

# Historical Tour



**Wolframs-Eschenbach**  
Home to the poet of "Parzival"



## **Wolframs-Eschenbach: A Rural Town Steeped in History**

Wolframs-Eschenbach lies southwest of Nuremberg on the gently rolling ridge linking the Rezat River with the upper part of the Altmühl River. The colorful church steeple beckons from afar and offers a point of orientation. Discover a town that was shaped in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. It may be small, but the cadence of its buildings is marked by an uncommon harmony. This is what the former ruler of the town, the Teutonic Order, had intended: to construct a “beautiful city” and “exquisite houses.”

After the knightly order had gained ground here around 1212/1220, Emperor Ludwig IV allowed in 1332 that it “make a city” of Eschenbach. While the leaders of the Order had long been able to plan as they liked in their heartland Prussia, they now also rose in the West of the German Reich and became the absolute rulers of this town.

### **First Signs of Life: The Hill over the Eschenbach Brook**

In pre-historical times, the hill pushing ahead between the valleys through which the Eschenbach brook and its first southern parallel flow may have seemed like a sanctuary. Originally, it was used as a burial ground. Over time, the natural advantages of the site and the work of man combined to transform the gentle bank into a miniature Acropolis.

Silver headbands, which were found as grave goods in the former cemetery around the Liebfrauenmünster cathedral, date back to the mid 8th century and are the earliest evidence of settlement. The excavations done in the cathedral itself show that a small, stone hall church was first built in the middle of the 10th century. Two hundred years later, a new, larger church was constructed, one that reached the astonishing length of more than 40 meters. Apparently, Eschenbach must have already experienced a remarkable boom at this time.

## **The Lifeline: The Trade Route from Nuremberg to Strasbourg**

The traffic passing along the long-distance commercial route that developed in the High Middle Ages to connect Nuremberg via Schwabach, Eschenbach, Dinkelsbühl and Cannstatt-Stuttgart to Strasbourg will have made itself felt in the city from a very early point in time onwards. The first Nuremberg Meilenscheibe, a circular table setting out the distances between cities printed in 1559, confirms that Eschenbach was one of the stations at which merchants traveling between Nuremberg and Strasbourg stopped to rest.

### **Where the Frankish Nobility Convened**

A number of the highest-ranking and most noble Frankish dynasties were attracted to Eschenbach and owned several farms and buildings in and around the town. Among these were the Counts of Abenberg, who were succeeded by the Burggraves of Nuremberg following the year 1200, the Counts of Wertheim, the Counts of Truhendingen, the Counts of Oettingen, the Lords of Heideck and the Reich Marshalls von Pappenheim. These noble lords awarded several fiefdoms to the local ministerial dynasty called “von Eschenbach” in return for the chivalric duties the family performed. This lasted until the Late Middle Ages, when the Teutonic Order rose to be the exclusive landlord of the town as a result of endowments made to it and by its own acquisitions.

### **The von Eschenbach Family**

The beginnings of this local ministerial dynasty probably date back to the 12th century. The most famous member of the family, Wolfram von Eschenbach, wrote his verse in the early 13th century. The oldest records referring to the family are dated 1253. In one of them, a Wolfelin von Eschenbach is mentioned and is identified in Latin as a “miles” – a soldier, or knightly vassal. Other members of the family appear in sources as brothers of the Teutonic Order or as canons living in religious communities. The family owned and held in fief a number of farms in and around Eschenbach and resided at a prime location in town: “near the church.” The first half of the 14th century saw the decline of the dynasty. Heinrich, the head of the house von Eschenbach, sold his holdings to the Teutonic Order during the agricultural crisis and became its “interest serf” in 1358.



