



48 HOURS IN

Cologne

TASTE · DISCOVER · LINGER

EUROPEAN SERIES

Welcome to Cologne.

Cologne announces itself before you've even left the train station — step out of Köln Hauptbahnhof and the cathedral's twin spires are already looming directly overhead, close enough to touch. That proximity is the whole city in miniature: 2,000 years of layered history — Roman colony, medieval trading power, Gothic ambition that took over 600 years to finish building — sitting in easy walking distance of a beer culture so specific it has its own legally protected name and brewing radius.

What Cologne has that no other city on this itinerary has: Kölsch, a beer style so tied to place that only breweries within 50km of the city can legally call their beer by that name, served in small 0.2L glasses at communal tables that all but guarantee conversation with strangers; the Cologne Cathedral itself, one of the largest Gothic cathedrals on earth and free to enter; a brauhaus culture built for solo dining, where sitting alone at a long communal table is the default, not an exception; and a river promenade along the Rhine that locals actually use, not just photograph.

Cologne rewards solo travelers who let the cathedral be their compass — you genuinely cannot get lost with those spires visible from almost anywhere downtown. Climb the tower or don't. Drink a Kölsch at a brauhaus and don't cover your glass unless you want another. Walk the Rhine promenade at sunset. Wander into the Belgian Quarter for something quieter. This is the itinerary.

DAY ONE

Day One — Cologne Cathedral · Old Town · Rhine Promenade

Day One covers the cathedral and the historic riverside core — Gothic architecture, cobblestone lanes, and Cologne's brewing culture.

MORNING · 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM**9:00 AM**

Cologne Cathedral (Kölner Dom)

Domplatte, directly beside the Hauptbahnhof. Free entry; tower climb ~€6, 533 steps to the viewing platform at 97m. One of the largest Gothic cathedrals in the world, construction started 1248 and wasn't completed until 1880. See the 10th-century Gero Crucifix in the Chapel of the Holy Cross and the Shrine of the Three Kings inside.

INSIDER TIP

Visit early morning or later in the evening to avoid the worst of the midday crowds — this is consistently the most-visited site in the city.

10:30 AM

Museum Ludwig

Directly beside the cathedral. Strong 20th-century collection including Picasso and major German expressionist works. A good indoor stop if the weather turns.

12:00 PM

Alter Markt & Fish Market

Cologne Old Town's colorful main squares — pastel-painted facades, a view of Groß St. Martin church, and the starting point for wandering the cobblestoned lanes toward the Rhine.

AFTERNOON · 1:00 PM – 6:00 PM**1:00 PM**

Lunch: Brauerei zur Malzmühle

One of Cologne's oldest breweries, dating to 1858, family-run for over 160 years. Authentic Kölsch and hearty Rhineland classics — Rheinischer Sauerbraten (marinated pot roast), Reibekuchen (potato pancakes). €15–25.

2:30 PM

Rhine Promenade (Frankenwerft)

Walk the riverside path from the Old Town, passing the Chocolate Museum and cafés with outdoor seating — always populated, so solo travelers never feel conspicuous. Cross the Hohenzollern Bridge, covered in thousands of “love lock” padlocks, for the best view back toward the cathedral.

4:00 PM

Chocolate Museum

Am Schokoladenmuseum 1a. Covers 5,000 years of chocolate history, with a café offering panoramic Rhine views. Open daily 10am–6pm.

EVENING · 7:00 PM – LATE**7:00 PM****Dinner: Früh am Dom or Brauhaus Sion**

Früh am Dom is a well-known, centrally located brewhouse near the cathedral; Brauhaus Sion, dating back roughly 700 years, is one of the city's most historic. Communal seating, hearty Rhineland food, Kölsch served continuously until you signal you're done. €18–30.

INSIDER TIP

The etiquette is simple — a beer mat left uncovered on top of your glass means “no more,” otherwise the server keeps bringing fresh 0.2L pours.

9:00 PM**Heumarkt & Old Town Wander**

One of the city's largest squares, lined with Kölsch beer halls. A relaxed way to close the first evening, with the option of an evening Rhine cruise if timing allows.

