

Share the fun - please feel free to send us info on interesting places not mentioned here, so we can add them to the list! We'll be happy to credit you with the tip.

INTERESTING PLACES TO TRAVEL TO

*Why this list? Because I have yet to see a travel guide that was written specifically for those interested in Europe from 650-1650 A.D. I for one have often passed right by a place(or store!) I would have been interested in seeing, because I didn't know about it; it's frustrating to find out about it too late. Here are some places we think you might find interesting, many of which are not found in the standard travel guides (or the guides might not list the specific information that we suggest). I hope this helps you avoid missing a place you would have liked to visit! And be sure to check the Historical Events page, to see what interesting events you could attend. Coryn PS. Unless otherwise noted, I'm the "I" in the listings below. * means we've been there, or someone who has gave us the info.*

Help!

Several of us here at Medieval Miscellanea are currently planning a trip to France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany. In 2011 we hope to go to Spain and Portugal, then possibly the Balkan states (Croatia, etc.). In 2013 it's Germany (200th anniversary of the Battle of Leipzig – ok, it's Napoleonic, but a good excuse for a trip!) Any suggestions for those countries gratefully received.

Tips

The year we were at a place, or learned of it, are in parenthesis in each listing. Please be so kind as to tell us of paces you think should be on our list. We also include a few tips we've learned in our extensive traveling. This list does NOT include festivals and other events – for that you must go to the Events page.

Cultures and peoples were not neatly divided during the Dark Ages, Middle Ages and Renaissance, and were often far from where they might be expected. If you are interested in one specific peoples, be sure you know where they were lest you miss some of them – like the Hungarians and Germans in Romania, the Germans as well as Romanians, Serbs, Slovaks, and others in Hungary, the Saracens and other Arabs in France and Italy, etc. Many traces of these cultures still remain, and there are museums full of info about them.

Tourist bureaus are wonderful. They are a great source of information relating to your specific interests not found elsewhere. If you know where you are going, write ahead and ask; we've managed to arrange walking tours geared to our specific interests (a great way to save time and energy, as well as seeing things you would otherwise have missed – and sometimes they are free!) We've also learned of things we might want to see, and even be able to arrange admittance to closed museums and private residences (castles, etc). Not to mention you can sometimes get great posters (occasionally free!) and other souvenirs - like the picture I got of a Roman Centurian who was asking directions in the Chester tourist office when I walked in...

Many of these places have large or small historical festivals, markets, or other interesting events . Check out the Events page in this website, and also write the appropriate tourist bureaus and ask. We also put info on the historical theme park near Clemenceaux, France on the events page, not here.

I always find out about the foods that are special to the area. Many of these dishes may date back to the Middle Ages and Renaissance (or even earlier!) – for example, the small sausages known as Rostbratchen in Thuringia, Germany date back to at least 1432 A.D., when an ordinance specified the purity of the ingredients. I ask at the local tourist bureau and at our hotel.

Most times a wonderful place or street name is simply a remnant from a vanished past, like Cloth Fair Street as well as the Hand and Shears Pub, both near Smithfield in London (there were huge cloth fairs held in the fields here during the Middle Ages). But sometimes it's not a remnant, and might interest you. It's worth asking about.

Spent some time wandering around in the evening, or even at night – most people miss how interesting and atmospheric a town can be at night, when modern people are not visible and some of the buildings are lit. Of course, use common sense and don't go where it isn't safe – but some of my favorite memories are of wandering around well after midnight in York, Stirling, and Chester; in Rothenburg in Germany, and in Cesky Krumlov in the Czech Republic (just to name a few!). It certainly makes for different vacation photos!

PLACES, INCLUDING THEATERS, HOTELS, RESTAURANTS, ETC.

NORTH AMERICA

USA

* **Grantsville, MD** – if you are interested in Renaissance German domestic architecture, visit Spruce Forest Artisan Village. There is a old house which is a replica of a particular German family's ancestral house, which dated back to the Renaissance; the replica is full of interesting and surprising parts. Check out the stone kitchen sink with the clever drain to the outside of the building!

* **East Liverpool, OH** – just east of downtown, you can see a very nice building that looks like a grouping of medieval and Renaissance attached houses. The different parts incorporate different architectures and different materials (stone, brick, and half-timbering), all harmonious and gorgeous. The buildings, formerly part of a huge orchid growing business called Riverview, housed the offices and the owner's apartment. Now they are a florist shop and greenhouses. Check out the inside, too, especially the chandeliers. I call dibs if it's ever for sale! It's on Anderson Blvd, I think. There are lots of other very nice faux-Tudor and Renaissance houses in East Liverpool, but this is outstanding.