When the village was elevated to become a town in 1332, its center of gravity shifted, moving up from the valley of the Eschenbach brook to the hill, which previously had been the clerical and seigneurial district. The careful design of this part of the town is still very recognizable. In some areas, the course of the wall and of the moat was aligned with the terrain, while in other areas the land was re-shaped to meet the requirements of medieval urban planning. In the east, the city wall nestles around the hill in a semicircle; in the west it closes off with a clear-cut edge. The town footprint, outlined by the city wall, appears like a strong and fortified shield directed westward. Although it is not designed as strictly in accordance with architectural rules as the church, the city reflects a sense of a higher, ideal order with its rounded contours and the arrangement of its main and side axes.





## The poet Wolfram von Eschenbach

The names of places and persons appearing in the Middle High German epic poem "Parzival" suggest that Wolfram von Eschenbach came from this town, known today as Wolframs-Eschenbach. The author alludes to the Counts of Abenberg, Wertheim and Truhendingen, all of whom had owned farms and buildings in and around Eschenbach in the High Middle Ages. Historical references in the work limit the period in which it was written to the years between 1200 and 1217.

Wolfram does not hide from the spotlight. He often makes a personal appearance in his own work, identifies himself, and is proud of his artistry: *"I am Wolfram von Eschenbach, and I can also write poems."* When insults had to be parried, which he apparently had to suffer at the hands of a vain, aristocratic lady, he placed his knighthood over his artistry, stating somewhat polemically: *"I was born for chivalric service. If a lady does not demand my bravery, and loves me instead for my songs and poems, then I would think she's not quite right in the head."*

The "Parzival" epic is the author's most comprehensive work. It tells the story of how the chivalric ideals of bravery, courage, and the joys of a secular life might be realized, while nonetheless living the Christian values of humility and charity. At a young age, Parzival goes forth into the world carefree and reckless and adopts the rules of life advocated by others without reflecting on them. Soon, he finds that he has trespassed against his fellow-man, and casts into doubt the mercy of God. It is when he begins to strive to gain insight into his own person and the greater questions of life, when he begins to accept responsibility for others and to act in a more reflected manner, that life shows itself to him in all its goodness. In spite of his previous failures, he is appointed King of the Holy Grail and guardian of the precious stone that is the source of life and, on certain days, provides food and drink, youth and beauty to all.

## The Knights of the Holy Grail and the Knights of the Teutonic Order

In their daily lives, the Knights of the Holy Grail described in "Parzival" combine chivalric and Christian virtues and live together in monastic fashion. This corresponds to the life of the Teutonic brothers when they were establishing the order in Eschenbach as contemporaries of Wolfram, and they may even have moved to the city by his intervention. Around 1212 to 1220, Count Boppo II von Wertheim transferred the patronage of the church in Eschenbach to the Teutonic Order; either he or his father, Boppo I, is mentioned in Parzival as a patron of the poet.

In the course of the Third Crusade, merchants from Lübeck and Bremen had founded a hospice brotherhood in the Holy Land. Another benefactor of Wolfram von Eschenbach, the Landgrave Hermann of Thüringen, was one of the princes who asked the pope in 1198 to make this brotherhood a knightly order. A year later, Pope Innocent III complied with their request and the "Teutonic Order" was established. Initially, its task consisted of helping to defend the Holy Land against the heathens, to care for wounded knights, and to look after pilgrims. Some of the brothers of the order were themselves knights, some were priests. They lived together in so-called commanderies, each of which had a presiding commander.

The endowments that the brothers were granted in German lands was intended to lay the economic groundwork so that they could fulfill their duties in the Holy Land or in Prussia, which was yet to be christianized. In return, their benefactors expected the knights and priests of the Teutonic Order to perform various duties: that they would found hospices, care for the poor, erect churches and be active in pastoral care. The more the order's original purpose of fighting the heathens lost meaning over time, the more the Teutonic Order evolved to become a social class. The brothers of the order rose to be sovereigns of various regions, and made it their new objective to build "beautiful cities" so that the people in them could lead lives pleasing to God.



