

# Bavarian break

Steve Williams visits Munich and comes away with more than just beer and pretzels

**B**eer. The humble, much loved, talked- and written-about beverage has played a major role in Munich's development since the German city was founded in 1158. Centuries later, the world descends on the Bavarian capital for Oktoberfest every September to consume around 6½ million litres of it, 111 oxen, as well as over 100,000 pork sausages. Although beer flows through the city's veins, there is a lot more to Munich: history, art, culture, football, spectacularly beautiful parks, even nudists and surfing. Yes, surfing — but more about that later.

Munich in Summer is absolutely gorgeous; I'd brought perfect weather with me from Singapore — long, hot, sunny days — the sun rising around 5am and setting about 9.30pm, but you need all those hours to fully discover this fascinating city.

Sadly, the football season had finished, but I took the opportunity to tour Allianz Arena — the home stadium of Germany's most famous football club, FC Bayern Munich; in fact, the club owns the stadium. It also shares the grounds with the other Munich-based club, TSV 1860 München. As the tour guide explained, this creates some interesting situations. There are four separate dressing rooms and, as each club has different beer sponsors, photos of the players in the sponsor's lounge need to be changed depending on which home team is playing. In a very unique design, the outer shell of the stadium is lit based on which team is playing: red for Bayern Munich, blue for TSV 1860 München and white for the German national team.

The 75-minute tour was very interesting — you get to sit on the covered upper tier, which has a fantastic view. You can only imagine the atmosphere from the seats close to the pitch when the stadium is at full screaming, throbbing capacity of 69,001. We were taken through the sponsor's lounge, press boxes and dressing rooms, and saw the players' tunnel, reminiscent of the Roman Coliseum, with players emerging like gladiators about to unleash hell.

The Bayern Munich mega store's range of merchandise is staggering. Apart from the usual suspects, there are Crocs, golf bags, blow-up beds, toothbrushes, squeegees, fire starters, cups, gumboots, fuzzy dice for your car, cutlery — you name it. There's a TSV 1860 München store as well, but it's not quite as "mega"

The "highlight" of the

tour was when a group of English football fans tried to be smart with our German tour guide when she asked, "Are there any questions?" "Yes, who's going to be the new Liverpool manager?" She had her revenge when Germany knocked England out of the World Cup.

## Eat, drink and take long walks

Speaking of England, any visit to Munich must include the magnificent Englischer Garten (English Garden). Opened in 1792, the massive park stretches from the city centre to the northern city border, covering an area of 3.7 sq km, with 75km of meandering paths. There are four beer gardens, including one surrounding the famous Chinesischer Turm (Chinese Tower), a 25m high, five-storey wooden tower first built in 1790. It was destroyed during World War II and rebuilt in 1952.

The beer garden here has 7,000 seats, and it was quite pleasant spending several mornings/afternoons/evenings here under the canopy of old chestnut trees, sipping a beer or two and taking in the sights. It's a fascinating mix of people — corporate types enjoying lunch or drinks after work, tourists, families and, one afternoon, a middle-aged guy on roller blades wearing only miniscule leather shorts, leaving very little to the imagination.

Speaking of pork knuckles, the beer garden has a range of traditional Bavarian food to accompany your beer — huge pretzels, schnitzels, sausages, chicken, fish, dumplings, sauerkraut, potato salad — you won't go hungry or thirsty.

Slightly less touristy is the Seehaus beer garden, located in the northern part of the park. This is smaller and set on the postcard-inducing Kleinhesseloher Lake complete with swans, with an adjacent restaurant.

Not everyone has beer on the



The Neues Rathaus (new Town Hall) located on the Marienplatz

agenda; the park really is Munich's backyard. Walking along the paths, you'll encounter cyclists, dogs, horses, people juggling, playing football, Frisbee, volleyball, guitars, drums and swimming — or stretching out on the grass soaking up the spectacular summer weather. There are bikinis, boardshorts and the oc-

casional nudist. Nude sunbathing has been permitted and practised in the Schönfeldwiese (Schönfeld meadow) since the 1960s. Unfortunately, it is mostly done by middle-aged men who appear to have eaten one too many bratwurst.

