by Prussia in 1866 and the castle was taken over by **Prussia**, too.

In 1900, with the help of the German Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II. in his capacity as King of Prussia, the **German Castles Association** was able to purchase the Marksburg for the symbolic price of 1.000 Marks (that is 10.000 Euros) with the direction to demonstrate it as a real medieval castle and the living on it in the Middle Ages. This was done on the initiative of professor Bodo Ebhardt, privy court planner and architect in Berlin, who carried out extensive restoration of the castle. Until 1945 he was living in the Marksburg; the grave of Bodo Ebhardt is on the north-western fortification.

Today this castle houses the headquarters and offices of the German Castles Association (DBV).



DEUTSCHE BURGENVEREINIGUNG e.V. (GERMAN CASTLES ASSOCIATION)

The DBV was founded in 1899 in Berlin “to stop the on-going destruction and incorrect restoration of castles and other historical fortifications”. It is thus the oldest national citizens’ initiative for the protection of historical monuments in Germany.

The main task of the association is the protection and preservation of castles and stately homes. Since 1999 the Association's impressive specialist library, comprising around 30.000 volumes plus records on castle history and archives about inquiries on castles and manor-houses, is housed down in the city of Braubach in the Philippsburg. It is there that the Association's journal "Burgen und Schlösser" (Castles and Palaces) together with a series of books on castle research are published.

Note: Everybody can become a member – foreigners too! Advertising material of the association can be obtained later on for people who are interested.

The Romanesque Palas

In the year 1239 the Romanesque palas was built straight onto the bare rock and was altered several times. After a fire in 1705 it was changed and rebuilt in the recent form. A palas is a stately building fulfilling several functions all under one roof: residence, banqueting hall, conference hall, jurisdiction and administration building. This building has always been lived in. The outline of a trefoil window, chalked in on the wall as a last remnant of a once magnificent facade, is typical of Romanesque stately architecture. To the right you can still see large areas of rendering; once, the whole castle was rendered and even brightly decorated. In 1991 samples of coloured paint behind the bricked up trefoil window were found, as well as similar traces of paint around the courtyard-side window opening on the stairs.

It was only in recent times that the rendering on our old fortified buildings fell off and was no longer renewed, as there was no longer any interest in such large-scale investments. We are now facing a situation where we have to replaster the castle because the weather and the aggressive environmental conditions are gradually destroying the walls. Plaster rendering always provided the "protective coat" of the castle, and could be adapted to meet prevailing tastes by the use of colour.

Great Battery

The southern part of the large Battery was built in 1589 as a "House of Heavy Artillery", the north side together with the Small Battery in 1711. Note the cantilever beam construction!

The original Marksburg-cannons of the 16th century were made of bronze. The contemporary canons are from the time of Napoleon Bonaparte. In peacetime cannons were used for firing salutes for passing dignitaries.

The castle itself did not serve as a toll-gate, this was almost certainly located down on the Rhine, presumably in the area of Philippsburg Castle (built at a later date). In the Middle Ages, Braubach maintained a levy for a period of only about 60 years.

Small Battery

The Marksburg, a castle used for defence, administration and customs, is located where the old road from Wiesbaden that leads through the Mühlenbach Valley meets the Rhine-River (well to be seen from the Small Battery). It also secured the Braubach silver mines.

The Small Battery was built 1711 to control the Wiesbaden road and the town gates on the landward side. In front of us we have a replica of one of the oldest cannons, dated between 1450 and 1500, the first breech-loader in history. Each of these cannons had several loading-chambers which could be changed. The cannonball had a lead jacket. Due to inadequate sealing on the combustion chamber, both range and penetration were poor, which is why they changed to the muzzle-loader that we can see over on the Great Battery in the form of the big guns.

Upper Bailey

We are now standing in the upper ward or bailey. A ward or a bailey is the narrow space between two enclosing or curtain walls. This one was constructed in approximately 1300. After 1400 the lower ward was added. Its towers are open to the inside, thus offering protection to the defending forces and not to the attackers.