*Coats of arms of members of the government of the Teutonic Order on the outwork of the Oberer Torturm main gate tower built in 1463.*

# St. Mary's Cathedral

## 1 Liebfrauenmünster

As early as in 1236, records report of the Teutonic Order having a house in Eschenbach. In 1253, a commander and six brothers of the local commandery were named in a deed. At this time, they were involved in constructing a new large church for the Order and the congregation of the town, which was to rise up as a strong physical presence.

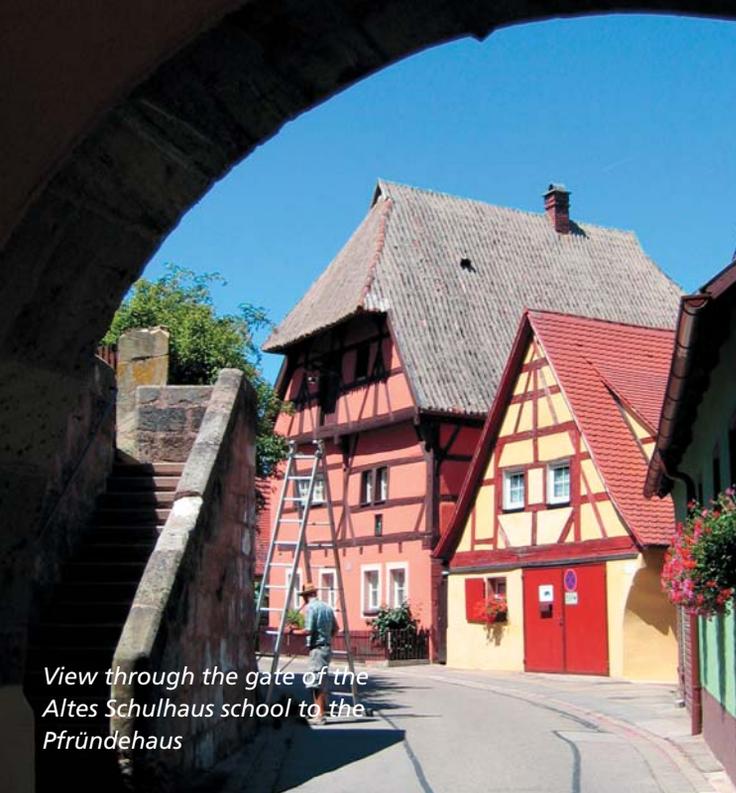
The three, late Romanesque lower levels of the **tower** date from around 1250 to 1260 and reflect the style of the masons' lodge that built St. Sebald church in Nuremberg. The early gothic **chancel**, which was constructed around 1260 to 1270, reflects the elegant design of the Cistercians in its precise execution and the powerful, rhythmic vaults that are reminiscent of the refectory of the Heilsbronn monastery. The **nave**, which was built between 1270 and 1310, is influenced by the simple architectural style of the mendicant orders: like the Franciscan church in Würzburg, it is also a large and wide hall, but only here, in the Eschenbach cathedral, is the spacious and harmonious character of the nave church accentuated. The Liebfrauenmünster is a significant example of early gothic architecture in Frankonia. In the middle of the 15th century, two levels were added to the tower in the late gothic style. This gave it its current height of 63 meters and made it the highest steeple in the diocese of Eichstätt. In 1956, its roof was covered with the colorful shingles we know today.

The **Rosenkranzaltar** (Rosary Altar) dates from around 1510 to 1520 and was created by craftsmen who were influenced by the carver and sculptor Veit Stoss. Characterized by its rich gold and silver colors, the most precious fixture in the church marks the transition from one epoch to another. The varied and intense religious feeling of laypeople in the late Middle Ages is expressed by the many figures of saints, while the influence of the sober, conceptual style of the Renaissance can be seen in the many symmetrically arranged figures surrounded by the full circle of the rosary. The saints appear as mirror images of the living and give the "Heavenly Court" a human form.