The English Garden is also famous for surfing. Running through the park is a tributary of the Isar River called the Eisbach. At the southern edge of the park, a one-metre-high standing wave is formed when water emerges from a tunnel under a 19th-century stone bridge and hits submerged concrete blocks. Since the 1970s, surfers have climbed down the riverbank, faced the bridge, and, well, surfed. This is a must see in Munich — a surreal sight of surfers on a river, in a park, in the middle of a city, nowhere near a beach.

Watching all that physical activity can make one rather thirsty, so an essential stop is the Hofbräuhaus

— the 400-year-old Hofbräu brewery/beer hall where it's Oktoberfest every day and night. The story behind this is that Munich's royal household wasn't satisfied with the quality of beer in Munich, so they established their own brewery. Munich's court ladies used to drink seven litres a day as a "beauty treatment". It's a great atmosphere — ornate halls with high ceilings, communal seating and a smaller beer garden. You can taste the history — oom-pah music, food, singing, laughter and waitresses dressed in traditional dirndls, waiters in lederhosen skillfully wielding litres of beer amid the chaos. All in good fun.

## Cars and culture

If you drive a BMW or appreciate the history of the automobile, you would know that Bayerische Motoren Werke (BMW) was founded in Munich in 1916 — originally under the name Bayerische Flugzeug-Werke. It is well worth spending some time at Munich's BMW "campus", which includes the BMW Museum, BMW Welt



A surfer on the Eisbach in the English Garden



# Italian head turner

Tony Watts waxes lyrical about the Maserati GranCabrio



The GranCabrio's Pininfarina-penned lines already look fantastic in photographs, but it's another car entirely in the flesh

I can concede that Daniel Day-Lewis makes a reasonable stand-in for Marcello Mastroianni's Guido Anselmi (mysteriously, as Guido Contini) in the Rob Marshall musical *Nine*, and Marion Cotillard is fabulous as Luisa Contini, but I'm fairly certain I wouldn't have cast Nicole Kidman in Claudia Cardinale's role as Claudia from the original *8½*. Come to think of it, I'm not so keen on Penélope Cruz, either — maybe I have a thing against Tom Cruise squeezes, and Hollywood remakes.

One can argue about the merits of re-making a cinema classic as a superficial musical or who should have been cast in it, but one thing remains true to the original — a 1950s Alfa Romeo Guilietta Spider is the only car for Guido. It does make me wonder, though: What car would a modern Guido Anselmi be seen in?

It would, obviously, have to be Italian, but it must not be too flashy, so Ferraris and Lamborghinis are out. While Fiat makes some great little cars, they're just a little too common for Guido. An Alfa would be a more obvious choice, and I can picture Cotillard in the passenger's seat of a Brera, but still, she'd look better with some wind in her hair. And if you were going to go topless, you'd want a soundtrack to match, something that speaks of power and drama.

Essentially, Guido's ideal new car is Italian, convertible, sounds great, looks fabulous without being gaudy, has performance to back up those looks (without being harsh) and, above all, appeals on an emotional level.

The Maserati GranCabrio checks all those boxes, and more.

## Rare convertible

The GranCabrio's Pininfarina-penned lines already look fantastic in photographs, but it's another car entirely in the flesh. That protruding mouth, the flowing lines, and the details, such as the LED brake lights integrated into the polished metal trim where the canvas hood meets the bodywork are simply beautiful. And it is a rare convertible that looks as good with the roof up as down.

Step inside and the feeling is much the

same. I assumed the use of so much red leather in the test car would have come off as a bit ostentatious, but it works beautifully here, coming together with all the controls to make the cabin of the GranCabrio a very pleasant place to travel in.

Fire up the Ferrari-sourced 4.7-litre V8 engine, and the Maserati's performance intentions are made known. The noise from the quad tailpipes sends a tingle up the spine, but not loud enough to annoy the neighbours.

A six-speed automatic transmission eliminates the jerkiness of the automated manual, and there are still paddles mounted on the steering column to take manual control of the ratios for sportier driving. Press the "Sport" button and it shifts the automatic down a gear or so, and opens valves in the exhaust above 3,000rpm. Hear the engine in its full glory, especially with the roof down — peak power is at a screaming 7,000rpm.

