

Cycling Mosel River

Saddle up for a slow sipping tour

Heaven is biking through Germany's Mosel district, writes **Cameron Wilson**

I HAVE half a day to spend in Trier before the start of my cycling trip along Germany's Mosel River, but it's just as well because the city has turned out to be a bit of a destination in its own right.

The Romans were serious enough about this end of the Mosel Valley that they established a major settlement here in 17BC, complete with monumental basilica, amphitheatre and an impressive city gate, now the centrepiece of modern-day Trier.

After a few hours inspecting the marvellous Roman remains, I walk over to the Hauptbahnhof (central train station) to pick up my rental bike – an eight-gear hybrid with a well-sprung saddle, ideal for a few days' cycle touring.

At breakfast the next morning, I get my first look at a trail map showing the dramatic U-bends and S-curves carved into the landscape by the Mosel.

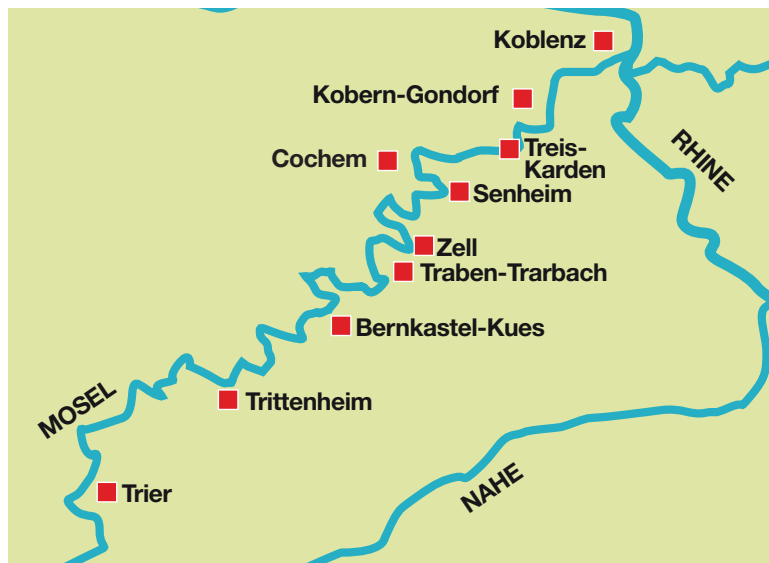
My luggage is to be transported to my accommodation over the next four days so, encumbered by nothing but a bagged lunch and water bottle, I wheel away through the streets of Trier to the cycle path that will take me nearly 200km northeast to Koblenz.

The Mosel is one of Europe's great cycling routes, in part because of the procession of postcard-perfect towns and castles that line its banks, but mainly because this is Germany's premier wine-making region.

Even the smallest of villages have their signature wineries, and it's the easiest thing in the world to fetch up on your bicycle at any one of them for a little weinprobe (wine tasting).

After cycling for an hour alongside riesling grapevines that grow on the steep valley walls, I'm keen to get acquainted with the local viticulture and a sign pointing to Longen-Schlöder winery prompts my first detour.

At the cellar door, Helene speaks English, which is handy since my knowledge of Mosel wines amounts to precious little. I've soon grasped that riesling trocken is dry, halbtrocken is half-dry and spätlese and auslese are the sweeter styles for which the Mosel is most renowned.



SCENE SET: Roman ruins in Trier (below left); and cycling the Mosel River.



I sample a dozen wines while Helene gets to practise her English, so by the time I mount up and rejoin the bike path, it's been a more than agreeable hour for both of us.

The Mosel is soon unwinding before me in all its splendour: barges and ferries along the river; ruined castles and monasteries appear suddenly around bends and atop hillsides; fellow cycle tourists in pairs, family groups or the occasional peloton whir past, soon to pull over for the next riverside picnic, village visit or winery stop.

By the time I reach the twin towns of Bernkastel-Kues around noon on Day 2, I can hardly remember a time when I wasn't pedalling along in the sunshine, infused with a gentle white-wine glow. Bernkastel is full of weekend tourists drinking wine and

