

Lübeck— the magical medieval town with mounds of marzipan!

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I've been to Germany before but not Lübeck, and for late September what a pleasant sunny surprise this town – a short drive from Hamburg and a UNESCO world heritage site, offered. Dominated by eye catching eclectic architecture, from Roman to Renaissance with touches of Baroque and Classical but predominantly Gothic, it's known as the city with the seven golden steeples. There really is no other town on the Continent with a skyline quite like it. As you enter the town through the famous Holsten Gate, inscribed in gold with the words *CONCORDIA DOMI FORIS PAX* (unity at home, peace abroad) it is interesting to know that it is the only town in Germany to decide Hitler couldn't go and spread his propaganda there, a decision by the then 1,932 inhabitants.

So famous is the gate throughout Germany that the late Deutsche Mark held its image and now the local 2 Euro coin does the same. Built between 1464 and 1478, it is a powerful reminder of Lübeck's role in the Hanseatic League and is featured on the renowned marzipan brand Niederegger – the only logo to do so, and so to marzipan – what Lübeck is now most known for today.

I was lucky enough to have a tour of the factory to breathe in the allure of roasted almonds myself, in true Willy Wonka style. With Christmas fast approaching, marzipan is THE flavour of 'the season to be jolly', and the factory has already kick-started (since summer) production of sultry marzipan santas and rich marzipan reindeer. You can go and visit their stand, alongside many other festive German offerings, at the historic Lübeck Christmas market, founded in 1648 and held annually from the 21st November to the 30th December. If you can't make the market, Niederegger has a fabulous marzipan café, a must see. I would recommend a selection of marzipan cakes with a marzipan coffee, yes marzipan flavoured coffee! The inspiration of this traces back to Zarenmutter Luise Charlotte, the mother of the former Russian Tzar. A long time ago, pre-planes, in the days of horse and cart, the Tzar would order marzipan from Lübeck but by the time it arrived in Russia the marzipan was rock solid, so his mother dropped it into her coffee to soften it, a lasting legacy.

Whilst in Lübeck, located neatly between both the North Sea and Baltic Sea, I'd recommend a boat trip around the city and book a guided tour on foot and spot the remnants of interactive scientific games dotted over the town, a wink to when three years ago Lübeck was crowned the City of Science, and don't forget a visit to the fascinating parliament building. For food, book dinner in The Seafarer's Guild to sample traditional local cuisine. If you are brave, like me, order labskaus – one of the most bizarre meals I have eaten; a combination of hot corned beef hash, a fried egg and cold pickled herring and pickled veg. For the main, as Lübeck is so close to the sea, I would suggest the local fish Zander. Wash down with a Spezi, the German 'delicacy' of half Fanta and half Coke mixed together or my preference, and more waistline friendly, an Apfelschorle, apple juice and soda mixed. Enjoy!

