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Rich culture underpins Stuttgart

Wahyuni Kamah, Contributor, Stuttgart, Germany

Stuttgart, capital of Baden Wuerttemberg state, has long been famous as an industrial city. It was witness to the success of Gottlieb Daimler, Carl Benz and Robert Bosch in pioneering automotive technology, not only in Germany but also worldwide.

Due to its important role as an influential industrial city in Germany, Stuttgart was one of the main targets of bombing by the Allies during World War II.

But its fame as an industrial city has also made tourists reluctant to visit as they have yet to realize that Stuttgart has a lot to offer: Arts, culture, shopping and leisure.

Situated in a valley and surrounded by vineyards on green hills, Stuttgart has green forests scattered around it.

Most of the interesting public places in the city are easily accessible on foot. From Schlossplatz downtown, which is a few hundred meters' walk from Stuttgart main train station, tourists can walk to Koenigstrasse, a 1.2-kilometer haven for shoppers.

Modern boutiques, department stores, supermarkets, music stores, cinemas, food stalls and fancy restaurants are available along the street. It is also a meeting point for youngsters and a good place for street artists to perform.

"It's my favorite place in Stuttgart," said Zaki, a young Lebanese living in the city.

Along Koenigstrasse, many eating places offer options for filling your stomach. You can choose from fast-food chain McDonald's to fancy restaurants. Prices start at 3.5 euros (Rp 32,630.5) for a kebab and nine euros for a set lunch. Upmarket restaurants are situated in Calwer Strasse, downtown.

In Schlossplatz alone, the green garden is always crowded every summer weekend by visitors who wish to relax or enjoy the sunlight.

They can also see the huge Neues Schloss (New Castle) located right on Schlossplatz. When standing

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facing Neues Schloss, you can clearly see the vineyards surrounding Stuttgart.

Built in 1746 as the last residence of Count Carl Eugen von Wuerttemberg, Neues Schloss now serves as the Baden Wuerttemberg office of the Ministry of Culture.

A few meters away is the monumental Altes Schloss (Old Castle) which has Renaissance architecture. The castle, which was reconstructed several times, used to be the residence of the Duke of Wuerttemberg in the 14th century.

The name "Stuttgart" was derived from the word *stutegarten* (stud garden) in 952. The stud then became Stuttgart's symbol.

During World War II, no buildings in the city survived Allied bombing. Most of them needed to be reconstructed and renovated. But the original decoration and architecture of the 16th century church can still be found in the Altes Schloss. The first Protestant church in South Germany escaped from the bombing.

Art lovers are spoilt in Stuttgart. The eighth-largest city in Germany currently has 40 theaters and 30 art galleries, some of which are only walking distance from Schlossplatz.

All year round, the theater agenda is full. Staatsoper Stuttgart was declared Opera House of the Year in 1998, 1999 and 2000. Every year in Stuttgart, the International Bach Academy organizes concerts and courses and Stuttgarter Ballet is one of the world's leading dance companies.

Neue Staatsgalerie -- located on Konrad Adenauer Strasse, across Schlossplatz -- is a must-visit venue for tourists. The gallery is well-known among architecture students the world over for its postmodern style.

"Don't forget to take the pictures of Stuttgart's Neue Staatsgalerie," said my Indonesian architecture student friend.

The gallery was designed by British architect James Stirling after winning a competition in 1977. The Neue Staatsgalerie is connected to Old Staatsgalerie -- built by King Wilhelm I of Wuerttemberg -- in the early 1800s.

Stuttgart is building a new gallery downtown, expected to be completed next year.

Despite all these attractions, Stuttgart is gearing up

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to host the Soccer World Cup in 2006 and Summer Olympics 2012. The city of 588,000 people is building and renovating sports facilities in preparation for both major events.

Public transportation in the city is efficient, clean and safe. Most places are accessible by stadt and strassen-bahn (city tram), S-bahn (intercity train) or buses.

Driving in Stuttgart is OK but parking is very expensive. The first two hours cost six euros and the following hour two euros more.

The development has also touched Stuttgart's main train station, which is being renovated to become a spectacular, 21st-century terminal.

Locals in the city are very helpful although, for the most part, they only speak German.

Touristik Information on Koenigstrasse 1A can give you information you might need on Stuttgart in English or German.