CANADA

Chambly Montreal, Quebec. The restaurant Fourquet Fourchette offers an atmosphere recreating the early days of Montreal, with food to match; apparently there is often appropriate music or a show. www.fourquet-fourchette.com (2007)

Montreal, Quebec. L'Auberge du Dragon Rouge offers a medieval show (music only?) and atmospheric décor, with a choice of gormande or medieval food. www.oyez.ca (2007)

Montreal, Quebec. Le Cabaret du Roy offers music, comedy and food of early Quebec. www.oyez.ca (2007)

Forges-du-Saint-Mauice, Quebec. Especially on Sundays, they present a variety of attractions, including a military camp, music and dances, etc. from the early days of Quebec. (2007)

EUROPE

Hostels - want to stay in a castle, palace, or other historical building, and/or have a great location at a low price? Check out hostels! You can stay in castles and palaces, or have great views of castles. For example, in Stirling and Edinburgh, Scotland, the hostels are in old buildings just a door or two from the castles (some rooms have castle views!). In York the hostel is inside the old city walls, and one room at least has a view of both the castle and the cathedral. In Cesky Krumlov (Czech Republic) the hostel is in the heart of the old town, right by the river. Hostels are not just for students or the young, and some have private or semi-private rooms (and even private bathrooms!). But check out the requirements; for example, must you bring your own sheets, and do they have a curfew or lock you out for the main part of the day? Also, do check out the anticipated noise level, as some hostels are more party-oriented than others or there may be a group of schoolchildren staying there when you are (the teens are the noisiest!). Some outstanding hostels in historic buildings are listed below by city and country.

BELGUIM

Mechelen has the Foolish Art Collection. This places a focus on satirical art from the 15th through to the 17th centuries, including works by masters of the genre such as Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel. The collection's name refers to the satirical paintings, also known as *sot* (foolish, crazy) in the 16th century. The works generally depict human sins and failings perpetrated by grotesque figures, and contain highly complex uses of symbolic figures. (2010)

CZECH REPUBLIC

* **Cesky Krumlov** in the southwestern part of the country can be done as a day trip from Austria (it's due north of Linz). During the Renaissance the local prince decided his castle needed work, so he brought lots of Italians to spiff it up (and very spiffy it is!). Then he decided the town itself, down below the cliffs in the curve of the river, was too shabby to suit his beautiful castle, so he set his workmen loose on the town! Shortly thereafter, the lower town fell into almost an enchanted slumber – the princely family moved elsewhere and those with money moved up onto the surrounding heights, so the buildings were not remodeled or ripped down and replaced. Then by some miracle the town was not “improved” under the communists. It's recently been tastefully and sensitively cleaned up, and has LOTS of great shops – including 2 stores offering very nice arms and armor! I spent 4 hours wandering around very late at night (and I felt perfectly safe!) I arrived too late to eat at the famous historical restaurant/tavern up near the castle, name forgotten – let me know if it lived up to the praise. There is a youth hostel in the center of the old town, right by the river – might be worth a stay. If you are rich, there is a wonderful historical hotel in town (name forgotten) with costumed employees – if not, at least wander in for a look. (2005)

* **Hradek Kralovy** has a nice, inexpensive medieval-themed restaurant, in a town with many Renaissance buildings still existing. The little festival (hot historical) on a square by the river had perhaps 2 dozen booths, including several with hand-made period wooden toys. (2005)

* **Kutna Hora** is quite interesting. (2005)

* **Prague** - don't miss the row of houses now called Goldsmith's Row, located inside the castle walls. These teeny tiny little houses were built up against the walls by the castle guards, to house their families. The larger ones are two stories, and so have two rooms, although the rooms are still very small (especially for an entire family). They became goldsmith's shops (obviously a very secure location for an expensive store!), and some are now gift shops. And we found a historical market being held on the main town square on our visit – check to see when, or if, it's still being held. (1995)

