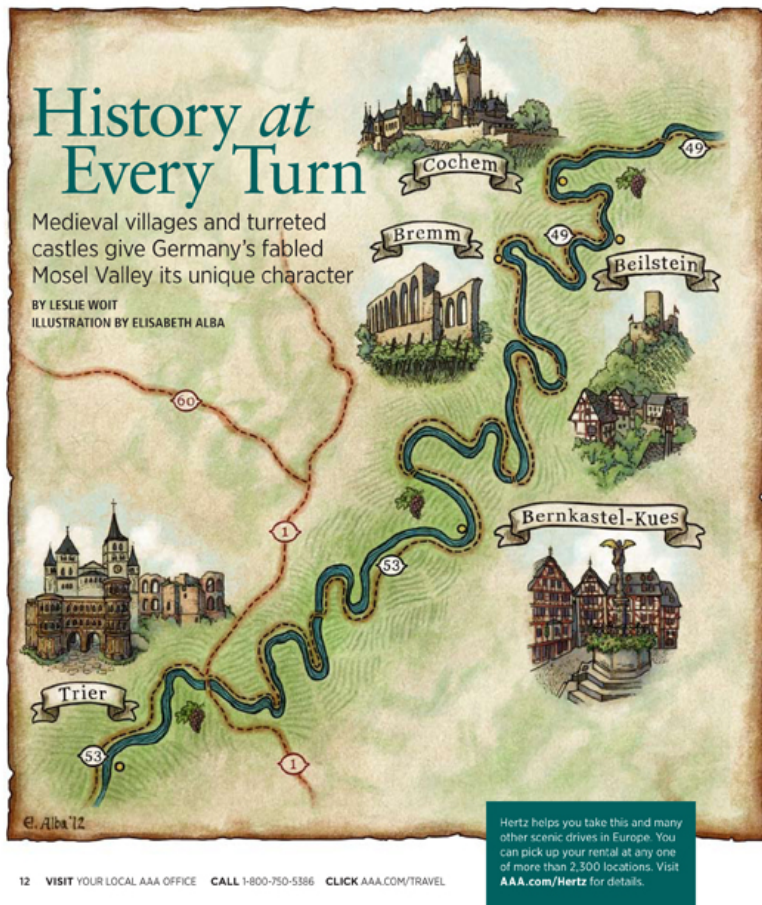


Great Drives



History at Every Turn

Medieval villages and turreted castles give Germany's fabled Mosel Valley its unique character

BY LESLIE WOIT
ILLUSTRATION BY ELISABETH ALBA

Hertz helps you take this and many other scenic drives in Europe. You can pick up your rental at any one of more than 2,500 locations. Visit AAA.com/Hertz for details.

The *Mosel River* snakes past some of Germany's most romantic scenery and finest vineyards. Every twist and turn of this prince of drives is speckled with charming medieval villages, fairy tale castles—and more than a few swans-a-swimming.

Trier

"*Ubi bene ibi patria*"—where one feels good, there is one's country. You'll feel at home in this history-packed town, once a happening hub of the Roman Empire and now the point of departure for your journey north along Highway B53. Take a moment to appreciate the ancient lifestyle of Germany's oldest city. Pass beneath its second-century Porta Nigra gate, a UNESCO World Heritage site, to visit the amphitheater. The magnificent stadium seated 25,000 spectators for gladiator fights. At the Imperial Baths, Romans plunged into hot and cold water, played sports, had a quick massage, gambled and got their hair done. Thanks to Romans' love of the grape, today some 5,000 winemakers flourish in the surrounding regions of Mosel, Saar and Ruwer.

Bernkastel-Kues

Connected by a bridge, Bernkastel and Kues perch on opposite sides of the Mosel. Together they comprise the "International Town of Vines and Wine." Most of the region's top wines are produced within a few miles of this pretty juncture. Wine festivals take place throughout the year, and the Wine Culture Center and Museum houses a cellar with more than 100 local vintages to sample.

Most area wineries welcome visitors for tours and tastings but require a reservation. Prepare your palate for a taste of Bernkasteler Doctor, the region's most celebrated nectar. It's made from legendary Riesling grapes that grow above the town on steep grades.

Bremm

In Bremm, keep your eyes on the road: The river takes a wacky 360-degree turn, a loop the Ice Age carved into the waterway's trajectory.

The tiny town perches along the Bremmer Calmont, where Europe's steepest vineyards cling to slopes of 50 degrees or more. The Romans called this area *calidus mons*, the hot hill, and favored its south-facing soil for grapevines.

Beilstein

Step into the dreamscape village of Beilstein for a quintessential Mosel moment. The town's warrens of winding alleys and streets are too narrow for cars, so you'll explore this splendid village on foot. Head up the hill to the ruin of Metternich Castle for a postcard river view. Then stroll down for a glass or two of locally produced *wein* in one of the cozy wine cellars along Bachstrasse. Emerge in time for a sunset dinner overlooking the river.

Cochem

Having survived in one form or another for more than a thousand years, Cochem Castle cuts a striking silhouette above a bend in the river. The fortress miraculously survived its perilous past. In 1689, the troops of France's King Louis XIV invaded the castle, set it ablaze—and blew it up for good measure.

Two centuries on, it was rebuilt in the trendy neogothic style of the times by a wealthy Berliner who added a lovely landscaped garden. Today, guided tours reveal a king's ransom in stained glass, rich tapestries, trophies, ornate painted ceilings and four-poster beds.

Cochem is also an ideal spot to board a river boat tour, perhaps for a little twilight dancing as the castle lights twinkle over the placid waters of the Mosel. 🍷

Writer **Leslie Woit** loves adventure travel. She recently completed a self-drive safari in Africa.