



Wassenberg - in the middle of Europe

The town of Wassenberg (17,000 inhabitants) is situated in the west of the Federal Republic of Germany close to the Dutch border. It lies within the triangle between Aachen, Roermond (NL) and Mönchengladbach.

Events from Wassenberg's history

In 1021 Emperor Heinrich II gave land to Gerhard von Antoining of Flanders on the lower Rur. After he built the "motte" (first castle), he called himself "Count of Wassenberg". Count Gerhard III donated St. George's basilica in 1118. In the 12th century Wassenberg was under rule of the dukes of Limburg. In 1206 the war for the German emperor's throne took place in the meadows of Wassenberg between Philipp of Swabia and Otto IV of Brunswick. Otto was beaten. Wassenberg had town privileges and was protected by a wall with defence towers as early as 1273. The "Bergfried" (castle) and the church tower were built after 1400. During the reformation, the Wassenberg Predicants were active (who belonged to the Anabaptists). In the 17th century there was a reformed parish. As a minority it had its own "Hofkirche" (church in a yard). Another minority were the Jews, who had their own synagogue until it was destroyed the day after "Crystal Night" in 1938. After the French Revolutionary Wars Wassenberg belonged to the French "Rur" department until 1814. After the Congress of Vienna it was made part of Prussia. In the 16th and 17th centuries religious refugees from the Netherlands brought the craft of weaving to Wassenberg. At the end of the 19th century this developed into a thriving industry.

Between Woods and River

The Rur valley and the wooded hills of the Wassenberg forest make the Wassenberg landscape unique. More than 35% of the town comprise of woods. Wassenberg is part of the Maas-Schwalm-Nette National Park, which the Dutch national Park "De Meinweg" is also a part of. A variety of activities (canoeing, sailing, swimming, walking, nordic walking, cycling, horse riding, golf) as well as cafés make Wassenberg an attractive destination. Restaurants and markets (Capuchins' market, artists market, food market and Christmas market) draw visitors from the surrounding areas.

- 1 Weberdenkmal
- 2 Freundschaftsbrunnen
- 3 Fußball
- 4 Roßtor
- 5 Marktsäule

- 6 Altes Rathaus
- 7 Löffelstraße
- 8 Hofkirche
- 9 Buir
- 10 Het Jaastes
- 11 Forckenbeckhaus
- 12 Kapuzinerkloster
- 13 Pferdepoststation

- 14 Verlorenturm
- 15 Küsters Garten
- 16 Stiftsplatz
- 17 St. Georgs-Basilika
- 18 Burg
- 19 Stadtmauer
- 20 Bergfried
- 21 Synagoge
- 22 Friedhof

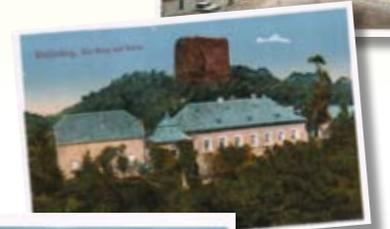


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Historic Walk

A guide through the history of Wassenberg



Historic Walk

1 More information available on a plaque.

2 No information available on a plaque.



tuated within the wall near the gate. In front of the gate there was the moat.

5 The "Market Pillar" with the coat of arms symbolises medieval market rights which Wassenberg is known to have had as early as 1273. The Market Pillar was re-erected in 2003. Today various events take place here, many of which are of regional significance.

6 The Old Town Hall was built in 1753 on the site of the former sheriff's house but was destroyed in World War II. After the reconstruction it was used as the town hall until 1987.

7 Thanks to the town rights Wassenberg was allowed to mint their own money. The mint was in the former Löffelstraße (spoon street).

8 Even in the earliest times of Reformation there were Protestant Christians in Wassenberg. After the 30-year-war (1648), prayer houses of the Protestant minority were only allowed in back yards, called "Hofkirche" (church in the yard).

9 Buir means "by the house" and it is supposed that the name comes from a tythe barn.

10 "Het Jaastes" (dialect for "the guesthouse") was founded in 1317 as the "Hospital of St. Nicholas" which took in the poor and the sick. Later it was used as an almshouse until 1936. The nearby stream has been dubbed "Gasthausbach" because of the guesthouse.

