




Three Corners of Europe

Black Forest, Alsace and Switzerland



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Three Corners Introduction



The "Three Corners" of Europe is the region where the Rhine River forms boundaries between Germany, France, and Switzerland – between the Black Forest, Alsace, and the cantons of north-eastern Switzerland.

These photos are from the nine-day tour of this region offered by European Castles Tours and conducted by its founder, Astrid Baur.

This tour itinerary offers a mixture of sightseeing opportunities. Remarkable castles are a staple ingredient in almost all of Astrid's tours. We explored three, one in France and two in Germany, one massive and sprawling, one compact and spiky.

Lakes, rivers, and breathtaking landscapes are also staples on Astrid's tours, and this one has a mountain thrown in too.

The "Alsace Wine Route" was a surprise. North Americans expect a wine route to connect a series of wineries, but this one connects a series of gorgeous and charming wine country villages.

Following Astrid's tour I headed deeper into Switzerland for some day-trip explorations from a base in Interlaken. Pictures from that phase of this trip are in the Switzerland section of this website.

Bruce McKay

Three Corners

- Tour Destinations
- ★ Tour Accommodations
- Independent
- Other Cities





Welcome

We arrived at Zurich Airport but immediately headed north to France and on to our base in Obernai.



Obernai

Obernai is an incredibly well-preserved medieval city of 11,000 inhabitants, 20 minutes south-west of Strasbourg.



Obernai

The town was surrounded by two rings of fortifications, portions of which remain. The interior ring was erected about 1282, and the exterior early in the 14th century.



Obernai

Our hotel is in the centre of town, and there are dozens of sidewalk cafés close-by for us to choose from.



Obernai

Obernai bills itself as "Alsace in a nutshell".



Obernai

A relaxed evening here before a big adventure tomorrow.



**Haut-
Koenigsbourg**

Haut-Koenigsbourg (High King's Castle), is strategically located atop Stophanberch maintain (2,477 feet / 755 metres high).



**Haut-
Koenigsbourg**

This 1.5 hectare / 3.7 acre castle oversees the junction of what were once important trading routes for wheat and wine and for salt and silver.



**Haut-
Koenigsbourg**

- Rebuilt by Hapsburg supporters in the middle of the 15th century.
- Destroyed by Swedish troops during the Thirty Years War (1618–1648).



**Haut-
Koenigsbourg**

- Restored by Kaiser Wilhelm II between 1900 and 1908.
- Confiscated by France after World War I.



Haut-
Koenigsbourg

The furnishings acquired during the restoration illustrate life from the late middle ages to the Thirty Years War.



**Haut-
Koenigsbourg**

The castle provides an incredible view across the fertile and prosperous Alsatian plain, now famous for its white wines.



Wine Route:
Ribeauvillé

The Alsatian Wine Route runs north-south for 106 miles / 170 km, connecting 16 quaint villages with narrow streets and flower-decked houses.



Wine Route:
Ribeauvillé

Many of these picturesque villages, like Ribeauvillé, live in the shadow of once-dominant castles or fortresses.



Wine Route:
Ribeauvillé

Ribeauvillé still has many medieval houses and is partially surrounded by its ancient walls. Storks have taken up residence atop the tower.



Wine Route:
Ribeauvillé

Storks, considered the symbol of happiness and faithfulness, are the emblem of Alsace. Although endangered in late C20, re-population efforts are obviously succeeding.



Wine Route:
Riquewihr

Riquewihr, the second village we visit, is still surrounded by its medieval fortifications. It was not damaged during WW II and looks today as it did in the 16th Century.



Wine Route:
Riquewihr

Riquewihr is equally famous for its architecture and its Riesling.



Wine Route:
Kayserberg

Kayserberg, our third village, is dominated by the ruins of the medieval Kayserberg Castle, now mostly just one round tower.



Wine Route:
Kayserberg

The first vines were brought here from Hungary in the 16th century and wine production remains important.



Wine Route:
Kayserberg

The centres of these villages are pedestrian zones.



