

Information for residents:

First and foremost – a very warm welcome to the Lauenburg Lakes!

Ziethen has a population of around one thousand. It has retained its village character and has a village pond and church as its centrepiece – and you don't have to worry about any strong smell of intensive mass animal production – all local farmers farm arable land.

Ziethen's story has been recorded for over 850 years, closely associated with the building of the Ratzeburg Minster.

Originally belonging to the neighbouring Land of Mecklenburg, in the 1945 territorial exchange affecting the Schaalsee communities (The Barber-Lyashenko-Agreement) Ziethen was allocated to the British Occupation Zone.

After the reunification in 1990 it became a permanent part of Schleswig Holstein, under the jurisdiction of it had anyway been for the past 40 years.

The old border is only two kilometres distant, now only visible at a few remaining points. The village has regained its traditional position in the centre of North Germany, against a beautiful backdrop of forests and lakes. From any point in the village you can reach unspoiled countryside by foot or by bicycle within merely 250 meters.

Our house:

Our self-catering flats have a 3-star classification from the German Association of Tourist Boards (Deutscher Tourismusverband).

- Let us know immediately if any is missing or broken so we can repair or replace it.
- If you have ordered breakfast we will place a breakfast trolley outside the door of your flat at the appointed time.
- We have travelling cots and high-chairs for infants.
- There is a parking place for each apartment in front of our house.
- TV-programmes are selected using the satellite receiver: Turn on the TV and chose your programme using the receiver's remote control.
- Our sauna and relaxation area is in the basement. Please tell us when you wish to use these facilities and we will heat the sauna and prepare towels: In the large basement area there is also fitness equipment which you are welcome to use. The bookshelf might also come in handy if the weather is not so good.
- We also rent out bicycles, which are kept in a shed beside the carport. You are welcome to use the shed to store your own bicycles. Here you will also find sunbeds and garden furniture for use on the adjoining lawn area.
- There is a small garden pavilion at the opposite side of the house. This is the ideal venue for relaxing in the evening. We can also supply an electric or charcoal grill on request.
- To reduce dust and noise our house is fitted with a central vacuum cleaner. The tube is stored at the basement stairs and the wallsockets are either in the apartments or in the corridor outside.
- There are cleaning mops and buckets in the basement.
- In the basement there are also washing machines and a dryer, for the use of which we charge a small fee.
- The stair and outside lighting switch on and off automatically.
- The entire complex is equipped with a door locking system. Your apartment key will also open the main door, the pavilion and the shed.
- Please adhere to our local garbage separation rules. There is a shed in the carport with the appropriate bins. These are: glass, paper "Gelber Sack" marked packaging (tins, plastics, etc) bio-degradable (brown bin) and other rubbish (grey bin)
- Smokers: please use the ashtrays provided.

Thank you for your understanding.

The state of Schleswig Holstein

Not quite the tropics, then, but rather Lübecker Bucht on the pristine Baltic coast of Germany, backed by green fields and fragrant pine forests. And to my mind, on this sunny morning, a rather better choice of destination.

The roofed beach chairs are something of a novelty, but I fetch a latte macchiato from the hotel nearby, settle myself into the creaking wicker, gaze out across the sea and feel very contented.

The sand is white and powder-fine, the sea before me glittering blue, the June sun high in the sky - and the beach is empty. It could be the tropical island of my dreams but for the large, roofed wickerwork beach chairs that have been set out tidily for my benefit.

The state of Schleswig-Holstein, stretching from Denmark south to Hamburg and beyond, is an archetypal European borderland, having shifted between German and Danish control for centuries. Even today, with its borders settled, the state contains substantial Danish- and Frisian-speaking minorities.

The combination of a long and tumultuous history, a green and gentle landscape and long coastlines on the Baltic and North Seas is positively bewitching.

The white beaches of the tideless Baltic are particularly beautiful, and the coast offers resorts large and small. Some, such as Timmendorfer Strand, are just for relaxation; others, like Travemünde, attract the elegantly energetic - and a few days spent basking on a comfortable beach chair constitutes a holiday in itself.

But Schleswig-Holstein has more to offer than wickerwork. Inland, the countryside ripples up from the north German plain into a range of hilly lakelands that earn this part of the world the moniker - exaggerated, to be sure, but one must admire the ambition behind it - of Holsteinische Schweiz: Holstein's Switzerland.

Pretty lake communities such as Eutin and Plön come complete with turreted Schloss - the Schloss Plön overlooking the town, the Schloss Eutin boasting a lakeside setting, gardens landscaped in the englischer style, and a summer opera festival staged under the stars in a waterside auditorium.

Civilised stuff, al fresco opera: and indeed, this corner of Germany embraces a diet of culture with considerable aplomb. The annual Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, now in its 25th year, is an extravaganza of classical music that takes place across the state, and spills into neighbouring Lower Saxony, Hamburg and Denmark. Think Proms-on-the-road.

Venues, in what has become one of the largest classical music festivals in Europe, include barns and hangars as well as concert halls and churches; and the festival also features a special children's programme. Many of the concerts take place on some of Schleswig-Holstein's country estates, offering plenty of scope for agreeable summer evening picnics to an accompaniment of exquisite music.

This part of north Germany, however, isn't all bosky pleasure grounds: it also boasts urban delights enough to counteract all that fresh air and sea bathing.