You can buy a *Sttucard*, a voucher that gives you reductions on the entrance fee to numerous attractions and a three-day public transport pass. You can also rent a bicycle.

The best time to visit Stuttgart is between August and September as the weather is excellent for strolling around the city and many attractions on offer.

The Stuttgart region has many swimming pools as it has the most productive mineral springs in western Europe. Three refreshing pools are available within the city. You can swim in huge pools by paying 6 euros for two hours.

I-box What to see:

Museums and galleries in Stuttgart do not only display collections but also frequently hold exhibitions. For information, contact the tourist information office.

*** Schlossplatz**

A large green square in the downtown area. From here, you can walk to the nearby galleries like Kunstgebäude (House of Art), Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart or a passage of shops in Koenigsbau, where outdoor cafes and restaurants are available during summer.

You can also enjoy the view of Neues Schloss and the Jubiläumssäule in the middle of the square with the vineyard in the background.

*** Altes Schloss on Schillerplatz 6**

The building is now Baden Württemberg Museum. The collections include items and tableaux picturing the situation from prehistoric times to the Roman Empire.

Open every Tuesday (10 a.m. to 1 p.m.) and from Wednesday to Sunday (10 a.m. to 5 p.m.).
Admission: 2.6 euros.

*** Städtische Galerie (Alte Städtische Galerie and Neue Städtische Galerie)**

Located on Konrad Adenauer Str. 30 to 32.

Alte Städtische Galerie houses original paintings from the Middle Ages to the 19th century. Neue Städtische Galerie houses a collection of classic modern art.

Open: Sunday to Wednesday (10 a.m. to 6 p.m.), Thursday (10 a.m. to 9 p.m.), closed Monday.
Admission: 3.5 euros.

*** Linden Ethnology Museum on Hegelplatz 1**

Houses Asian, African and South American artistic and cultural artifacts.

Open: Tuesday to Sunday (10 a.m. to 5 p.m.), Wednesday (10 a.m. to 8 p.m.). Admission: 4 euros.

*** Wilhelma Zoological and Botanical Garden**

The largest in Europe, set in a Moorish park. The collection includes 10,000 animals of 1,000 species and 6,000 species of plants from Africa and South America. Also, Amazonia House, where you can find a tropical forest setting.

Open: daily (8:15 a.m. to 5 p.m.), from November to February 8:15 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission: 9 euros (summer), 6 euros (winter).

*** Natural History Museum Loewentor**

The right place to see the natural history of the animal kingdom dating back from 200 million years ago. Many skeletons of dinosaurs and early mammals are on display.

Open: Tuesday to Friday (9 a.m. to 5 p.m.), Saturday

and Sunday (10 a.m. to 6 p.m.). Admission: 4 euros.

*** Mercedes Museum, Mercedesstr. 137**

Opened in 1923, the museum displays everything about Mercedes from history and literature to the products.

Open: Tuesday to Sunday (9 a.m. to 5 p.m.).
Admission: free.

*** Porsche Museum, Porscheplatz 1**

Another automotive museum on Porsche, featuring its prototypes including sports cars.

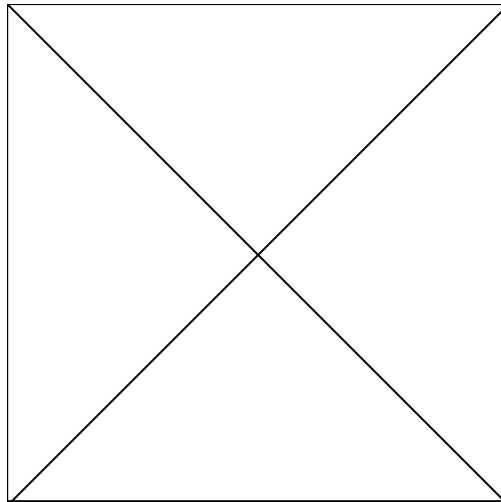
Open: Monday to Friday (9 a.m. to 4 p.m.),
weekends/holidays (9 a.m. to 4 p.m.). Admission:
free.

*** Markthalle, Dorotheen Str.**

A market hall offering fresh tropical and subtropical fruit and vegetables, exotic spices and a wide range of international cuisine.

Open: Monday to Friday (7 a.m. to 6 p.m.), Saturday
(7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission: free.

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