



The Hanseatic League

Cities and Abbeys of Germany's Baltic Coast

4–11 August 2022 (MI 438)

8 days • £2,970

Lecturer: Andreas Puth

Picturesque towns, spectacular medieval buildings, a transformative historical phenomenon – yet little known outside Germany.

Monumental brick Gothic, a major feature in the plurality of medieval architecture, and many UNESCO-listed sites.

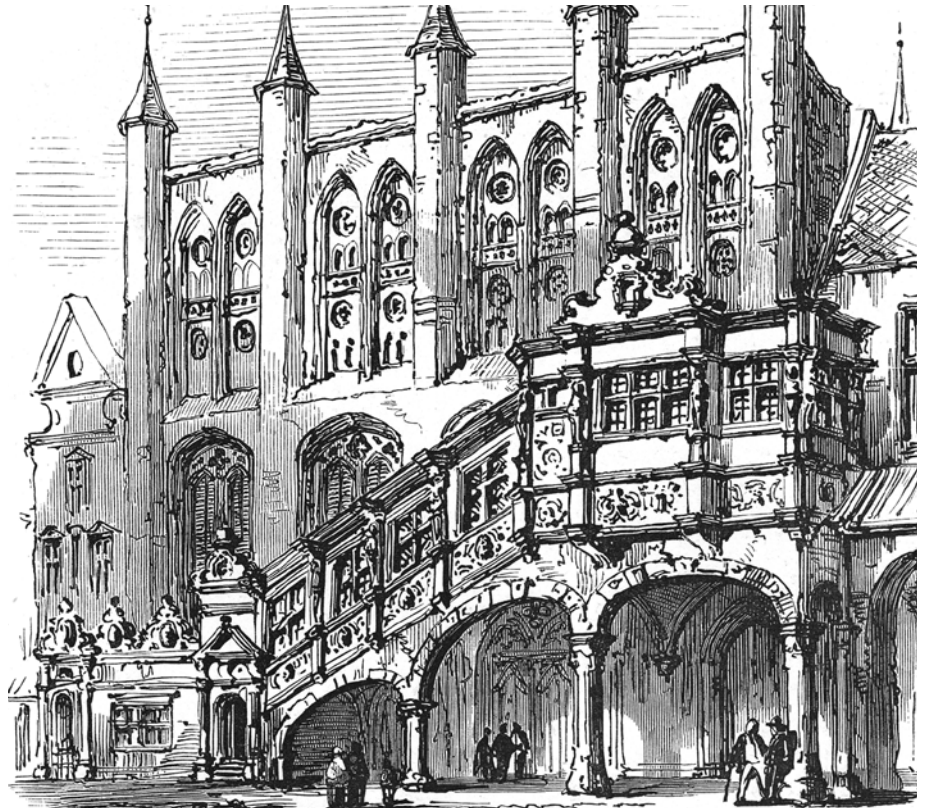
Swedish suzerainty and Communist rule add to the historical fascination of the area.

For three hundred years, from the middle of the 12th century, the Hanseatic League was a major power in northern Europe. It began with the co-operation of trading guilds in a few Baltic ports to protect their seafaring and riparian trade ('Hansa' means convoy), and grew to become a loose federation of over two hundred cities, stretching from the Gulf of Finland to the Southern Netherlands. Though never a state, and with few of the members enjoying the independence of Free Cities elsewhere in Germany and Italy, the League had the cohesion and might to wage and win a war against the kingdom of Denmark.

The prosperity that resulted from judicious exercise of their power ushered in an explosion of civic pride expressed in art and architecture. Great churches were constructed in imitation of French Gothic cathedrals, town halls were vastly extended and ornamented, merchants' houses were rebuilt with aspirational magnificence. Decline, however, set in from about 1450, a combination of political and economic factors having broken their monopoly. England was partly to blame. Only nine delegates attended the last Hanse meeting in 1669.

This tour traces the growth of this great merchant empire and explores the remarkable building traditions which arose in its wake. In particular, the development of North German Brick Gothic architecture is a remarkable and – outside Germany – little known phenomenon.

One of the reasons most of these remarkable towns have not been visited more – and part of their attraction – is that for forty years they were locked behind the Iron Curtain. That barrier collapsed thirty years ago, and in the meantime huge resources have been devoted to the restoration of the region's heritage and to the embellishment of the towns. Much of the



Lübeck, Town Hall, engraving c. 1890

damage done during the Second World War, and the consequences of neglect during the Communist era, have now been made good.

Itinerary

Day 1: Ratzeburg. Fly at c. 10.45am (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Hamburg. Drive to Ratzeburg, a charming town picturesquely located on an island in a lake. The splendid Romanesque cathedral was founded by Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony and of Bavaria, who conquered the area in 1159. Continue to Lübeck for the first of three nights.