Wine Route:
Kayserberg

These villages with their half-timbered houses are incredibly photogenic, but the relaxed pace of life is perhaps even more attractive.



Strasbourg

Strasbourg is a big city of 500,000, the capital of Alsace, and seat of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament.



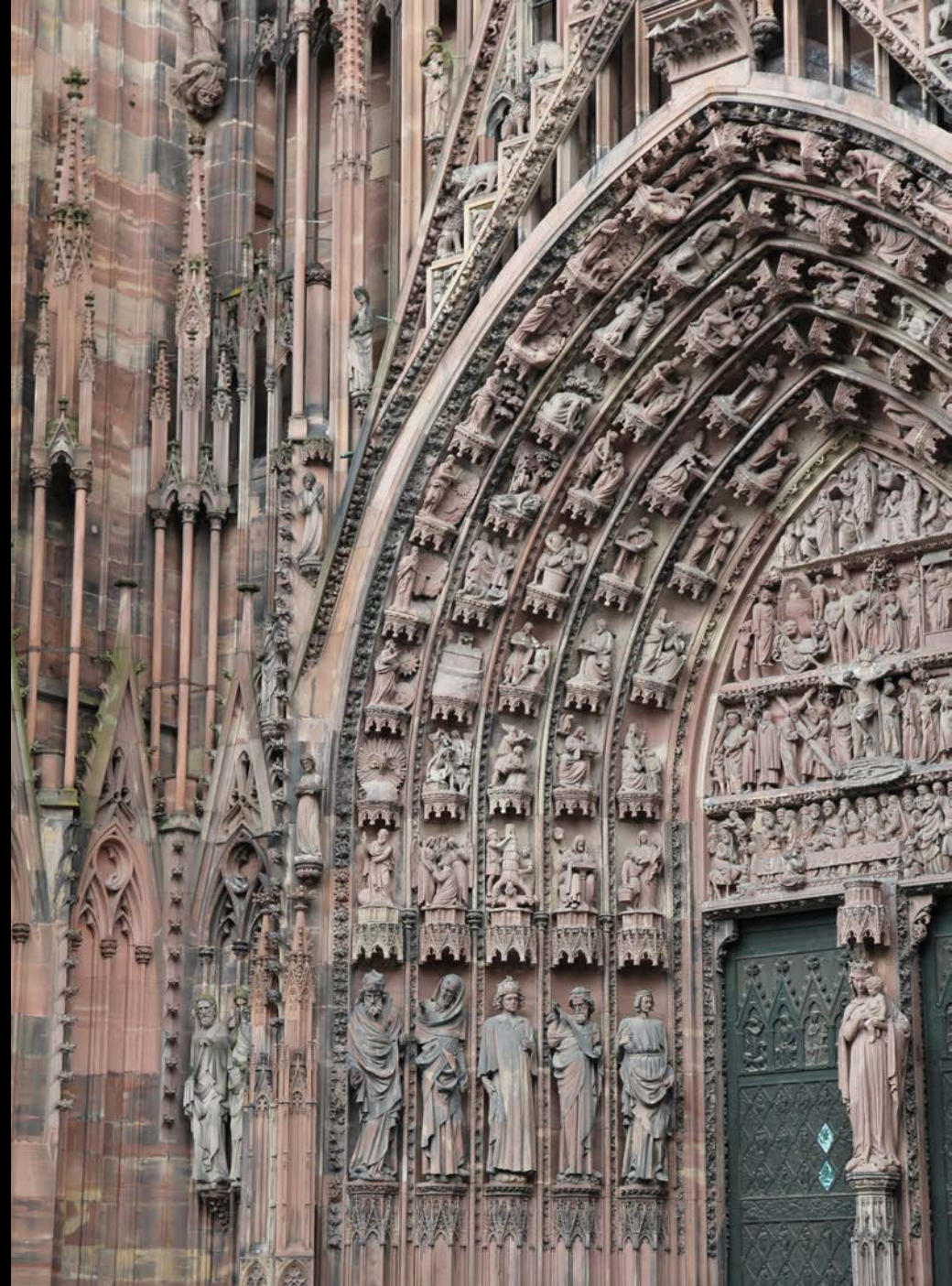
Strasbourg

Astrid points out some highlights of the city centre, including the 466-foot / 142 metre spire of Strasbourg Cathedral, which dominates the old town.