Maybe it's the extra noise, but the GranCabrio feels as though it has more urgency in "Sport" mode too. It's fast, but not brutally so, in fitting with its *gran turismo* design brief.

## Practical enough for four

Handling is pretty good too, with a good amount of feel through the steering wheel and commendably flat cornering. The brakes feel a bit wooden, especially with a light application, which provides less braking force than expected — causing a heart palpitation in the first instance — but a firmer pedal foot does bring things to a halt quickly. The brake pedal itself is a fraction too large and big feet could get tangled at the bottom.

And while I'm complaining, those gorgeous exterior lines have come at the expense of boot space, with just enough to squeeze in a 9in golf bag, according to Maserati. There may be rear seats, and

## MASERATI GRANCABRIO

\$530,000 including COE

**Engine:** 4,691cc, 32-valve, V8

**Power/torque:** 440hp/490Nm

**0-100kph:** 5.3 seconds

**Top speed:** 283kph (roof up),  
274kph (roof down)

they're more spacious than in many other cars of the same class, but you will be using that space for luggage if your Claudia travels with more than a handbag.

Still, you don't have to be an angst-ridden artistic type to appreciate the GranCabrio. It is practical enough to seat four, it sounds fabulous, and its performance is nearly a match for its looks. Guido would approve. **E**

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(World), the BMW plant as well as its corporate headquarters.

The BMW Museum highlights seven exhibition houses showcasing the BMW design and inspiration, motorcycles from the 1920s through to today, technology and motorsport. The "House of The Series" showcases the design of individual series, the executive class, and the BMW M models. The museum is set in an iconic round building (the architecture of the entire campus is stunning) and it's fascinating seeing the development of one of the world's most recognised automotive brands in what is a very innovative, hands-on experience.

Allow yourself at least a few hours. BMW Welt showcases the current range of cars, with design studios and unique interactive displays. You can even take delivery of your new BMW vehicle here — in a fairly elaborate ceremony, the latest addition to your garage will be displayed on a presentation platform in "the Premiere". You will receive tickets to explore the entire campus as part of an exclusive tailor-made

programme. You can take part in a guided tour of the BMW plant before or after you take delivery of your new car.

Thankfully, you don't have to buy a BMW to see the plant. It's a very interesting 2½-hour experience — from parts being produced from steel coils and the assembly of the car, painting, engine production to various testing procedures.

For the culturally inclined, Munich has many excellent galleries and museums to explore. It would be easy to spend months immersing yourself, but I'd suggest The Glyptothek — with a fascinating collection of ancient Greek and Roman sculptures, The Neue (New) Pinakothek — one of the three Pinakotheks — houses a collection of European art from the 18th and 19th centuries, with works by artists including Monet, Manet and Matisse.

The nearby Museum Brand-



The famous Chinese Tower in the English Garden was first built in 1790 and rebuilt in 1952 after being destroyed during World War II

horst opened in 2009 and is a very impressive, once-private, collection of modern art. There are numerous Andy Warhol and Damien Hirst artworks and those from many other modern artists.



The domed towers of the Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady) frame the statue on the Mariensäule column on the Marienplatz

The Deutsches Museum is a brilliant science and technology museum with exhibits ranging from a recreation of Galileo's workshop and steam and motor engines to dozens of aircraft.

Bavarian Alps is a nice reminder of your time in Munich. **E**

Capturing the world's people and places in words and images is what Steve Williams is all about

As in any city, you will experience the most by just wandering around and exploring — check out the residential areas, cafés and local shops. Munich is a very easy city to get around by bus, train, tram and taxi. It's a unique city with a great feel to it — hard to describe, but there's just something about it.

Even as you depart Munich, the beer gardens are never far away. The Lufthansa Business Lounge has created an area with a stylised indoor beer garden featuring modern wooden tables and benches, with hooks on the tables holding pretzels. There's a choice of beer and wine, traditional Bavarian cuisine, sausages, pickles, potato salads, bread, even hamburgers. The view of the