* **Tabor** – this is an interesting little town between Prague and Cesky Krumlov. It was built by the Hussites specifically as a defensible town during the wars of religion, so walk it while imagining being an attacker, or a defender. Good luck not getting lost – it was deliberately designed to confuse and disorient attackers. Note the buttresses that stick out and make the street very narrow in the middle of some blocks, with a door on each side of the buttress – any rush down the street would be broken by a sudden bottleneck; and no matter from which direction the attack came, the defenders could shoot from behind the buttress, ducking back into the door when they had to. From there they could retreat to the cellars, if necessary – which are interconnected with lots of other cellars, but in a maze with sudden dead ends, drops, low ceilings and crawl-throughs. If you don't know where you are going, you would get lost, and might never get out (DON'T wander off from one of the tours of the cellars, or get left behind like I almost did!). The tours leave from the very nice little Hussite museum, and end coming out at a building across the wide main square, so allow plenty of time in the museum before taking the tour. (2005)

ENGLAND

* **London**, of course. Be sure to visit Smithfield; off Charterhouse Square there is the entrance to Sutton Hospital. Here the warren of tiny Elizabethan alleys and cobbled courts, ivy walls and an ancient water hand pump show how London must have looked 400 years ago. Nearby are several Elizabethan gatehouses plus the church built by Rahare (favorite fool to Henry I), which is almost unchanged after 900 years. Don't miss the gravestones – my favorite reads “Shee first deceased. Hee for a little tryd, To live without her, liked it not and dyd”. Now THAT's romance! On the other side of the river is the recreation of Drake's ship the Golden Hinde. It's amazing how small it is! There are sometimes costumed docents or reenactors on the ship or in the gift shop across the wharf. While on the south side of the river, check out the Globe, of course – but also go visit the nearby existing Elizabethan building that was an inn, with a courtyard surrounded by a balcony along the second floor. This is the sort of place where plays were presented long before the Globe was built, and where outside of London traveling actors would set up stage. There is a youth hostel in Holland Palace (a very grand building with one wing a former Jacobin manor, build in 1607; very centrally located, in Holland Park). (2003)

* **Rye** was a famous smuggler's town from medieval times on. Stay at the Mermaid Inn, an Elizabethan building with hidey-holes and a resident ghost. In August there is a medieval festival. (2003)

* **St. Briavel's** (near Cheapstow) has a moated Norman castle, built by King John as a hunting lodge and guard against the Welsh. It's now a youth hostel, with great views of Wales across the valley. You can stay in the prison room (on an upper floor), the throne room, etc. Be sure to take the guided tour. (2009)

* **Shrewsbury**, especially if you are a fan of the Brother Cadfael medieval mysteries. This is a good town for walking late at night, to get a better feel for medieval times. There was, in 2000, an interactive mystery exhibit at the monastery; no idea if it is still being offered. (2000)

The Weald and Downland Open Air Museum in Sussex has rescued buildings from the 13th C. on, including a timber-framed farmhouse and a medieval shop. There is a reconstructed market square that in the picture looks like it would have been found in a medieval village. They hold events, too. (2009)

* **Totnes** is a medieval town on a hill, with a castle at the top. It has both an Elizabethan Museum and a Costume Museum, not to mention a costumed charity market every Tuesday morning in the summer, and a Drake festival in August. Interesting architecture including protruding second stories to protect the merchants and shoppers. (2007)

* **Upton-Upon-Severn** has an Elizabethan house, which is currently a private museum. See it soon – the owner has done a great job of restoring it, but she is not young, and who knows what will become of it. A particularly good time to go is when the Riverfest is being held. (2009)

* **Wilderhope Manor** is a large, E-shaped Elizabethan manor house (1586) in the Welsh Marches, owned by the National Trust – but it's a youth hostel, and you can stay there! Check out the plastered ceilings, the staircases, the multi-bow holder over the fireplace in one of the main rooms, etc. An amazing place! They would be willing to rent out the whole thing, quite reasonably - what an Elizabethan event I could hold here, or what a place for a destination wedding... (2009)

FRANCE

Bories are beehive-shaped stone buildings with slate or stone roofs, used as dwellings or storage from pre-historic times. There is one group called "les cabanes du Breuil", very interesting. (2002)

* **Bligny sur Ouche** is not far off the beaten path (i.e., several major freeways!), and offers the Chateau d'Ecotigny. This was constructed between the 12th & 17th centuries, but then the family moved away and it ended up being used to shelter sheep for several hundred years. The new owners are restoring it and it's now a wonderful bed and breakfast (some rooms have working fireplaces). Madame showed us before-and-after pictures and took us on a full tour from the attics to the cellar (although she wouldn't let us climb down into the well to check out the escape tunnel). She introduced us to the skeletons they found while working on the place. Oh, the stories she told! (2002)