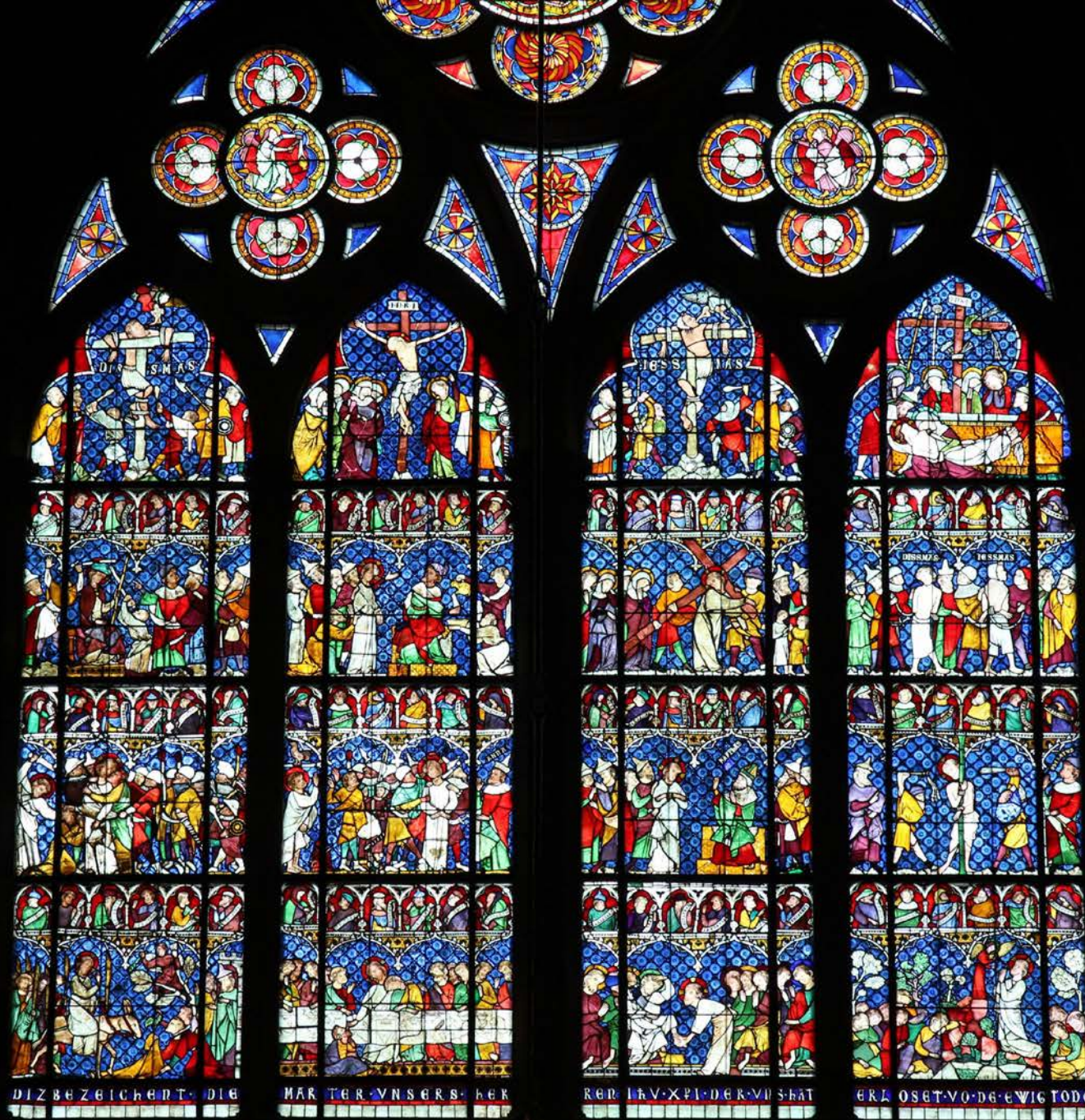
Strasbourg

The Cathedral of Our Lady of Strasbourg is considered one of the finest examples of late Gothic architecture. Major construction began in the 1200s.