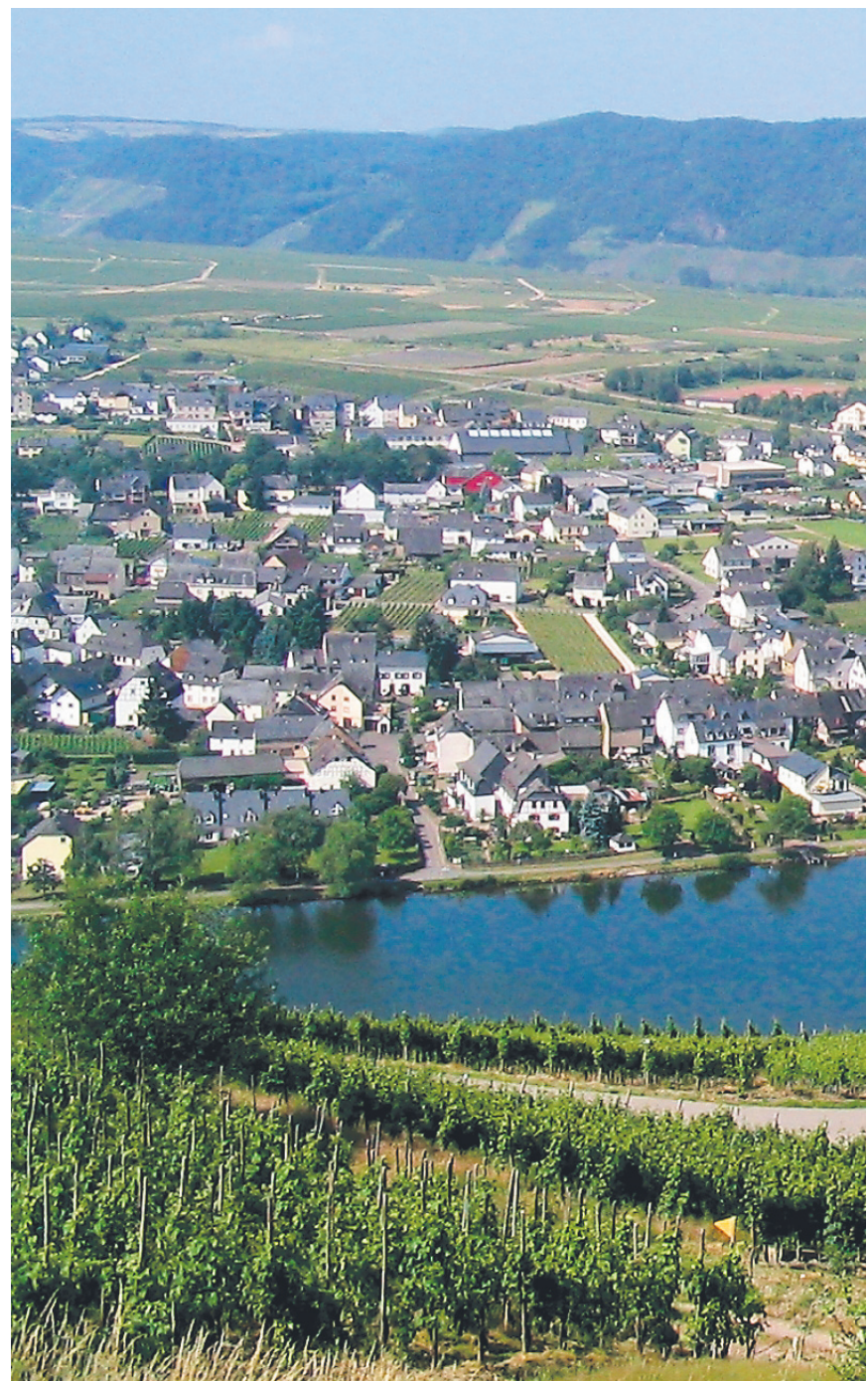
weiss bier (wheat beer) in the sun or strolling the narrow, cobbled streets.

Some take the steep walk up to Burg Landshut, the brooding stone fortification that has stood sentinel above the town since 1277.

Across the river in Kues, I'm able to get properly to grips with the history of the region's winemaking at the Mosel Wine Museum.

At the Vinothek next door, €15 (\$22) secures me an empty glass and directions to some stairs leading down to a cavernous cellar. There are 130 wines available here for tasting, and given I'm a cycle tourist rather than a motorist, a fair few of them are about to come under scrutiny.

And 90 minutes later I've ventured through winery labels A to Z, enhanced my appreciation of the



subtleties among riesling styles, and drunk somewhere between two and 11 glasses of wine. Fortunately it's a lazy 5km to the town of Graach-Schäferrei where my accommodation awaits so, pleasantly squiffy and pleased with the world, I head north.

When I arrive at Graach, Kemmer's Panorama Hotel is nowhere to be seen, but a map on the church wall alerts me to its whereabouts: The hyphenated "Schäferrei" is Graach's satellite hamlet, perched high among the vineyards. A panoramic view may be on offer, but it seems I'm going to have to earn it.

A Category 3 Tour de France climb may not be everyone's idea of holiday biking, but I'm genuinely thrilled to find myself faced with a proper European cycling ascent.

Fuelled by prospects of a majestic view and a litre or so of Germany's finest plonk, I click into first gear and, riding out of the saddle, power up the 2km of punishing switchbacks.

On reaching the hotel, I sink into a chair on the veranda, where I'm moved to celebrate my achievement with, of all things, a cup of tea. To the north and south of me the gabled roofs and church spires of five different towns are in view, as a late golden sun glints upon the Mosel and deepens the colours of the grapevines all around.

Following next morning's searing switchback descent, I'm soon pedalling into Traben-Trarbach, another castle-endowed tourist town that's distinguished by its art nouveau architecture, legacy of style-conscious wine merchants of a century ago.

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