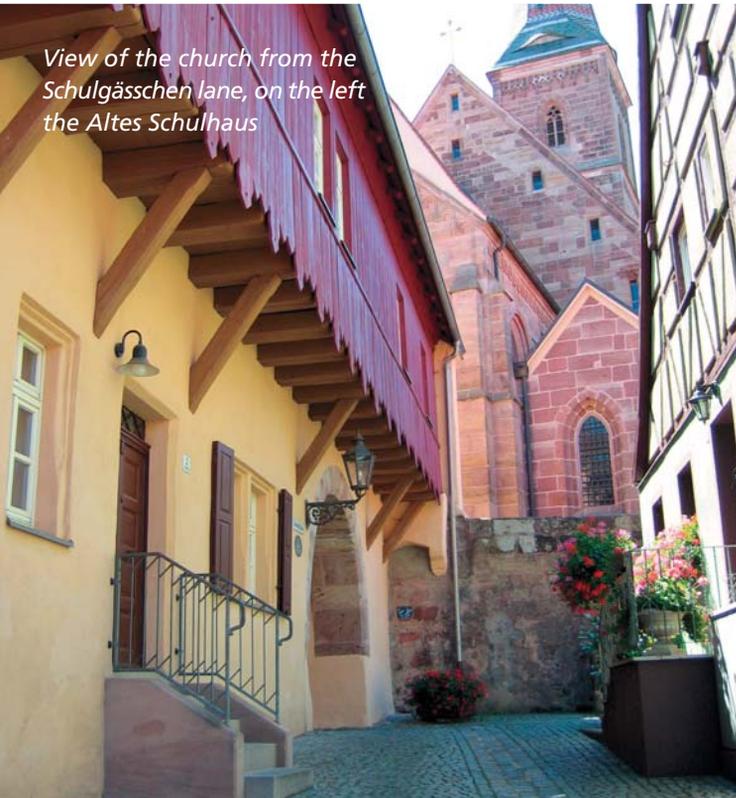


*The nave of the cathedral,  
a wide and clear space.*

## The Clerical and Academic Quarter



View through the gate of the Altes Schulhaus school to the Pfründehaus



View of the church from the Schulgässchen lane, on the left the Altes Schulhaus

To the northeast of the Liebfrauenmünster cathedral, the vestiges of a clerical and academic quarter can still be seen.

**2** In 1975 to 1976, the **Pfarrhaus** (rectory) was rebuilt between the Zehntscheune (tithing house) and the cathedral in the style of its predecessor building of 1667, while being relocated a bit to the west. Some parts of the early Baroque portal, with its broken pediment and colorful coat of arms of the lords of the Teutonic Order, still date back to the time it was originally built.

**3** The Färbergasse is where the **Pfründehaus** (benefice house) is located. Its traditional name indicates that it was originally inhabited by a cleric. In contrast to the older houses in this quarter, it has two levels and conveys an impression of prosperity. The building was constructed in 1410 and is still in its original condition, other than most of the buildings from this time. Its half-hipped roof shades the upper windows like the brim of a hat.

Eschenbach lived off of the exchange of ideas and goods. The city was as much a religious as an economic center of attraction. Wealthy families from other cities sponsored several benefices here to provide the canons of the Liebfrauenmünster with a livelihood. Berthold and Gertrud Holtzschuher, members of a patrician family from Nuremberg, had already established a benefice in 1374; in 1410, a foundation followed, sponsored by the Nuremberg citizen Eckard Neydung and his wife Alheit.

Another tradition that gave Eschenbach its shape is the city school that was founded in the 14th century. Located to the east of the cathedral, the so-called **Altes Schulhaus** (old school) was built in 1598 and was expanded in 1886. The building's layout and structure is a masterpiece. Its western gable is supported by the top of the churchyard wall, while an arch spans the Färbergasse below. In this way, the eastern orientation of the church roof is continued by the long side of the school-house. Seen from the Schulgässchen alley below, the large dimensions of these structure define the view of the hill.



