**Title Option 1: Offbeat Germany: From cars to castles to cakes to clockwork**

**Title Option 2: Hidden German gems: Castles, clockwork, cars and more**

**Total Word Count: 806 words (excluding the title)**

Germany is indeed an underrated travel destination. You may hear of people moving to Germany for a masters in engineering or for work, but never really to explore the Land of Poets and Thinkers. The only ones who may consider travelling to Deutschland for leisure are the beer lovers for the Oktoberfest. However, Germany has more to offer than you can imagine and I was fortunate to discover a few hidden German gems on my trip to Europe last year.

**Epic day trips from Munich**

Munich is often the gateway to Europe for many of us travelling from Asia. Once you are done exploring the Marineplatz, strolling through the English Gardens and filling your bellies with some German beer and pretzels at biergartens, it is time to traverse the hinterland.

Only a couple of hours away from Munich, nestled in the Bavarian countryside is the **Neuschwanstein Castle** which is every fairytale lover's dream come true. This castle, built by King Ludwig II of Bavaria, who fantasised about living like a medieval king is believed to have inspired the castle in Disney’s logo. You can opt for a horse drawn carriage ride to drop you at the castle’s doorstep to make your fairytale reverie as real as possible. I celebrated my 29th birthday soaking in the stunning views of the castle’s exteriors and meandering through the interiors with my jaws dropping at the breathtaking panoramas outside the castle’s majestic windows and turreted stairways.

Germany has always been renowned for its prolific engineering and cars. If you are a car enthusiast, then you must drive through the autobahn (a motorway without any speed limits) from Munich to Stuttgart to visit the **Mercedes-Benz Museum**. From vintage Mercedes cars owned by American billionaires to their newest wheels with a revolutionary mechanism, this place is interesting even if you are not into cars as it correlates the launch of every new model with a bygone era, giving you a compelling historical account.

**A Swiss-German melange**

A part of Germany accessible from Zurich, near the Rhine River is the **Black Forest**. You guessed it right, this is where we trace back the origins of our childhood favourite black forest cake. This place is famous for a brandy made out of sour cherries native to the region which gives the cake its distinct flavour. Legend has it that the colour of the cake represents the colours of the clothes of the people from this region. I had the best black forest pastry at a local konditorei here and they offered to give me two large pieces for the price of one as it was already evening and they were about to shut shop.

Another novelty of the Black Forest are its dreamy cuckoo clocks. It is believed that during the 18th century, German farmers sourced wood from the Black Forest and sought inspiration from the homes in the region to create wood carved clocks as a source of livelihood during the winters. The Black forest has numerous shops selling authentic cuckoo clocks and they also ship abroad. If you are investing in one, its best to opt for the mechanical clockwork and the less frequently you have to wind the clock the more expensive they will get.

**The horrors of the past with the backdrop of the Alps**

You cannot think of Germany without thinking of Adolf Hitler and its Nazi past. We visited the **Eagle’s Nest** located high up in the Bavarian Alps, closer to the Austrian border and a half day trip away from Salzburg. This place was Hitler’s 50th birthday present from the Nazi party and although the acrophobic dictator visited it only a few times, it is historically significant. The long tunnels and overpowering stone walls of this structure symbolised the terror of the Nazi regime. While there are no historical markers here as a mark of respect to those who would have suffered in the past, some of the most horrifying decisions related to the Holocaust and wars against other countries were taken here.

The tourist highlight here is the brass elevator which was an engineering marvel back in the day and is still accessible. The elevator takes you all the way up to the top of the mountain. There are multiple vantage points to think about the past associated with this place juxtaposed with the heavenly beauty of the Bavarian Alps and a rooftop restaurant to sip on a cup of joe and brood over the mixed feelings.

**Last word**

If you are planning a trip to Europe, do slide in a little German excursion and you won’t be left disappointed. Whether you’re travelling to Western Europe or to Eastern Europe, you can include a different part of the country to explore that suits your route and I promise you will be left craving for some more.