

Munich is a place of contradiction. One minute you'll bump into a throng ofantomime patriots frequenting the beer gardens. The next, just around the corner on Maximilianstrasse, fashion-forward city slickers with fast cars prowl the designer boutiques lining one of the city's four royal avenues. And among the grid of spotlessly clean streets and soaring architectural landmarks, cultural hotspots sit in wait at every turn.

If you want to head to a concert, play or opera, you're in the right place. Munich's cultural kudos is indebted to the Wittelsbach family, who once ruled over Bavaria and were responsible for laying the foundations of the 60 theatres and opera houses which pepper a city that both the Bavarian State Opera and the Bavarian State Ballet call home.

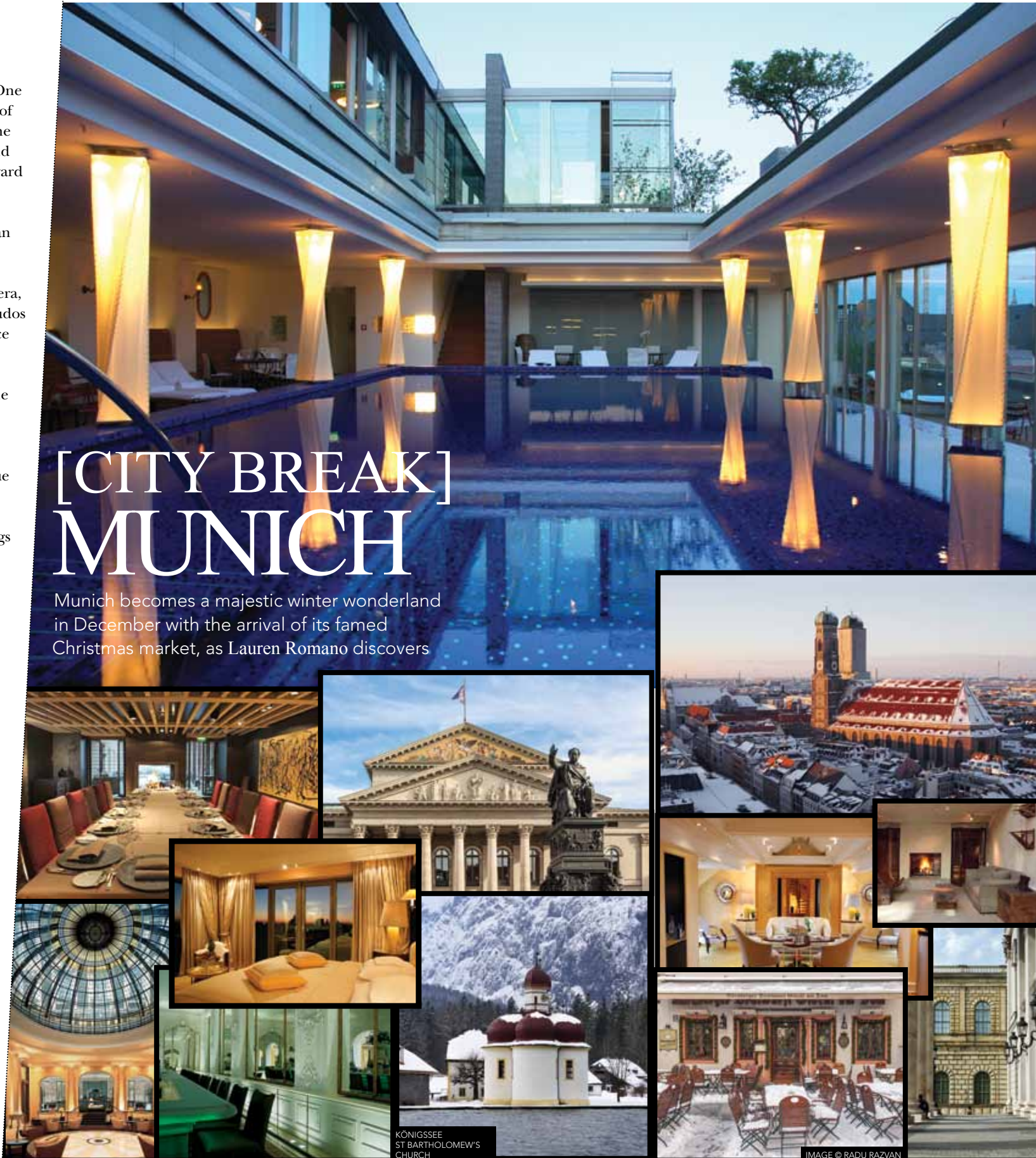
Clustered around the Kunstareal art district, Munich's 40 museums and 70 galleries continue the impressive culture crawl. One of the oldest galleries in the world, Alte Pinakothek, houses an exemplary collection of Old Master paintings with Rubens, Bruegel, da Vinci and Titian all featured in the venerable line-up. Meanwhile, over at the Neue Pinakothek down the road, masterpieces by Constable, Turner, Manet, Monet, Renoir and Degas rub frames.

The Lenbachhaus Museum, is also a must see, as the former studio and home of artist Franz von Lenbach reopened last year after a four-year renovation. The striking Blue Rider collection of early 20th-century expressionist paintings, including work by Wassily Kandinsky, is worth the entrance fee alone.

While you're there, visit the nearby neoclassical Haus der Kunst, which was opened under the Nazis in 1937 as the first monumental building of the Third Reich and has remained one of the city's most important art spaces ever since. Regardless of whether you choose to spend your time gallery-hopping, experiencing the local brews at one of its famed beer gardens or enjoying the Christmas markets, Munich is sure to dazzle and delight. ☑

[CITY BREAK] MUNICH

Munich becomes a majestic winter wonderland in December with the arrival of its famed Christmas market, as Lauren Romano discovers



Where to stay

The Bayerischer Hof's historic address boasts 350 rooms, but manages to retain a sense of intimacy despite its size. Opened in 1841 at the behest of King Ludwig, the hotel has been owned by the Volkhardt family for more than a century and no expense has been spared in its recent refurbishment; it oozes understated elegance.

Double rooms start from €360 plus €38 per person for breakfast. (bayerischerhof.de)

Eating & drinking

Tucked away beneath the Bayerischer Hof, the vaults of Palais Keller restaurant are the place to head for the most authentic pretzels, sausages, dumplings and schnitzels. Calorie counters might want to give the crackling lard and its attendant pâtés a wide berth, but I would nonetheless advise ordering the Bavarian plate for a little taste of everything.

Mayfair recommends

Spend an evening under the festive lights of the city's oldest Christmas market, and one of Munich's most famous winter attractions. This iconic and traditional fête is said to date back to the 14th century. Visitors can be immersed in the holiday spirit with beautifully crafted gifts on offer, enveloped in the comforting aroma of grilled sausages and roasted chestnuts. From November 27 to December 24

SUITCASE ESSENTIALS

#1 Tote, £2,770, Fendi, (matchesfashion.com)



#2 Cell repair night oil, £45, Aurelia, (aureliaskincare.com)

#3 Dress, £850, Victoria Beckham (victoriabeckham.com)



#4 Fur-trimmed wool cardigan, £655, Diane von Furstenberg, (matchesfashion.com)



#5 Flats, £595, Christian Louboutin (christianlouboutin.com)