Herb Garden

In the mid 18th century a baroque castle garden was laid out in the upper ward, whereby the ditch was largely filled in. It was here that, in 1969, the German Castles Association created the first botanical garden containing only plants recorded as having been grown and used in the Middle Ages (about 150 different species):

- plants of witchcraft, magic and superstition
- a little pleasure-garden with its grass seat, known to have been common in gardens between about 1200 and 1500 (Latin name: hortus clausus). Contemporary paintings were used as models for this.
- medicinal and aromatic plants
- agricultural plants, e.g. flax, mustard, spelt

On the Wooden Steps

Opposite we see the former lead-works, today the biggest factory in Europe for the recycling of car batteries.

Since earliest times, lead and silver have been dug for in the area around Braubach. First recorded in 1301 the Counts of Katzenelnbogen had the mining rights - "within a radius of one mile around the castle" - and their castle, the Marksburg, had the task of protecting the mines.

We're now entering the inner castle courtyard through a passage in the castle's oldest defensive wall, built in 1231. This door was created shortly after the 2nd World War.

Please go down the stairs on the left-hand side and take a look into the wine cellar, which we cannot enter at the moment, because of the danger of infection.

Please be careful on the stairs!

The Gothic Hall

The Wine Cellar

This is what a wine cellar looked like in 1750. In the Middle Ages there would have been more full barrels than we have empty ones today. The only "standard" drinks in Medieval times were wine and beer. The people suspected water because it could contain risky germs. Braubach wine was the first to be recorded on the right-hand bank of the Rhine (691 !). The wine was pumped from one barrel into the other by bellows to separate it from the settled yeast. There are big jugs to serve the wine because bottles were not used. Glass was too expensive, wine glasses too. Little stone mugs were used.

The wine was brought up from the cellar for drinking in these wooden jugs or pitchers. It was usually served in mugs of earthenware or pewter. Noblemen and women had goblets of silver or gold which they took with them on their travels.

We're now entering the hall building from 1435 and will climb the stairs. *At the foot of the stairs you can find an opportunity to disinfect your hands.*

Kemenate (Ladies' bower)

The German word “Kemenate” comes from the Latin word *caminata* and means “a heated chamber”; we can also see a link with the English term 'chimney'. In this room we have a cast-iron stove dated 1612 as a follower of the original tiled stove, both were stoked from outside. This room could be avoided by using the corridor on the courtyard side - a very early example of this kind of interior design.

In order to conserve the heat, the small room was partitioned off using half-timbered walls. When these rooms were converted into prison cells in the 19th century the wooden panelling was torn from the walls by the prisoners and used as firewood during the winter. When we took over the castle, we replaced this panelling in order to recreate the atmosphere of a 'ladies' bower' of around 1600.

The thick walls made it possible to install a real window seat. Here the ladies would sit and spin their yarns, in the literal as well as the figurative sense.

The furniture dates from the 18th century. The four poster bed could be closed by curtains in order to conserve warmth and to hold small animals outside...

It was not common practice to hang clothes in cupboards, but rather to store them in chests or trunks. A trunk, as you can see to the left of the door on this example with its iron fittings, was a chest to which handles were added to make it transportable.

Great Hall

The great hall doesn't take up this entire floor. It was apparently the wish of the Counts of Katzenelnbogen to create comfortable living quarters here. This was already in 1435.

The great hall was the scene of the 'courtly life' of the knights: festivities, functions, discussions, feasts - all took place here. On these occasions, the lord of the castle would sit in front of the great fireplace, the ladies and damsels on the window seats. On other occasions great feasts would be held here. The table, already laden with food and drink would be carried in and set down on wooden trestles. At the end of the meal it would be carried out again. Once upon a time all these walls were painted, however there were no traces to be found in 1900 when the castle was taken over by the German Castles Association. For this reason the founder of the Association, Bodo Ebhardt, had the great hall decorated by two artists from Berlin. The remains of this work can be seen on the half-timbered wall. During renovation work on the other walls some renaissance art work was uncovered, restored and can be seen above the entrance to the latrine.

Behind the door in the outer wall there is the toilet. Seen from the outside the whole thing hangs over and flushing was done by the next rainfall.

