

Splashing variety of events - Aachen has extraordinary things to offer in terms of politics, culture and sports

Aachen does not just celebrate its festivals as they come along. The city actively creates events, which reach out far across the boundaries of the Aachen region and mark highlights on the international events diary. Wimbledon is famous for its tennis championships and Vienna for its Opera Ball, Munich for its Oktoberfest and Bayreuth for the Festival Theatre. Aachen enjoys worldwide fame for the "Karlspreis" award and the "Medal for Combating Deadly Seriousness", the International Riding, Jumping and Driving Championships (CHIO) and the "Aachen September Special".

Aachen is very keen on its events. Famous people from all areas of public life, politics, culture and sports are happy to be invited to Aachen to take part in the ceremonies. Apart from the official programme they all enjoy the historic atmosphere and the non-pretentious friendliness of the old Emperor's city.

The fact that Aachen can offer events of international calibre of many subjects is proof of the open attitude and European spirit of the city. At the top of the annual event diary is the International Karlspreis. This award was created in 1949 at a time when the German nation suffered from heavy destruction and deprivation due to the fighting of WWII by a farsighted Aachen entrepreneur. Within a very short period of time the award began to have an important political impact because it was all about the idea of a European unification on the basis of peace and humanitarian ideals across all existing political boundaries. Since 1950 the Karlspreis is awarded annually to people who have promoted the idea of the unification of the western world with regard to political and economical as well as spiritual or philosophical dimensions. The listing of the award winners contains well-known names from Konrad Adenauer to Simone Veil. You also find Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, Sir Winston Churchill, Robert Schuman, Walter Hallstein, King Juan Carlos, Angela Merkel and Bill Clinton on the list. You may not have known that the Commission of the European Communities and the people of Luxemburg have also been awarded

the Karlspreis. Following the tradition the award ceremony is always held in Charlemagne's city, the favourite location of the man who founded the European world and who has given more than his name to this symbolic award.

The "Orden wider den tierischen Ernst" (Medal for Combating Deadly Seriousness) has also long been internationally acclaimed. In a similar way to the Karlspreis, this medal also recognises humanity in people albeit on another level. The medal is awarded to people, who manage to be humorous and humane in environments – particularly bureaucratic environments – that are commonly regarded as deeply serious. Not only are award winners German like August Everding, Norbert Blüm, Johannes Rau, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Freiherr von Heeremann but also French like Jack Lang and Dutch like Ruud Lubbers and last but not least Renate Schmidt and Gertrud Höhler are always welcome in the "Aachen Fool's Cage".

Truly international are also the annual Equestrian Championships in the Aachen Soers, the "Concours Hippique International Officiel", abbreviated as CHIO. The tradition of international riding meetings in Aachen goes back as far as the medieval ages. The CHIO itself is a world famous riding, jumping and driving tournament and was founded in the twenties of the last century. Every year in summer Aachen is transformed into a Mecca for horse lovers. The best horses and riders in the world come to the equestrian grounds in the Soers in order to meet and compete. Due to a number of illustrious guests you can find a touch of extravagance here. However the people of Aachen managed successfully to avoid the rather stiff and elite formality of comparable English tournaments.

The youngest member in the line of the big Aachen events is the Aachen September Special. During four days the city transforms itself into a paradise for all those who love music. There is something for everyone's taste: You can choose from classical and modern, traditional and experimental, Rock and Pop, Jazz and classical music ... The events take place in the open-air squares of the town with their own very special atmosphere.

It is particularly these squares – most importantly the Katschhof, Market Place, Hof (Courtyard) and the Domhof (Cathedral Square) – with their unique mixture of historic atmosphere and pulsating life that contribute every year to the enormous success of other Aachen events: The European Market of the arts and crafts, the big Aachen City Festival and of course the annual Wine Growers Festival and the Christmas Market.

If the extraordinary number and variety of the events make you feel overwhelmed at times, look for a balancing force. At regular intervals Aachen finds the time for inner

reflection and spiritual renewal: Every seven years all the pilgrim souls in the world are warmly invited to join the Holy Pilgrimage to Aachen...

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