DAY TWO

Day Two — Museum Quarter · Belgian Quarter · Ehrenfeld

Day Two moves from Cologne's art museums to its trendiest residential neighborhoods, ending with a river cruise or a quieter local evening.

MORNING · 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

9:00 AM

Breakfast in the Belgian Quarter

This quirky, boutique-filled neighborhood is Cologne's best spot for a relaxed breakfast or specialty coffee before the day's activities.

10:30 AM

Farina Fragrance Museum

The origin story of Eau de Cologne itself, told through a guided tour — small groups, intimate, well-suited to solo visitors who want personal interaction with a knowledgeable guide.

12:00 PM

Schildergasse / Hohe Straße Shopping

Cologne's main shopping streets, near the cathedral — good for a midday wander even if you're not buying.

AFTERNOON · 1:00 PM – 6:00 PM

1:00 PM

Lunch: Belgian Quarter Café

The Belgian Quarter's cafés and bistros offer a lighter, less touristy lunch scene than the immediate Old Town.

2:30 PM

Ehrenfeld

A multicultural, creative district known for street art — join a guided bike tour or wander independently through Brüsseler Platz and the surrounding streets to spot murals most visitors miss entirely.

4:30 PM

Cologne Triangle Observation Deck

Across the Rhine via Deutzer Brücke, ~18-minute walk. A 360-degree observation platform with sweeping views back over the Old Town, the cathedral, and Groß St. Martin.

EVENING · 7:00 PM – LATE

7:00 PM

Dinner: Papa Joe's Biersalon

A vintage-inspired beer hall with a lively atmosphere and a strong selection of local and international brews — a fun, slightly offbeat final dinner spot.

9:00 PM

Rhine Evening Cruise

A 1–2 hour cruise along the river, cathedral and Old Town lit up on one side, Kölsch available on board. A relaxed, solo-friendly way to close the trip — no group dynamics required, just a seat and a view.

WHERE TO EAT

Cologne's Table

RESTAURANT	NEIGHBOURHOOD	PRICE
Brauerei zur Malzmühle	Old Town	€15–25
Früh am Dom	Near the Cathedral	€18–30
Brauhaus Sion	Old Town	€18–30
Papa Joe's Biersalon	Old Town	€15–28
Belgian Quarter cafés	Belgisches Viertel	€8–18
Chocolate Museum café	Rheinauhafen	€6–15

GETTING AROUND

Navigating Cologne

MODE	COST	NOTES
Walking	Free	The cathedral and Old Town are within a 20-minute walk of most central hotels.
U-Bahn / S-Bahn	€3/ride (90 min validity)	Random ticket checks are common — always keep your ticket on you.
KölnCard	From ~€9/24hr	Unlimited public transport plus discounts on museums and attractions.
Bicycle	~€7/3hr	Cologne is very bike-friendly; Radstation Köln offers rentals.
Taxi	Metered	Uber is not commonly used; download the local taxi app instead.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Before You Go

TOPIC	DETAILS
Getting There	Cologne Bonn Airport (CGN), connected by S-Bahn to the city center.
Best Time	April–June and September–October: mild weather, fewer crowds. Carnival season (Feb/March) is a major, very lively event if timed intentionally.
Solo Dining	Excellent — brauhaus communal seating is specifically built for sharing tables with strangers, making solo dining genuinely social rather than isolating.
Language	German; English widely spoken, especially among younger residents and in tourist-facing businesses.
Useful Apps	KVB app (local transit, 10% fare discount), Google Maps (offline download), a local taxi app rather than Uber.

Cologne awaits.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

Final Checklist

- Visit the Cathedral early morning or evening to avoid the worst midday crowds
- Learn the beer-mat etiquette at brauhauses — leave it uncovered to keep the Kölsch coming, cover it to stop
- Book Farina Fragrance Museum guided tours ahead — limited capacity
- Keep your transit ticket on hand at all times — random checks are frequent and unticketed riders are fined
- Watch belongings around the Hauptbahnhof and in crowded Old Town lanes — the city's main pickpocketing zone
- Avoid Ebertplatz (the square, not just the underground station) alone at night
- Download offline maps before arrival

Your interactive map is one scan away.

All locations from this guide, colour-coded by day, open on your phone.

goingsolo.life/maps/cologne

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