Days 2 & 3: Lübeck. Lübeck was the first, the richest and the most powerful of all Hansa cities. Tremendous prosperity in the 13th and 14th centuries led to the construction on a grand scale of civic and charitable buildings, churches and monasteries, mansions and fortifications. Of the brick-built churches, the Romanesque cathedral was founded by Henry the Lion, but the greatest is St Mary, a soaring Gothic construction. St Catherine

(1300, now a museum) houses Tintoretto's *Raising of Lazarus*, and St Jacob (1334) retains its box pews and historic organ. The St Annen Museum, installed in a former priory, shows art of the 13th to 16th centuries including an altarpiece by Hans Memling. Walks also take in massive city gates and walls, the town hall, market place and picturesque backstreets. A free afternoon allows a visit to the European Hansemuseum, opened in 2015, and the *Buddenbrookhaus*, former home of Thomas Mann's family.

Day 4: Wismar, Bad Doberan. The rest of the tour is in territory which until 1989 lay behind the Iron Curtain. The port city of Wismar has two massive late Gothic churches (Nikolaikirche, Georgenkirche), a medieval hospital and well-preserved cityscape of medieval and early modern merchants' houses. Between 1848 and 1903 it was technically Swedish territory. Continuing eastwards, visit Bad Doberan Abbey, perhaps the crowning achievement of ecclesiastical Gothic architecture in the Baltic. Overnight Rostock.

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continued

Day 5: Rostock, Stralsund. On the banks of the Warnow River, Rostock joined the Hanseatic League in 1253, and in the next century took over the fishing village of Warnemünde 12km away on the Baltic coast, becoming the largest city in the Duchy of Mecklenburg. The Church of St Mary was modelled on Lübeck's church of the same name, the town hall is medieval and Baroque. The City Museum, in the historic Convent of the Holy Cross, houses an extensive collection of art and cultural history. Continue to Stralsund for the first of three nights.

Day 6: Stralsund, Greifswald. Stralsund commands the Baltic Straits to the Island of Rügen, and was second only to Lübeck during its 14th-century golden age. Unspoiled and undamaged, the legacy is a UNESCO-listed gabled streetscape where Gothic showpieces are interspersed with Baroque monuments from two centuries of Swedish rule. The *Alter Markt* is a unique medieval panorama combining the church of St Nicholas with the spectacular town hall. Greifswald has a superb hall church and many merchants' houses with enormous gables, and a university founded in 1456. Close by are the romantic abbey ruins at Eldena, immortalised by Caspar David Friedrich. Overnight Stralsund.

Day 7: Stralsund. The Catherine Cloister Museum displays Gothic altars and sculptures alongside objects illustrating the life of Hanseatic merchants; medieval textiles are a highlight. The restored chandler's house dates to the 14th century, and the still-functioning elevator wheel in the attic is one of the oldest of its kind in Northern Europe. The afternoon is free. You may wish to visit the island of Rügen, renowned for its chalk cliffs, silver sands and beautiful, deciduous woodland.

Day 8: Chorin. Drive south to Chorin in Brandenburg. The former Cistercian abbey was founded 1258 and secularised in 1542 and allowed to decay until the 19th century, when the ruins were restored and the building partly rebuilt under the direction of Karl Friedrich Schinkel. It is now an archetypal example of the Brick Gothic style. Break for lunch here before continuing to Berlin Airport. Arrive London Heathrow c. 6.00pm.

Lecturer

Andreas Puth. Art and architectural historian. He studied history and art history at the University of Freiburg, followed by an MA in art history at the Courtauld. He has lectured at UCL, Birkbeck College and the Courtauld on medieval and early modern architecture as well as imagery. For three years, he was a fellow at the Research Centre on the History and Culture of East Central Europe affiliated to Leipzig University.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £2,970 or £2,810 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,300 or £3,140 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 320 & 321); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 5 dinners and 1 lunch with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Radisson Blu Senator Hotel, Lübeck (radissonblu.com): a 4-star hotel located on the banks of the river Trave. **Radisson Blu Hotel, Rostock** (radissonblu.com): a large 4-star conference hotel on the edge of the old town with views of the harbour. **Hotel Scheelehof, Stralsund** (scheelehof.de): a characterful 4-star hotel in converted historic townhouses. *Single rooms throughout are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? Fitness is essential. You will be on your feet a lot, walking and standing around. The tour would not be suitable for anyone with difficulties with everyday walking and stair climbing. Some days involve a lot of driving, particularly the final day. There are also several days with no coaching. Average distance by coach per day: 60 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.