In those days the windows would already have been glazed. In Medieval times the window openings would still have been sealed with shutters, supplemented in winter by wadding made from hay or straw, because in the middle-ages glass was very expensive. Windows of thin animal skins, mica or horn allowed a certain amount of light to penetrate. It is worth noting the door of the wall cupboard with its gothic mountings.

On the south wall you see the painting of Johann "the Valiant", landgrave of Hesse. It was he who added the bastion-like fortifications to the Marksburg in the 17th century.

Since the rather small castle chapel adjacent to the Knights' Hall cannot be visited with larger groups due to the risk of infection, participants can enter the chapel one at a time in small groups.

Chapel Tower

Chapel

At the apex of the triangular castle complex of the Staufer era this tower 1372 was being changed into the present-day form. The tower was there to give protection on the attack side. Only here, on the ridges which slope away from the castle, was it possible for the attacker to set up siege engines, e.g. apetraria (catapult) or, later on, firearms, with any hope of success. Across the tow the rock is not so steep so that the set up of catapults was possible. So, in effect, the castle presented only the minimum wall surface to the weapons of the attacker: the tower through its slanting walls and polygonal layout, the hall building through the solid structure of its 'sharp corner'.

The location of the chapel at the main side of a possible attack is significant. It is characteristic of medieval man, who was so very closely bound up with his religion, that he should place the castle chapel with the holy relics in its altar at this strategically dangerous point.

With its ten-part late-Gothic groined vaulting, this is the most lavishly structured of the smaller rooms in the castle. The corbels, however, date from the late Romanesque era, so that we must assume that they were taken from an older chapel and reused here. One of the figures is the unfortunately partially damaged "agnus dei" (Lamb of God).

As in the great hall, the wall paintings here date from the beginning of the 20th century, painted after frescoes in churches in the Middle Rhine valley. Above the window is the patron of the chapel, Saint Mark. In the Middle Ages this castle was referred to simply as "Braubach Castle". However, after the Philippsburg was completed, down in the town between the cliffs and the Rhine (1568 - 1571), a distinction had to be made between the two castles. From this time on the castle on the hill was called "St. Markusburg" (St Mark's Castle) or shorter "Marksburg".

The narrow staircase, leading up inside the thick wall to the former battlements and connecting the chapel tower with the Romanesque palace, cannot be used, because of the danger of infection. The group will follow the path from the knights' hall through the corridor next to the bower back out of the hall building and to the left, into the castle kitchen.

Castle Kitchen

In 1435 the old Romanesque palas no longer met the requirements of a representative building, and so this gothic hall building was erected.

In the castle kitchen the room takes up a whole floor. In other words, the outer walls are also the interior walls. You can see on the outer wall that the walls were roughly 3,50 meters thick. As this wasn't a side of the castle, which had to fear an attack, we must assume that such thick walls were necessary from a structural point of view. This large building, set in both the upper ward and the inner courtyard, needed a strong buttress on the steep sloping side of the castle hill. The thick joists, supported by four octagonal oak pillars and the close-set beams, give the room its special atmosphere - something that is enjoyed almost every week by various groups of people, who hire the room for candlelit celebrations by the side of a roaring fire.

On the back wall you can see Braubach's communal wine-press dating from 1767; the spindle in the middle is carved from a single tree-trunk!

At the time when the German Castle Association took over the castle, no-one had cooked or eaten here for years and so the furnishings had to be acquired second-hand. They are not medieval, but they illustrate how people cooked and worked in kitchens in pre-industrial times.

The iron cauldrons hang on pot-hooks, which, thanks to their teeth, made it possible to raise or lower the pots depending on whether more or less heat was needed. The pots were pushed over the fire by means of a large fork. In a dry place to the left of the fireplace you can see the salt-cellar. To the right of the door is an ice cabi-

net, which would have been filled with blocks of ice. The ice was broken from ponds and rivers in the spring and then stored in cellars or pits, covered with straw, leaves or earth, so that, with a little luck, the supply lasted the whole summer.