# The City Ramparts

Around 1306, the small commandery of the Teutonic Order in Eschenbach was dissolved and its possessions assumed by the wealthy and influential preceptory of the Order in Nuremberg, which gradually acquired all of Eschenbach and governed the city through an administrative office called a Vogtei. As already mentioned, the brothers of the Teutonic Order had been granted the right in 1332 by Emperor Ludwig IV to “make a city” of Eschenbach. By allowing them to do so, the Emperor was acting on the request of Heinrich von Zipplingen, who was the Landkomtur or provincial commander and thus the sovereign ruler of the Order in Frankonia.

For the most part, the moat, towers and walls were constructed between 1332 and 1440. In the area around the Oberer Torturm upper gate, the defiant stance of these fortifications is still very recognizable to the present day. The deep moat, the massive tower gate and the high inner walls, further strengthened by an outer ward and a second external wall, give the impression that Eschenbach was to serve as a fortress. Nonetheless, its rhythmic structure and harmonious dimensions turn the military system into a work of art.

- 5 The **Unterer Torturm** gate is decorated by the coat of arms of Count Konrad of Egloffstein, who as Deutschmeister (German Master) was the sovereign ruler of the Order in the German lands, serving from 1396 until 1416. The coat of arms on the left is that of Count Ludwig of Wertheim, who was the Frankish provincial commander from 1407 until 1419. At the beginning of the 16th century, the south side of the city wall was further reinforced by the **Hungerturm**
- 6 and the **Bürgerturm**.
- 7
- 8 The **Oberer Torturm** gate shows the coat of arms of the Teutonic Order on the right-hand side, and on the left, the coat of arms of Philipp von Bickenbach, who acted as the German Master from 1361 to 1375.



City fortification near the Oberer Torturm gate tower

View from the Oberes Tor gate out into Hauptstrasse: the buildings Kocherhaus, Lammwirtshaus and Stadtschmiede



## The Avenue

After a fire damaged the city around 1410, the Hauptstraße main road was turned into an avenue. Over time, an architectural tension and interplay developed between the façade of the high steeple and the curved main road. A visitor walking through the Oberer Torturm gate is drawn forward as if by magic. With every step, other houses come into the foreground, opening up new perspectives.

Three solid gabled houses with opulent timber framing rise up on the ride-hand side, giving the road its cadence.

- 9** The **Kocherhaus** built in 1686 follows
- 10** the **Lammwirtshaus** (Lamb's Inn) from 1410. The column structure of the timber framework is typical for the Middle
- 11** Ages. The neighboring **Stadtschmiede** (city blacksmith's shop), which was also built in 1410, was constructed using the more modern technique of putting up a building one level on top of the other. The **Traubenwirtshaus** (Wine Inn)
- 12** and the **Lexlhaus** were also built in the same time period.
- 13**

In their original design, these well-structured, comfortable buildings from around 1410, whose façades give the road its urbanity and elegance, combined the publicly accessible and private areas of a family and business under one roof and yet cleverly kept them separate. The ground floor was entered through a central gate entrance and served **trade** and **agriculture**. This is where a restaurant or a blacksmith's shop were operated, a bakery or sausage kitchen, a brewery or a stable. However, bread and meat were not allowed to be sold in the house itself. Instead, from 1451 at the latest, bakers and butchers had to offer their wares for sale in the market area within the town hall, so that the city could better control the quality of the food.

The **living quarters** of the houses were located on the first floor, where the fully timbered and paneled room was heated with the help of a tiled stove. The kitchen and the smaller rooms were located in the back part of the house.