* **Carcassonne** – the guidebooks will tell you all about this wonderful medieval town, but not that it has a lovely tapestry store where you can get recreations of period tapestries not seen elsewhere. If they are still there, ask to see the basement – beautifully carved furniture (including a fantastic cabinet/display case), weapons, armor, etc. We bought 2 tapestries, but they wouldn't sell us any of the furniture. While in Carcassonne, don't miss the visitor's center, which is OUTSIDE the walls – it has several detailed dioramas of Carcassonne during different periods of history. And do drop into the famous hotel with the medieval furniture and décor, even if you can't afford to stay there (if you are rich enough that you can, wouldn't you like to take a guide along? I speak some French...). Oh, Carcassonne also has a tournament each year, held in the original jousting grounds between the walls. (2002)

La Roque Saint-Christophe is a steep cliff with caves that have been inhabited since pre-historic times. The photos we have seen include medieval half-timbered walls transforming the caves into houses, as well as large cranks and other methods of bringing wood and supplies up to the ledges; not to mention people in medieval costumes. (2002)

Moorish Provence. Think the Moors were only in Spain, and were kept out of France by Roland? Wrong. Besides raiding across the border and along the coast of France, some Saracens came to stay. They conquered or established a number of villages and even towns in southern France, especially along

the coast. Some of these stayed Muslim for a long time until conquered or re-conquered by Christians. Gourdon especially is known as the Saracen town. High up in the hills, there are magnificent views over a large sweep of the coast. The chateau was restored during the 17th C, and craftspeople have opened studios and shops along the village streets. There are many other medieval villages perched on mountainsides in the general area, some of them fortified. Some have historic festivals (Castellane) or festivals of ancient music (Simiane la Rotonde), others are filled with craftspeople, still others have been used as settings for historical films (Riboux). Chateauxdouble is known for having 2 castles, and Trets has a 13th C. synagogue. Don't miss the many frescos in the area – it seems like each village has more than the last. The Little Train de Pignes starts in Digne-les-Bains and goes all the way to the Riviera, stopping at villages along the way – might be worth checking out. Check out the Weekend in Provence, from the regional tourist board at www.crt-paca.fr (but don't expect to cover even a fraction of the sights in even 2 weeks, much less a weekend). (2005)

Mouzon has a Felt Museum (Musee de Feutre), “where the transformation of the material from wool to felt will be carried out in front of you”. Besides the technical side to the use of felt, the artistic uses are also shown in the museum. (2010)

* **Rocamadour** is the second most holy pilgrimage site in France (just after Saint-Denis in Paris). This is a delightful little medieval village part-way up a sloping cliff from the fields on the valley floor; the way the houses were built and the street walled and gated at each end made it quite defensible. There is a castle on the top of the cliff, and the church buildings are located between the two. Try to stay overnight here, as it's better after the tourists leave in the evening. You can buy a pilgrim's badge even if you don't climb the steps to the church on your knees. (2002)

GERMANY

* **Alsfeld** is a medieval town which still has over 400 half-timbered houses, as well as a big medieval event in September and Walpurgisnacht celebrations at the end of April. (2007)

* **Landshut** still has most of its late medieval buildings (many with painted facades) and layout, and is the home of the Landshutter Hochzeit, a fantastic historical recreation of a wedding (held every 4 years). Burg Trausnitz is one of the largest and most impressive castles in Germany. www.landshut.de (1977)

* **Marksburg**, at the intersection of the Lahn and Rhine rivers. Much is ruined now, but the main buildings that remain are appropriately furnished and decorated. Not to be missed. (1976)

* **Schleswig** is not only Schleswig-Holstein's oldest city, but the most important German port for the Vikings. They left boats, gold jewelry and graves where they had their settlement. The Wikinger-Museum Haithabu is excellent, while the Archaeologisches Landesmuseum has 4th C. bodies, fragments of clothing, shoes and weapons, as well as a longship c. 1350, all rescued from peat bogs. Schleswig is also one of the best-preserved cities in northern Germany, with an excellent museum with art and handicrafts from the middle ages and Renaissance, including several paintings by Lucas Cranach. (2003)

HUNGARY

* **Budapest**, of course. Note the wonderful carving at the castle, and the wonderful embroidered linens that women stand holding for sale along the outer walls. Don't miss the flea market down by the river – in 1995 I bought an antique hand-embroidered sheepskin vest (shaggy wool on the inside) from an old gypsy woman, and in 2005 bought another. Both are perfect for garb. Bargain hard, but watch out for pick-pockets and very aggressive sellers. (1995)