Food supplies were stored in earthenware pots. In the butter-churns the milk was pounded until the little lumps of butter appeared on the surface.

We're leaving the hall through the rear exit.

Courtyard

We are now standing in a relatively small castle courtyard. The buildings around the Center Court are set up triangular: Roman-style Palas of the counts of Eppstein, Chapel Tower (belongs to the Palas), defence walls. Since the Counts of Katzenelnbogen built the Palas in the Gothic style, the Marksburg has one of the smallest Center Courts of Germany's Castles. The court was made still smaller in 1706 when the Rhine Building was erected on the place of the former bakery; well and cistern were covered by it.

Bergfried (Main Tower)

Perched on the highest point of the castle hill we see the castle's main tower, the so-called Bergfried, which is almost 40 m high. The German type of such a tower is different to the British "keep", because the central-European "Bergfried" is not a residential tower with a comparable floor space and rooms inside.

The lower part of this tower dates from 1239. The upper part was erected 1468 in this realisation by the Counts of Katzenelnbogen. These so-called 'butter-churn towers' were almost certainly introduced into Germany by the Counts of Katzenelnbogen, who had first seen them in France and Italy. The keep was the emblem of sovereignty and symbol of power of the lord of the Castle. In the watch-tower two guards took turns of duty. If the castle were seized, a keep was the final refuge for the castle garrison and 'iron rations' were therefore often stored there too. However - the keep

of the Marksburg is too close to give place to the garrison. There are only three very small rooms inside.

Down at the base of the tower is another small room, about 2 m square; this is the castle dungeon. Through an opening in the floor of the guard-room, the so-called 'hole of fear', prisoners were let down the 7 meters into the dungeon via a rope. Fortunately in the dungeon was a toilet - in 1972 we discovered there a small vault under the dungeon. The guard-room too had a toilet and a fireplace.

The tower cannot be visited from the inside due to safety reasons.

Rhine Building

Now we find ourselves in front of the Rhine Building, built in 1706 by the Landgraves of Hesse and the last building to be erected inside the original castle walls.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Marksburg was used to house destitute disabled and retired soldiers. The younger soldiers lived here with their wives and children.

In the cellar of this building is the castle well, which dried up as a result of an earthquake in the year 1756.

The cellar also houses a cistern (which is still in use as a reservoir for water for fire-fighting) and the remains of the Gothic bake-house which burnt down in 1705.

The whole group will now follow the small staircase. At the foot of the stairs you can find an opportunity to disinfect your hands. Then the group is going to be divided by the castle guide: the first subgroup goes straight ahead through the door into the battlements and from there on to the left-hand side, into the weapons room and then into the armoury, the second subgroup goes into the armoury and then into the weapons room.

Weapons room

Inside the long table showcase objects are exhibited that were found in a cavity during the restoration of the medieval ceiling in the Romanesque Palace. Along the walls various pieces of armour and weapons are displayed. The exhibits are labelled in two languages.

On the back of the showcase there is a long row of halberds. The end of the knightly fighting method was determined not only by fire-arms (the model of a 12-pounder from around 1700 deliberately represents this era). Mounted warriors were also threatened by the phalanx-formed foot-fighting hordes of lansquenets with their long pole weapons, which we can see here.

Armoury

All castles had a secure room in which the weapons were kept under lock and key. The 19th century custom of exhibiting armour in the living quarters was not usual in the Middle Ages. We do not know where the arms were kept in the Marksburg during this period. The 19th century collection you see on display here (the "Gimbel Collection") shows the development of the armoured warrior from the ancient world up to the end of the Middle Ages. The suits of armour contain original elements.