*Fürstenherberge, Vogtei administrative office and Deutschordenschloss castle, with the steeple towering*

A counterpoint to the homes of the farming citizens and craftsmen of the town is formed by the elegant, stately buildings that were constructed in front of the church tower during the Renaissance. In 1609, the **Fürstenherberge** (Prince's Inn) was built. The wide façade with its five windows, the high saddle-back roof, the rolling eastern gables and the fine graphic sgraffito plasterwork give the house a southern European flair.

- 14**
- 15** The gable of the adjacent building constructed in 1623, later serving as the **Benefiziatenhaus** (benefice house for the chaplain), seems to be caught up in a dialog with the gable of the Prince's Inn facing it from the side.

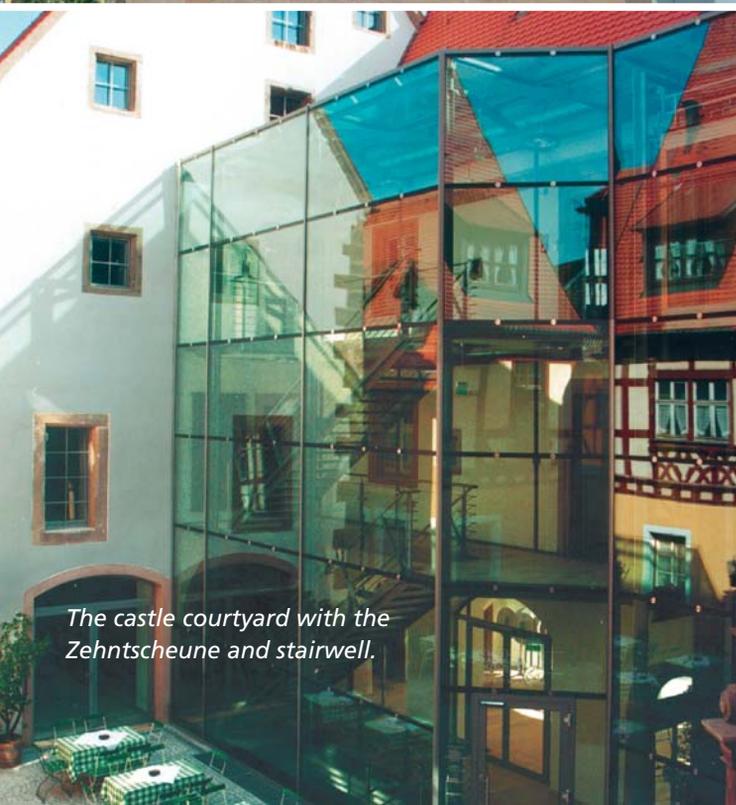
- 16** Next door is the new **Vogtei**, or **administrative office** of the Teutonic Order, which was built in the 16th century and today serves as the inn „Alte Vogtei“. The façade is formed by well-balanced, symmetrical timber framework facing the street. Around 1610 to 1617, the building's centerpiece, a sandstone portal, was added. Playful, yet noble forms decorate the entrance: columns and coats of arms, a shallow arch, a horizontal beam with beads, and above it all, an oval window and the crowning three-cornered gable. The building housed the administrative offices of the Vogt, who governed the city as a representative of the Teutonic Order. In the 18th century, the stately dining room was relocated to the ground floor, to the right of the entrance. The cheerful Baroque stucco decorations of the ceiling have remained intact until the present day.

Eschenbach experienced a significant boom from the 12th until the 18th centuries as a stop-over point for merchants traveling along the long-distance trade route from Nuremberg to Strasbourg. From 1340 until 1578, the city of the knightly order was the residence of a large deanship, during which time it developed further as a regional marketplace while the local restaurateur tradition evolved. Innkeepers, brewers, barkeepers, bakers and butchers did good business.

The city grew to be one of the larger towns between Nuremberg and Dinkelsbühl. Around 1500, Ansbach had 451 households, Eschenbach 227, Gunzenhausen 217, Windsbach 122 and Merkendorf 68.



The castle  
of the Teutonic Order



The castle courtyard with the  
Zehntscheune and stairwell.