11 Next to "Het Jasstes" in Graf-Gerhard-Straße - which was named after the founder of Wassenberg - there is Forckenbeck house. Here lived Oskar von Forckenbeck who had private means and who travelled the world, collecting newspapers, and subsequently founded the world's oldest newspaper museum in Aachen. He had the "Judenbruch" (part of the woods) designed as a park with lakes and avenues, which still draws many visitors to Wassenberg. Opposite the house there is the oldest Wassenberg brick house (built after 1400) with its gothic arches.

12 From Graf-Gerhard-Straße, near the "Kreissparkasse" parts of the old Capuchin monastery can be seen. In 1654 Capuchin monks came to Wassenberg during the counter-reformation. In 1681 the church monastery was consecrated by the Lüttich auxiliary bishop. During the Wassenberg "French era" the monastery was closed during secularisation (1802). The church was torn down in 1819. A bronze plaque shows a model of the former monastery area.

13 In the 19th century there was a post station (horses) on the site of the Cafe Post. This house as well as many others in Wassenberg catered for numerous guests. Thus tourism in Wassenberg developed into a thriving business.

14 The "Verlorenturm" (Tower of the Lost) is part of the wall. Wassenberg had a law court. Robbers and murderers were often severely punished. Those sentenced to death and thus having forfeited, i.e. literally lost their lives were first jailed here before being taken to the gallows.

15 "Küsters Garten" is a garden named after a doctor's family who grew botanic rarities here. A redwood tree, a gingko tree and some "Wassenberger Sämlinge" (peach trees) can still be seen.

16 "Stiftsplatz" is a reminder that St. George's church was a gift from Duke Gerhard, who gave generously to the church. The place was defined by the "Immunitätsbogen" (Gate of sanctity).

17 Place of the former St. George's basilica, 1118 donated by Duke Gerhard III. In front of the church there are some old gravestones to be seen which are a reminder of the old catholic churchyard.

18 The Castle area consists of the "Bergfried" (Tower, which was the old castle) in the background and the (newer) castle in the foreground. It was the heart of Wassenberg. The lower castle was built in the Julich time in 1740, it was the living and working house of the sheriff (Amtmann).

19 In medieval times Wassenberg was protected by a wall. Towers enhanced the defences.

20 The "Bergfried" (The key can be picked up at the hotel reception) was built as a multi-storey tower on an artificial hill around 1400 when the defences were renewed. Inside an enormous fireplace, stairs and a "toilet" can be seen. The tower was the most northern point of the defences and the living quarters of the Wassenberg sheriff. From here, the enormous Meinweg-area was governed. In 1505 Emperor Maximilian II. and in 1543 Emperor Karl V. were guests in the castle.

21 From the middle ages onwards Jews lived in Wassenberg. In 1867 a synagogue (prayer room) was built for their small community, which was destroyed by arson in 1938.

22 Since 1688 the Wassenberg Jews had their own cemetery. During the Nazi-time (1933-1945) the gravestones were taken away. Those still intact were re-erected after the war. In the middle of the cemetery there is a memorial stone for the Herz family and their grandchildren Betty and Walter Reis. Most Wassenberg Jews were killed in concentration camps, Betty Reis in Bergen Belsen. The Comprehensive School in the upper part of the town is named after her.

Next to the Jewish cemetery is the protestant cemetery which was established in 1628. The famous protestant priest Grashoff is buried here.



1 The weaver memorial in front of the new town hall (1988) is a reminder of the former industry in Wassenberg.

2 The "Friendship Fountain" is situated in front of the town hall. Since 1968 Wassenberg has been twinned with the French town of Pontorson which is situated near the Mont St. Michel in Normandy. The fountain was erected from Norman rocks in 1988. Since 2010 Wassenberg has also been twinned with the English town Highworth near Swindon.

3 Somewhat inconspicuously, framed by a hedge, there is a "footfall" (1717). They were the predecessors of the Stations of the Cross. The material - sandstone - comes in part from graves from the Roman-Franc epoch. In the bricks in the street the image of a gate can be seen where the "Birgelter Tor" (Birgelen Gate) in the wall around the town used to be.

4 The "Roßtor" is the only one of what was formerly three gates which is still intact. The name (horse gate) derives from a mill worked by a horse (Ross) which was si-