Strasbourg

The Cathedral was the world's tallest building from 1647 to 1874. The west front, decorated with thousands of figures, is considered a masterpiece of the Gothic era.



Strasbourg

The Cathedral was hit by Allied bombs during WW II, but the stained glass windows – some late 12th century, mostly 14th century – had been removed and were restored later.



Strasbourg

Strasbourg is strategically situated on the Ill River, where it flows into the Rhine. Settlement dates from 1300 BC.



Strasbourg

It's raining today, so the enclosed Strasbourg River Boats are a comfortable way to do some sightseeing (though they're not great for taking pictures).



Strasbourg

This former monastery, then prison, is now headquarters for France's *École nationale d'Administration*.



Strasbourg

**The River Boats also venture into the European Union institutions zone.
Political and administrative functions are split between Brussels and Strasbourg.**



Colmar

Colmar is smaller and friendlier, and we can explore on foot.



Colmar

The House of Heads, named for the large number of masks and grimacing faces adorning its facade, was built in 1609 for a prosperous merchant who later became mayor.



Colmar

The tiniest house in Colmar is less impressive but equally interesting.



Colmar

The sculptor Auguste Bartholdi (1834 - 1904) is Colmar's most famous artist. The house where he was born houses the Bartholdi Museum.



Colmar

Bartholdi is best known as the creator of the Statue of Liberty. Models from the period of its development are on display.



Colmar

Little Venice



Colmar

Little Venice



Colmar

Tanners' District



Germany



Black Forest

There are no black trees in Germany's Black Forest, but there are a lot of dark green ones, and they're closely spaced, so sometimes it's dark.



**Black
Forest**

It's a beautiful, peaceful region.



Lake Titisee We're staying in the Lake Titisee resort area.



Lake Titisee

**A last-minute change in hotels has
landed us in the nicest place in town.**



Lake Titisee **View from the hotel**



Lake Titisee

Everything for a dream vacation is here, and it would be tempting just to stay put. But ...



Freiburg

... We're off to explore Freiburg, hub of the western Black Forest, incorporated in the early 12th century, and one of the famous old German university towns.



Freiburg

The new Rathaus (Town Hall) of 1896
supplements the original of 1557.



Freiburg

The Historical Merchants Hall, built between 1520 and 1530, is decorated with statues and the coats of arms of four Habsburg emperors.



Freiburg

Construction of Freiburg Cathedral started around 1200. It has the only church tower in Germany completed in the middle ages (1330). It escaped damage in WW II.



Breisach

The Badischer Winzeller, one of Europe's largest wineries, is a co-operative that serves over 6,000 vintner families and produces over 500 different types of wine.



Breisach

Our highly informative tour was conducted by a veteran wine making expert. But he didn't speak English so Astrid translated.



**Hohenzollern
Castle**

Hohenzollern Castle sits atop Mount Hohenzollern, about 45 miles / 70 km south of Stuttgart, and about 770 feet / 235 m above the village of Hechingen below.



**Hohenzollern
Castle**

The castle is considered the ancestral seat of the Hohenzollern family, which emerged in the Middle Ages and eventually became German Emperors.



Hohenzollern Castle

It was first constructed in the 11th century, destroyed in 1423, rebuilt between 1454 and 1461, served through the 1600s, but fell into disrepair in the 18th century.



**Hohenzollern
Castle**

The current castle was constructed for Frederick William IV of Prussia between 1846 and 1867. Interior photography is not permitted.



**Hohenzollern
Castle**

View across the Swabian plain.
The castle remains the property of the Hohenzollern family.