## Around the Marketplace

After the setbacks it had suffered due to the Reformation, the Teutonic Order decided to refurbish and modernize the city's center. In the spirit of the Renaissance, room was made next to the place of worship to demonstrate the Order's secular power. As already mentioned, the new administrative building, the Vogtei, was constructed in the late 16th century, **17** and next door the new **Zehntscheune** (tithing house) was placed in the churchyard around 1596 to 1597. The group **18** of buildings was completed by the **Deutschordenschloss**, the castle of the Teutonic Order, which served the sovereigns and lords of the Order in Frankonia whenever they visited the city.

**The side of the castle facing the road** is one of the masterpieces of Renaissance architecture in Frankonia. Bartizans, or bay towers, with imperial roofs leap up from the second floor as if they came straight from a story about castle towers and knightly valor. As a contrast, several horizontal cornices run across the front, while a rhythmically curved gable is enthroned above. The balance of vertical and horizontal elements, of right angles and rolling forms and of austerity and a more relaxed style creates a sense of elegance with a hint of romance. The stately coat of arms of the sovereign ruler of the Teutonic Order, the Hochmeister and German Master, Archduke Karl of Austria was placed in the middle of the façade on the third floor. Below left, the coat of arms of the Frankish provincial commander Johann Eustach von Westernach, and to the right that of the Nuremberg Hauskomtur (house commander) Caspar Moritz von Thürheim decorate the façade.

From 1859 onwards, the castle was used as a city hall. From 1999 until 2001, both the castle and the tithing hall were renovated and modernized once again to serve as a **community center and city hall**. A modern stairwell was installed in the interior courtyard along the side wing. Now the thick historical walls are connected to a glass façade and different historical and architectural eras are linked. The new community center with a gallery in the tithing house offers space for meetings, presentations, exhibitions and concerts. The council hall is located above.



*View of the castle of the Teutonic Order, the Liebfrauenmünster and the Altes Rathaus*



The first city hall was built on the marketplace in 1451 under the Frankish provincial commander Ulrich von Lentersheim. From then on, the city also had a **mayor** and **councilmen**, who performed administrative duties alongside the Order's administrative officer, the Vogt. After the city hall had suffered severe damage in the Thirty-Years' War, the Frankish provincial commander Johann Wilhelm von Zocha mandated it in 1684/1685 be reconstructed as the building we know today as the **Altes Rathaus** (old town hall).

19

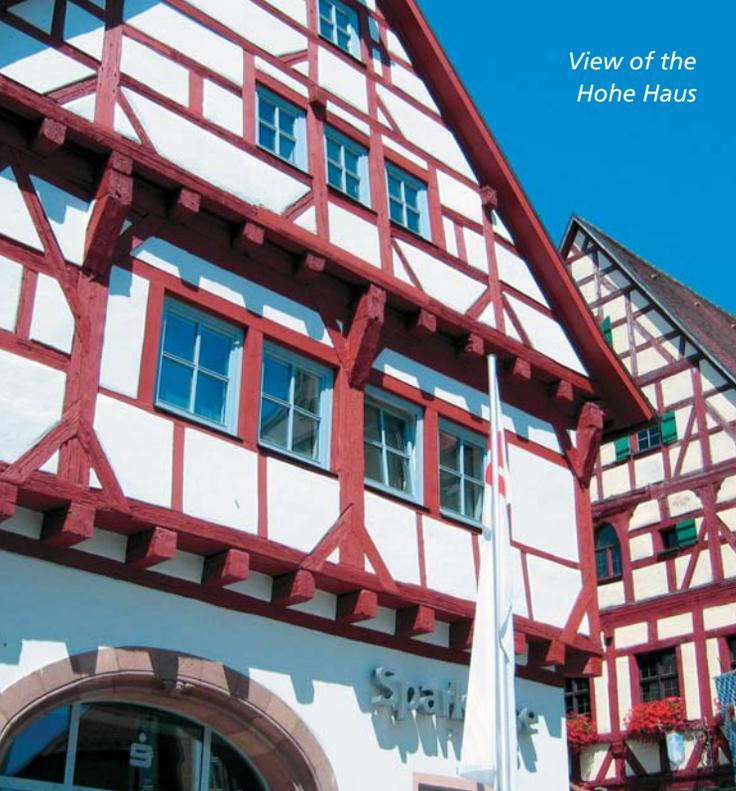
The three-story, baroque, half-timbered building looms large over the marketplace, like a high ship at anchor. At the time, the ground floor served as a market hall for the city's bakers, butchers and grocers. The second floor contained a naved hall for assemblies, public dancing and businesses. The council chamber and city archives were established on the third floor.

