



Features

February 16, 2003

News & Views

[News](#)

[Features](#)

[Gallery](#)

[Weekly Roundup](#)

[Your Column](#)

[Past Editions](#)

Resources

[Acronyms](#)

[Addresses](#)

[Indonesian Cabinet](#)

[Indonesian History](#)

[Links](#)

[Where to go](#)

Members Area

[Register](#)

[Login](#)

[Archives](#)

[Who's Who](#)

[Provinces](#)

[Companies](#)

[Laws](#)

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[Company Info](#)

[Subscription/
Advertising](#)

[Online Advertising](#)

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Friedrichshafen, the base of Zeppelin

Wahyuni Kamah, Contributor, Germany

Anyone who visits the cities situated on the edge of the Bodensee, or Lake Constance, in southern Germany, will have an impression totally different from those of other German cities.

When driving in this beautiful region, signs pointing to vacation houses, guest houses, inns and youth hostels, are abundant.

In any of the region's cities, especially those near the lake, there are numerous hotels, inns, restaurants, cozy cafes and souvenir shops, an idyllic tourist destination.

In summer, these cities are packed with people who want to take a break enjoying the wonderful view of the biggest lake in Germany, swimming or visiting the great castles found in the region.

Friedrichshafen, one of the cities on the Bodensee, however, is more renowned as the city of Zeppelin than as a lake resort, and its modern history cannot be separated from the airship's inventor.

In 1900, from a floating hanger by the Bodensee near Friedrichshafen, Ferdinand Graf von Zeppelin launched the maiden flight of his airship, a historical move in the world of aviation.

Later, the rigid airship designed by Zeppelin, a retired German army officer, brought success to Germany in World War I through long-range bombing operations. Nevertheless, the Allied bombers during World War II laid waste to both the zeppelin and Friedrichshafen.

The Zeppelin Industry contributed greatly to the citizens of Friedrichshafen who found work there. "If there are houses with big yards in the city, they belong to people who used to work at the Zeppelin Industry," said Hubert, whose father also worked there.

His parents live in a housing complex for Zeppelin workers, which was provided by Zeppelin Industry through a housing allowance scheme.

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The citizens are very proud of Zeppelin. Most places in the city are named after him: hotels, restaurants, streets and pubs. A monument created by sculptor Professor Toni Schneider-Manzel was built in honor of him, and stands in the lakeside park below the train station.

The Zeppelin-Museum Technik und Kunst, which stands on a 4,000-square-meter plot by the lake, is the biggest airship museum in the world and cost around 70 million Deutschemark to build. The museum, which opened in 1996, has an extensive collection, spanning pieces from the Middle Ages to the modern era. Visitors can see part of the monumental LZ 129 Hindenburg, a zeppelin that was destroyed during its flight from Germany to the U.S. in 1937.

The souvenirs from Friedrichshafen are, indeed, all related to Zeppelin, from pencils to miniature models of a zeppelin airship.

The zeppelin airship is still used for recreational purposes, and people are still enthusiastic about flying in a zeppelin. In Landesgartenschau in Ostfildern last year, people eagerly paid around Euro 175 to fly 45 minutes in a zeppelin, having signed up on a waiting list two weeks earlier.

The city, also known as *Messestadt*, or a city of fairs, is only populated by 53,000 people. Because of its small population, intra-city transportation is served by bus, while private cars are the main form of transportation.

Friedrichshafen is clean and quiet, even on busy days, and its people are friendly and courteous. Besides working in manufacturing and industry in the city, they also hold jobs in neighboring cities. On weekends, the city is very quiet, and only a few bakeries and cafes are open.

"I prefer to live in Constance -- a city by the Bodensee in Switzerland. It is bigger and the dresses in its shops are more fashionable than here," said 19-year-old Jasmin, a resident of Friedrichshafen.

Founded by Fredrick I of Wuerttemberg in 1811, the city was formerly called Buchhorn. Friedrichshafen was formed when the city of Buchhorn and the monastic village of Hofen were joined. After World War II, the city was largely reconstructed and became an important industrial city in southwestern Germany.

The city is accessible and open, with a port that connects to neighboring cities and countries like Austria and Switzerland, whose regions also border

the Bodensee.

The trains which depart from Friedrichshafen train station can take you to any city in Germany, and there is also an airport for longer distance travel.

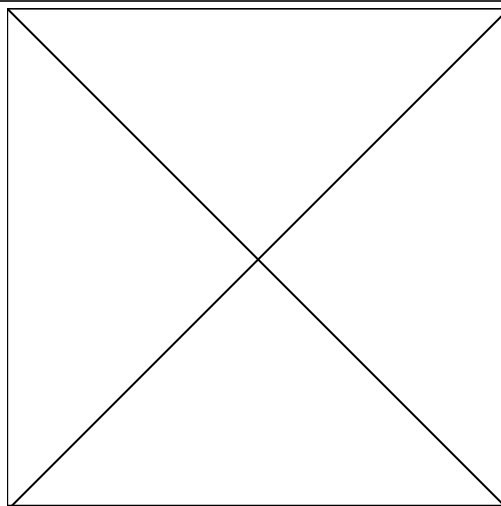
Altstadt, or Old City, is at the center of Friedrichshafen, but there are no remnants of medieval buildings since they were completely destroyed in World War II. Altstadt is a business and trade hub where you can find shops, banks, restaurants and cafes. Some government offices and even a church are also located in Altstadt.

Though Friedrichshafen credits Zeppelin for its fame, its landmark structure is Schloss Kirche, or the Palace Church, which was built in the late 16th century.

In the heart of Altstadt, in front of the Rathaus parliament building, there is a new landmark: Buchhorn-Brunnen. It is a fountain ornamented with the sculptures of a tree, a horn, a fish and tree branches, symbolizing the history of Friedrichshafen, created by sculptors Barbara and Gernot Rumpf.

Friedrichshafen indeed has different atmosphere: a clean, small, industrial city located on the lakefront, inhabited by people who are *lieb* (nice) and proud of their city's place in history.

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[Gallery](#) [Weekly Roundup](#) [Your Column](#) [Past Editions](#)
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