Lichtenstein Castle

Lichtenstein castle is not the largest on our tour, but its setting is the most dramatic.

Lichtenstein Castle is a mid-19th century Neo-Gothic folly erected on medieval ruins.

It is located on a cliff in the Swabian plain about 35 miles / 60 km south of Stuttgart.

Just like Neuschwanstein Castle, it looks like it belongs in a fairytale.



**Lichtenstein
Castle**

There has been a castle on the site since around 1200. It was destroyed in war in 1311, rebuilt, and destroyed again in 1381 but not rebuilt.



**Lichtenstein
Castle**

The current castle was built to replace the ruins by Duke Wilhelm of Urach, Count of Württemberg, between 1840 and 1842.



**Lichtenstein
Castle**

Duke Wilhelm was inspired by Wilhelm Hauff's German novel *Lichtenstein*, which in turn had been inspired by Sir Walter Scott's Scottish novels.



**Lichtenstein
Castle**

View across the town of Honau and Swabian Alb.
Lichtenstein Castle is still owned by the Dukes of Urach.



Rhine Falls

The Rhine Falls at Schaffhausen is the largest plain waterfall in Europe – 450 feet / 150 metres wide and 75 feet / 23 metres high.



Rhine Falls

In summer the average flow is 185,000
US gallons / 700,000 litres per second.



Rhine Falls

At this point the Rhine is just getting started. It still has about 560 miles / 900 km to go and build on its way to the North Sea.



Lucerne

Beautiful Lucerne is understandably a favourite for tourists. I've been here before, and it's great to be back.



Lucerne

The Chapel Bridge is the city's most iconic feature.
Never mind that the 1333 bridge had to be replaced after a fire in 1993.



Lucerne

Waterside cafés on one side of the river ...



Lucerne

... with elegant old hotels opposite.
Cruises on Lake Lucerne depart from here.



Lucerne

If you're interested, see the Switzerland page for more on Lucerne and Lake Lucerne cruises – in the Switzerland-2007-2.pdf.



Merlischachen On this trip we're staying in Merlischachen,
on the lake on the outskirts of Lucerne.



Merlischachen The topography here has changed.
Not the Black Forest any more. Distinctively Switzerland.



Merlischachen A hint of what will follow in my stay in Switzerland after the tour.



Merlischachen Again we're staying in a perfect vacation resort and there's a temptation to just settle in. But ...



Mount Pilatus We have a mountain to climb, Mount Pilatus.
Elevation 6,982 feet / 2,128 metres.



Mount Pilatus The Pilatus Bahn is the world's steepest cogwheel railway. It boasts a gradient of 48%.



Mount Pilatus As our 30-minute climb begins we get a view across Lake Lucerne.



Mount Pilatus And then we pass into the clouds.



Mount Pilatus As we near the summit we get a glimpse of the valley below.



Mount Pilatus But its a cloudy day up here.



Mount Pilatus We take a group picture inside.
The high point of our tour.



Mount Pilatus We use a different mode of transport for our descent.
The cablecar ride takes just 5 minutes.



**Museum of
Transport**

Later, on my free time, I visit the Swiss Museum of Transport.
This is not modern art. It's the cutting face of a tunnel boring machine. Nicely painted.



**Museum of
Transport**

This complex exhibits all forms of transport, including rail, road, ship, cableway, aircraft, and space, and is the most popular museum in Switzerland.



