If there’s such a thing as the German dream, **MUNICH** (München) embodies it. Germany’s third – and favourite – city often tops surveys to find the world’s most liveable city, and it’s easy to see why, with lakes and mountains on its doorstep, a fine roster of historic and cultural sights, glittering shops and the air of confidence that comes from being the home of BMW and Siemens. For all Bavaria’s conservatism, it’s also relatively liberal. If there’s a fault, it’s in the very lack of a flaw: with little grunge to offset it, Munich’s well-groomed bourgeois perfection can at times seem a little relentless.

**Brief history**

Founded in 1158, Munich became the seat of the Wittelsbach dynasty in 1255, but for much of its history it was outclassed by the wealth and success of Augsburg and Nuremberg. Finally, as capital of a fully-fledged Kingdom of Bavaria, established by Napoleon in 1806, it witnessed a surge of construction as Ludwig I and his architect Leo von Klenze endowed it with the Neoclassical monuments commensurate with its status. The turn of the twentieth century brought intellectual kudos: the Blauer Reiter group of artists flourished, and a young Thomas Mann completed *Buddenbrooks* in the bohemian district of **Schwabing**. War changed everything, and in the chaos after World War I the city gave birth to the Nazi movement, which ultimately brought disaster upon it.

After World War II, Munich assumed Berlin’s role as Germany’s international metropolis, the haunt of VIPs, celebrities and the leisured rich. Much of the Federal Republic’s film output emerged from the Geiselgasteig studios; Wim Wenders graduated from film school here and Rainer Werner Fassbinder held court at the *Deutsche Eiche*. More surprisingly, Munich was a cradle of the disco movement too, as producers like Giorgio Moroder fused strings, synthesizers and soulful vocals to massively commercial effect, though the acts–notably Donna Summer–were often American and sang in English, so the music’s “Germanness” went unnoticed. The 1972 Olympic Games should have crowned this golden age, but the murder of eleven members of the Israeli team shocked the world and overshadowed all other events.

Berlin reasserted its old role post-reunification, but Munich has not rested on its laurels: the **Museum Brandhorst**, **Pinakothek der Moderne** and **Allianz-Arena** have all added lustre to the city in recent years. And, of course, there’s always the beer: whether in a historic *Bierkeller*, shady *Biergarten* or in a vast tent at the **Oktoberfest**, Munich’s tipple of choice is a world-beater.