Between the castle and the old town hall, the church steeple points to the sky like an index finger. It provides a subtle axis of orientation and gives the city another dimension. Clearly, buildings were deliberately concentrated into a monumental group around the church, expressing the self-assurance of the Teutonic Order and the pride of the city's residents.

## Wolfram von Eschenbach Museum

The **Wolfram von Eschenbach Museum** was opened in the Altes Rathaus in 1995. Images, unusual colors and forms, refined lighting and selected texts all combine to tell the story of the life and work of the poet. Ten exhibition spaces bring to life the courtly world as Wolfram lived it, and the epic and poetic works he created. We hear him speak, virtually, by the indications he gave his readers as to who he was. Wolfram's grave in the cathedral is also presented, which is documented in records until 1608. Finally, there is a depiction of the literary influence of Wolfram's works. The museum shop offers many books about Wolfram von Eschenbach and, of course, his own works.





*View of the  
Hohe Haus*

## Around the Marketplace

**20** The **Hohes Haus** (high house) dominating the western side of the marketplace from its isolated position, may be a successor building of the home of the Eschenbach family. It was erected in 1439 to 1440 as a three-floor, half-timbered house and then was reduced by one floor in the 17th century.

In 1861, the Bavarian King Maximilian II granted the funds for a **Wolfram Monument** on the marketplace. The tiered stand and the surrounding fountain were designed by Eduard von Riedel, who was to act as the architect of Neuschwanstein Castle a few years later. The statue, which depicts Wolfram with a sword, a harp and a laurel wreath and thus as a knight, singer and poet, was sculpted by Konrad Knoll. The monument is a distinctive example of the statues created in Germany's late classicistic period.

### The Special Charm of the City of the Teutonic Order

In many ways, the medieval city was an original creation. As opposed to the city of ancient times, there was no slavery. On the contrary, many professionals lived and worked next door to each other and were all treated as relative equals: members of the Teutonic Order, priests, knights, merchants, craftsmen and farmers. Even if the brothers of the Order held a monopoly of power over Eschenbach, the residents of the town were involved in the administration of the city to ensure that a fully functional regional center could develop. The public areas of the main road, marketplace, and churchyard were cleverly interwoven. The connection of the individual buildings to one another develops the city's characteristic energy. Any visitor to this town who allows himself to be guided by these impressions will perceive some of this secret power.



*The Wolfram Monument  
in the middle  
of the marketplace*

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Further information in German  
on the history of Wolframs-Eschenbach:  
»Wolframs-Eschenbach. Der Deutsche Orden baut eine Stadt«  
by Erwin Seitz and Oskar Geidner, 1997  
ISBN 3-87707-510-X; EUR 17,90



In 1796, the Prussian king revoked the sovereignty of the Teutonic Order over the city; in 1806, it became a part of the Kingdom of Bavaria. In 1917, the Bavarian King Ludwig III allowed the city to change its name from Eschenbach to Wolframs-Eschenbach.



Waizendorfer Straße 15

[www.ritterspielplatz.de](http://www.ritterspielplatz.de)  
besides Ringroad



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