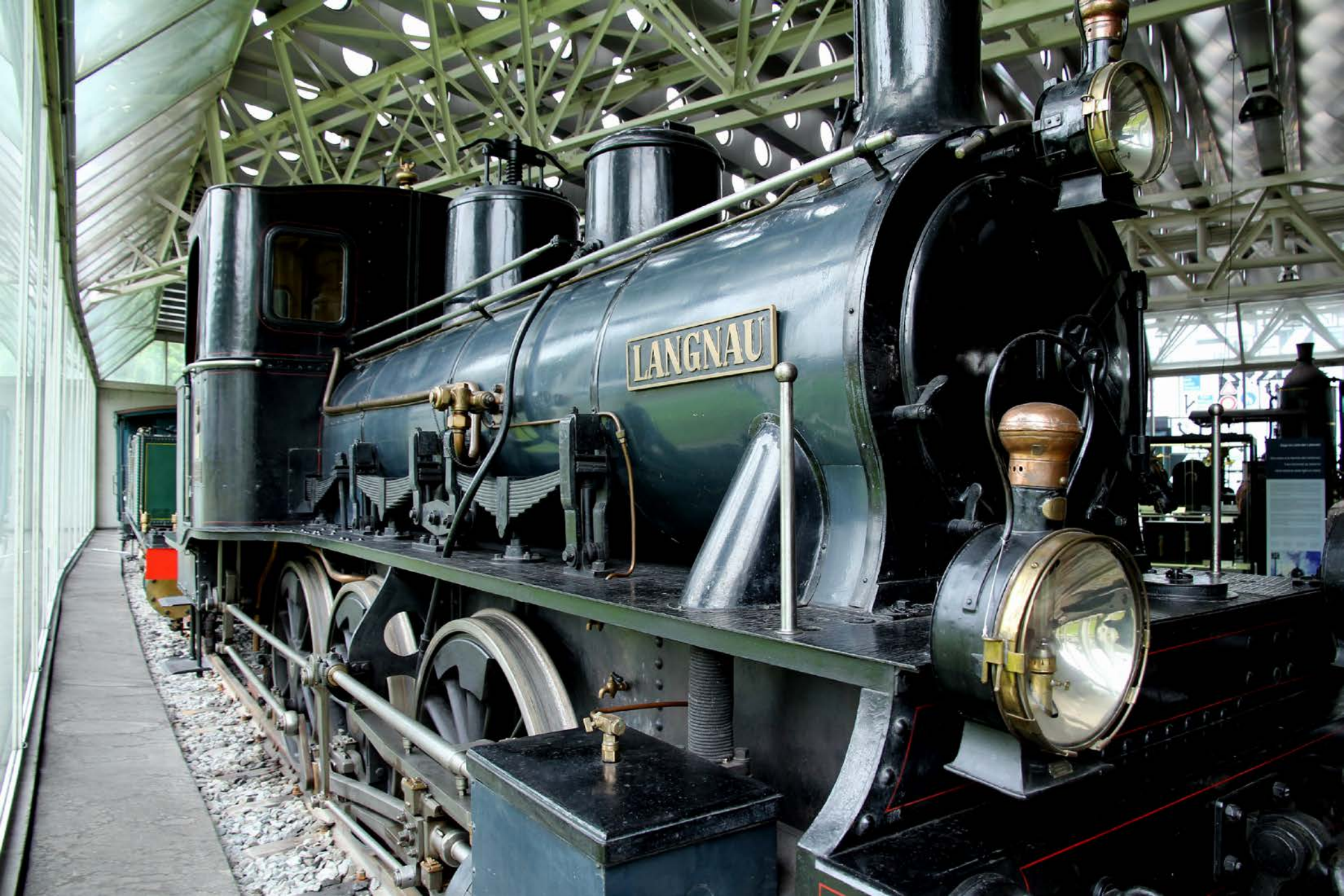
Museum of Transport

The indoor exhibition halls feature more than 3,000 objects spread over 215,000 sq feet / 20,000 sq m of exhibition space.



**Museum of
Transport**

There are models of each form of transport, tracing developments from ancient times to the present.



**Museum of
Transport**

The collection of locomotives and period
railway cars is especially extensive.



**Museum of
Transport**

There are so many automobiles that they are stacked and retrieved for close-up viewing by an automated picker system.



**Museum of
Transport**

This museum was one of the first to introduce and stress interactivity. This hands-on shipping zone is especially popular with kids.



**Museum of
Transport**

As I watch the kids enjoying their miniature train rides I realize that I'll be on a real train tomorrow, headed off for the second part of my trip.

< End >

Three Corners