The Puszta, the Great Plains of Hungary, are incredible, well worth a visit for their architecture and museums alone. You can also see ancient breeds of animals, sweep wells, etc. The Arpad Era Archeological Park recreates a living village from the 9th C., and offers many hands-on activities, some involving horses. The castle in Sümeg has an exhibit of the Transdanubian Hussar Association – no idea how early they date. While in the Puszta, stay in thatched buildings or yurts, or on the site of a medieval Hungarian village. Shop in a “handicraft yard” or ancient winery (Hungarian wines and brandies are known world-wide). You can also go pleasure riding, on one of many different historical breeds of ponies and horses including Akhal-Teke (Achal-Tekinis), Lippizaners, Haflings, Karbardins, Mezohegyes or Kisber half-breeds, Gidrans, Nonius, Noris, and more. Carriage rides onto the Puszta are also readily available (or sleigh rides in winter). If you like displays of ancient riding styles, gypsy and folklore shows, yurts, Mongols, schools teaching mounted archery, and a whole bunch more, check out the listing for the Puszta on the Events page, in Spring through Fall. There is also info on recommended booklet to get from the Hungarian Tourist Bureau. (2005)

IRELAND

* At the **Kerry County Museum** "Medieval Life" exhibit, you can experience the sights, sounds --and yes-- smells of medieval life. http://www.kerrymuseum.ie/explore_6.html. Courtesy of Beth Johnson (2007)

ITALY

* **Grazzano Visconti** www.grazzano.org . Ok, the town is a fake, but like the Burgo Medivale in Turin (below) it was built as a reconstruction of a medieval town. They have a medieval faire geared to children, lots of fun for all ages. (2003)

San Marino is actually a country, but so tiny and so Italian that we're including it here. Besides the interesting city itself, there are several medieval stores in San Marino. 2007

* **Sirmione**. This charming town is at the tip of a long, skinny peninsula; the castle moat and walls separate the tip from the rest. This is a good place to buy brass, bronze and iron stuff for your camp cooking, plus ceramics for your home. Check out the ingenious medieval fish pens in the moat, kept fresh by the tides; small fish can come in thru the mesh, but after they are fed and fatten enough, they can't get back out. Now the restaurants sell stale leftover bread to the tourists, who feed the fish – then the restaurants harvest the fish to feed to the tourists. Talk about double-dipping! (2003)

* **Turin**. Go to the Burgo Medivale to see what a small medieval town actually looked like, and a Renfair site could look like. The buildings are painstaking re-creations of medieval ones that existed at the time they were re-created, in the late 1800s (many of those originals have since, alas, been lost). The streetscape makes it feel like an actual surviving town. The recreated castle includes duplicates of furnishings and frescos from actual castles, including one of the Nine Heroines (and you just thought there were Nine Heroes!). The shopping and restaurants aren't bad, either! (2003)

ROMANIA

* Do go to **Sighisoara**, where Vlad Tepes, aka Vlad Dracul or Vlad the Impaler, spent much of his childhood (you can eat in the restaurant in his house). A lovely little medieval town, with a medieval festival. (2000)

* **Bucharest**, naturally. Try to stay at the Caravannassarai in the heart of the oldest section, just a block or two from the remains of Vlad Tepes' castle. This is the medieval building where the caravans would stay in Bucharest, as they traveled along the trade routes between the East and West. The exterior of the 2-story building, and the large courtyard it completely surrounds, haven't been much changed since those times. Our room on the upper floor was quite large and comfortable, with a private bath, altogether a very sensitive remodeling. However, stay as far away from the public rooms as possible – when we were there, a wedding was being celebrated, and the very noisy party went on almost until dawn. Each course of food was heralded by a trumpet call, and they ate the whole time! Be sure to go to the Museum of the Romanian Peasant – there aren't dates on the exhibits, but there is fantastic shopping for antique textiles and clothing in the gift shop! Some of the heavy linen blouses, hand-embroidered, are perfect for conversion to Elizabethan garb, and none of the ones I bought cost as much as the tissue-thin modern touristy one I had already bought. Also, there aren't many book stores in Bucharest, but do go to the street with all the used book stalls. It's the only place I have literally been fought over by two men, when one thought the other was poaching his free-spending customer. I came home with a suitcase of books unavailable in the U.S. And then there are the fabric stores – heavy silk in a brocade, 60" wide, \$3.50 a meter; cashmere wool, 60" wide, \$8 a meter. No room in the suitcase? I folded one of my cashmere pieces in half lengthwise and wore it like a wrap onto the plane! (2000)