Arms development in the Middle Ages can be summed up thus:

The original light body protection containing little or no iron became, in the course of half a millenium, increasingly heavier and more comprehensive. At the end of this era a suit of full plate armour weighed about 40 kg. It is, however, a legend, that a knight in armour who had fallen from his horse was doomed to lie on the ground helpless and incapable of moving. A well-trained fighter would have had no difficulty in getting to his feet and continuing the fight. It must be stressed, however, that the knight was first and foremost a horseman, and that he was only really effective when mounted on a suitably strong war-horse. During battle he was accompanied by pages and mounted soldiers, whose job it was to ward off other infantrymen. The helmet too went through a process of development: the strapped helmet was already in use by the Teutons on Roman soil during late Graeco-Roman times, but nei-

ther its rigid visor nor its coat of chain-mail made it suitable for warding off enemy projectiles and blows. The *casque* helmet covered the entire head and neck, sitting as it did on the knight's shoulders, but it allowed its wearer only a narrow angle of head rotation and of vision. The solution was found in the helmet with the movable hinged visor, which the knight raised with his right hand before battle, in order to show his face. This is the origin of the military salute still used by all armies to this day, whereby the hand is raised to touch the brim of the cap. The pointed form of the visor, also known as a beaver because of its resemblance to a beaver's muzzle, serves the purpose of warding off projectile strikes or frontal blows to the head.

The lance rest on the right-hand breast-plate of the last-but-one coat-of-armor shows that this was tournament armor; the lance was placed in the rest in order to 'unseat' the opponent. These knights bore their coats of arms or those of their feudal lord on their escutcheon or shield. Perhaps they 'took up the cudgels' to win the favour of a fair damsel who urged them on from her seat on the dais overlooking the so-called lists or tilt-yard.

The end of the knight-in-armor came not only as a result of the development of fire-arms but equally through the phalanx-formations of the hoards of mercenary foot-soldiers known as the *lansquenets*.

We'll now go down the stairs and into the castle courtyard, turn left, walk around the keep and come to the stables.

Romanesque Palas

Stables

We are now standing on the ground floor of the Romanesque palas or residential apartments in what used to be the stables. This room is partly broken into solid rocks; up to here the knights were able to ride on horseback. The very important part of this room is the ceiling. You can see the original Oak beams which date from 1239, the first construction phase of the castle! We are sure of the date because we have done a dendrochronological test on a sample of wood: by examining the annual rings of the beams it is possible to say exactly when the tree was felled.

Exhibition of instruments of torture and punishment (*“Torture Chamber”*)

Today you can see here an **exhibition of instruments of torture and punishment**. It is almost certain that there was a torture-chamber in the Marksburg in times when it was the residence of the noblemen of Braubach or later a grave of Katzenelnbogen.

One can distinguish between instruments of torture, such as the thumbscrew, the strappado, the rack, and penal instruments of municipal jurisdiction, such as the double fetters, iron collar, 'pig's head' (to be worn in the stocks or at the pillory). The iron collar was used for transporting prisoners.

The pictures, taken from Karl V's Rules of the Capital Court from 1530, show the supreme penal court or assize for capital offences. These laws laid down with scrupulous accuracy, which punishments were to be implemented and when. It was always the legislator's endeavour to regulate the punishments meted out, but it has to be said that, equally, there has always been despotism and sadism. It is important for us to realise that there were no machines in those days, and that man was the single most important source of income, as he supplied all the 'man-power'.

We now leave the core castle through its oldest gate, the Iron Gate, and then walk down the equestrian staircase to the last stop on the tour, the castle blacksmith's shop. As you pass through the Iron Gate on the right, please take note of the various extinguishing buckets that could be used to form a bucket chain from the well to the fire in an emergency case!

Blacksmith's Shop (underneath the Great Battery)

The blacksmith working here did not forge weapons. That was a business of specialists in cities like Nuremberg, Damascus or Toledo. The blacksmith of a castle shoed horses and all kind of repairs were done - he did the work that any ordinary village blacksmith would have done, say 50 years ago. The shop was the factory of the castle and is filled with old equipments and tools.

Next to the forge there is the dog kennel built in 1727.

We have now reached the end of our tour of Marksburg Castle. I hope you enjoyed it; it would be nice if you have learned something about life in a medieval castle 600 to 700 years ago.

Exit through the upper Foxgate (Fuchspforte)

Now you have the opportunity to visit the souvenir shop or to refresh yourself in the castle inn.

Thank you for your visit of Marksburg Castle and further on nice days at the Rhine valley!