The gritty state capital at Kiel was devastated during the Second World War and today sees little in the way of tourism; the marvellous engineering feat that is the Kiel Canal, however, is well worth a look, although most visitors gravitate to the historic port of Lübeck. Known as the "Queen of the Hanse" for being the chief mover behind the Hanseatic League, the city retains proof of its medieval prosperity in the restored old centre with its fine merchants' houses, churches and the red-and-black round towers of the Holstentor city gate.

Lübeck attracts the well read and politically minded, who come to the city to visit the museums honouring local Nobel laureates Willy Brandt, Günter Grass and Thomas Mann. But, if this seems altogether too terrifyingly virtuous, bear in mind that the city also attracts the greedy and sweet-toothed, drawn to Café Niederegger's lush premises by Lübeck's claim to be the inventor of marzipan.

Niederegger claims to sell the best marzipan in Lübeck from its premises in the city centre; see www.niederegger.de (451 53 01 126) for a glimpse of a giddy range of products. Schiffergesellschaft zu Lübeck, complete with menus, is at www.schiffergesellschaft.de (451 76 770).

Kick back here with a coffee and choose from every kind of almond confection under the German sun: much more fun than Buddenbrooks (Thomas Mann's first novel), any day. Or catch a glimpse of the city's mercantile past at the banquet tables of the ornate Schiffergesellschaft guildhall, today one of Lübeck's most splendid restaurants.

For me, though, the most striking sight in Lübeck lies on the floor of the reconstructed Marienkirche, in the centre of the medieval city. This atmospheric, twin-steepled church was devastated in the Palm Sunday air raid of March 28-29, 1942, when, amid the destruction, the bells of the Marienkirche crashed down into the church itself.

Today, their twisted remains lie where they fell; close by, meanwhile, hangs the renowned nail cross of Coventry, made of metal salvaged from the ruins of that city's cathedral and as potent a symbol of reconciliation, maybe, as can be imagined. Arresting images of war and peace in Europe: and not to be missed in any tour of Schleswig-Holstein.

Schleswig-Holstein basics

The international dialling code for Germany is 00 49.

For an overview of Schleswig-Holstein, its history and culture, see www.schleswig-holstein.de.

Lübeck and Hamburg airports serve the region. BMI (www.flybmi.com) and BA (www.ba.com) fly to Hamburg from a range of British airports; easyJet (www.easyjet.com) flies to Hamburg from Luton. Ryanair flies daily from London Stansted to Lübeck. (www.ryanair.com)

A double room at the Hotel Geneuser Schiff at Hohwacht on the Baltic coast of Schleswig-Holstein (438 175 33, www.genueser-schiff.de) starts at €10 (£88) for b&b.

The Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival runs at various venues between July 11 and August 30; the theme for 2009 is "Germany". See www.shmf.de (ticket hotline: 431 570 470) for a programme and online booking. For details of the lakeside Festspiele at Eutin (July 9-August 17), see www.eutiner-festspiele.de (452 180 010).

The Willy Brandt Haus in Lübeck is at www.willy-brandt-luebeck.de (451 12 24 250); the Thomas Mann Haus at www.buddenbrookhaus.de; and the Günter Grass Haus at www.guenter-grass-haus.de (451 12 24 243 for both).

Till Eulenspiegel

Mölln is a little charming rogue of a town. Its best-known resident was Till Eulenspiegel, who spent the last years of his life here – not without playing a few more tricks, of course. His stories remain alive in Mölln to this day: the Eulenspiegel stream, his own museum and his tomb slab on the Nicolai Church serve as reminders of the infamous trickster. The Eulenspiegel Festival, which takes place every three years, is a particular high point. For this occasion exclusively, you can experience open-air performances against the backdrop of the historic marketplace.

Foolish antics on the ‘Alte Salzstrasse’

Mölln was once an important junction on the ‘Alte Salzstrasse’ salt trading route. The toll duty from the salt deliveries brought the town a certain amount of wealth, which can still be seen in the old town today with its magnificent buildings and winding alleys.

The superb situation of the **Lauenburg Lakes Nature Park** creates ideal conditions for rest and relaxation in the great outdoors. On your trusty steed or down in the water, on two wheels or your own two feet – there are many ways to relax on holiday around the Till Eulenspiegel town of Mölln. The ‘erlebnisreich’ tourism and nature centre in the historic Stadthauptmannshof offers lots of information and tips for excursions.

Mysterious woods and blue shimmering lakes

The Nature Park entices visitors with its **mysterious woods**, blue shimmering lakes and unique plant and animal habitat. Heading down the romantic avenues, past farmhouse shops and old thatched cottages, you can get to the island and cathedral town of **Ratzeburg** or discover the Elbe-Lübeck Canal. The best way to discover the beautiful ‘Pinnautal’ valley is from the water. If you’re travelling in a group, it’s worth taking the combined cycle-hike-canoe tour, where you get into the Canadian canoes together.

In Mölln there is a map specially made for hiking enthusiasts, with twelve routes ranging from three to twelve kilometres in length. Horse lovers, meanwhile, can choose from riding trips in Eulenspiegel’s estuary lasting from one to several days.

Tip:

Stately homes invite guests on a grand outing near Mölln. **Schloss Wotersen**, as seen on the TV series ‘Das Erbe der Guldenburgs’ (The Guldenburgs’ Legacy) attracts visitors with farmers’ markets, antiques and arts and crafts exhibitions. **Concerts** are held in July and August against a baroque backdrop for the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival. Romantic spring and Christmas markets are held at the idyllic location of **Basthorst Manor**, between the Bille rivulet and the Sachsenwald forest.