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## Tuebingen, city of students, poets and philosophers

**Wahyuni Kamah**, Contributor, Tuebingen, Germany

Of all the cities in Germany, Tuebingen offers a distinct impression.

As soon as one arrives in Tuebingen railway station - only 55 minutes by train from Stuttgart, the capital of the state of Baden Wuerttemberg -- one sees many young faces about. Teenage girls and boys crowd the waiting room, cheerfully chatting with each other. On the streets, young people carrying colorful backpacks are seen waiting for the bus, riding bicycles or just walking along. This is a rare picture indeed, given that the majority population of most small cities in Germany consist of the elderly.

One of Tuebingen's attractions is Eberhard Karls University, more popularly known as Tuebingen University, which has lured many students from the world over to this city.

"Of the 85,000 inhabitants in Tuebingen, 20,000 are students," proudly revealed an official at the Tuebingen Tourist Information center.

The university, which was founded in 1477 by Duke Eberhard, is also one of the oldest universities in Germany.

There are also numerous research institutes in Tuebingen, such as the Max Planck Institute, that have contributed to making the city one of the leading research centers in the world. It is no wonder that Tuebingen calls itself *Universitaetsstadt*, or "the university town".

Tuebingen also owes its fame to noted poets and influential philosophers, who spent time studying and living in this 900-year-old city.

Philosophers Hegel, Schelling and Hoelderlin, and astronomer Johannes Kepler studied here, while writer Hermann Hesse spent four years working in a bookshop in Tuebingen. It is also here that Goethe actually published his first work. The places where these famed thinkers and scholars studied, worked and lived can still be viewed today.

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The atmosphere in the city certainly supports Tuebingen as a university town. Its people are open and intelligent, and the city is relaxed, yet modern. Although it is often dubbed as a student's town, Tuebingen is attractive to visit, particularly its undamaged and well-preserved Old Town area.

Still standing in Old Town are the original buildings from the Middle Ages, because Tuebingen had not been targeted by Allied bombers in World War II. It was once hit by a stray bomb during the war, but only two houses were destroyed.

"It remains a mystery as to why Tuebingen was not bombed, but there were 59 Americans who studied in Tuebingen from 1920 to 1945," said Michael Seifert from Eberhard Karls University. "Moreover, Tuebingen was once a lazarette city," he added.

Perhaps another reason was because although Tuebingen had a small Jewish community, which used to occupy the road of Judengasse, they were expelled from the city in 1477. There is now nothing but houses along this short road.

Tuebingen is divided by Neckar River, and the best route to explore Old Town is from Neckar Bridge, a favorite photo subject for tourists. Neckar Wall, which faces the river, is a favorite student hangout and for residents to spend their free time chatting or reading books. A few punting boats are tied up by the river, waiting for passengers who want to have a river tour. In the distance, the peak of Hoelderin Tower can clearly be seen.

Old Town is accessible by foot, although it means a walk along narrow, winding cobblestone alleyways lined with 16th-century semi-timber houses and the pointed gables of castles and towers. Those who love medieval architecture will find Old Town of Tuebingen very inspiring.

In Marktplatz, or market square, at the center of Old Town, visitors will find the three-story City Hall, which dates from the 15th century. The square is surrounded also by semi-timber houses, and in the summer it is full with outdoor cafes. Kiosks selling fresh fruit or souvenirs can also be found in the open square of the market.

The original Renaissance portal of the 16th century can be seen at Hoehentuebingen Castle, which now houses the various academic departments of Tuebingen University. On Burgsteige, the road that leads to the castle, stands the former home of Johannes Kepler. The Protestant Seminary, where Hegel and Schelling studied, has served as a center of Protestant theology until today, and the house where poet Hoelderlin lived is now known as

Hoelderin Tower.

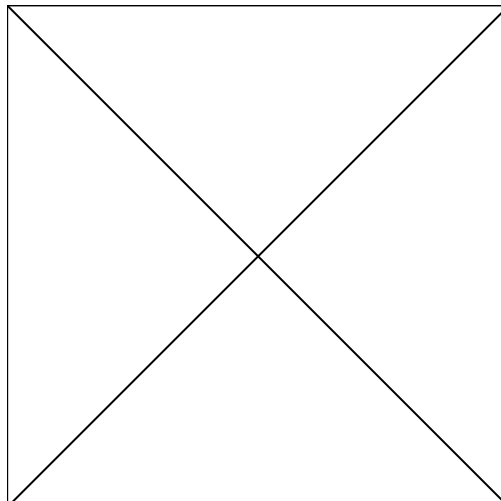
Collegiate Church in Holzmarkt has the most beautiful Gothic rood screens in south Germany, as well as stained glass windows from the 15th century and tombs of the dukes and duchesses of Wuerttemberg. One of the stores in Holzmarkt was formerly the bookstore where Hermann Hesse worked.

In most modern German cities, the gutters are underground but on Ammergasse, the gutters are in full view in front of the houses, which gives a unique and picturesque image to the road.

Despite the centuries-old surroundings, the lively atmosphere from street cafes and student pubs permeate the city. The shops, restaurants and cafes are mostly housed in old, timber houses and interestingly enough, they are not concentrated in any one particular area, but are scattered throughout Old Town, their streets generally frequented by tourists.

The city's celebratory highlights are scheduled every year from January to December, ranging from boat races to musical performances. Nature lovers can visit Tuebingen's Botanical Garden or take a stroll down Platanenallee. A trail bordered by large trees that overhang and provide cool shade along the path, Platanenallee is a favorite place for those who like to read outdoors.

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