

Nature



Vast areas of the island are nature reserves. The marshland near the shores preserves landscapes, as monastery founder Pirmin probably discovered them, when he first set foot on the island more than 1000 years ago. Today, these preserved areas are protecting species of plants and animals, which are typical for the region around Lake Constance.

The reeds, this forest of millions of stems, are not only the symbol for the shoreland at the island of Reichenau. They also offer a home for the Reed Warblers, Great Reed Warblers and the rare Little Bittern. Overall, the waters to the left and to the right of the island's dam are a paradise and in winter also an important resting place for waterfowls.

“Beach grass” is a real specialist: It spreads along the narrow shingly edge of the shore, which is flooded during summer, due to the increasing water level, and in winter, it is arid. The forget-me-nots at Lake Constance are some of the well known representatives of this family of plants.



Tradition



Even today, the island of Reichenau demonstrates an extraordinary connection to its monastic traditions. The worship of the relics has survived monastery times and locals as well as visitors still swarm the streets during the three island festivals, when the valuable holy relics are carried across the island in processions. The Markus relic, which is on the island since the 9th century, is the core of Markus Day on April 25th. On the Monday following Trinity Sunday, the Holy-Blood-Relic, owned by the monastery since 923/925, features the procession with the same name. On August 15th, the island celebrates Assumption, the festival of the patron saint of the cathedral.

Together with worshiping the Markus relic, pilgrimages started in the 9th century – a first kind of “tourism”. But also the beginning modern tourism is influenced by the medievell island of Reichenau: the main attraction for the crowds of visitors at the end of the 19th century was the then recent discovery of the mural paintings in St. George's.



MUSEUM REICHENAU
The Reichenau
Monastery Island

Visitors to the island can obtain information in three museum units at the REICHENAU MUSEUM on the outstanding significance of Reichenau's cultural history. Together with the three Romanesque churches, the four museum buildings in all, which are located in close proximity to the churches, form an “information network” on the “Reichenau Monastery Island” World Heritage Site. You can almost immerse yourself in the Middle Ages in the largest of the new museum buildings at the existing museum in the “Altes Rathaus” (old town hall). The construction history of the Minster of St. Mary and St. Mark and of the monastery, the poetry of the monk “Walahfrid Strabo”, the St.Gallen monastery plan, which was created on Reichenau, the work of the monk “Hermann der Lahme” (the lame), who occupied himself with science and the veneration of relics, are among the topics presented in the exhibition. The presentation of the Reichenau manuscript illumination forms a centre of interest. The small museum buildings at the churches of St. George and St. Peter and Paul explain the construction history of the respective church. The famous mural paintings of the Church of St. George or the topic of the fraternisation in prayer are also picked out as a central theme. The history of the Reichenau burghers is presented in the historic “Altes Rathaus”, one of the oldest half-timbered houses (12th/15th century) in Southern Germany.

Opening times of all museum buildings:

April – Oct. daily 10.30 am – 4.30 pm | July + Aug. daily 10.30 am – 5.30 pm, Nov. - March Sat, Sun, public holidays 2 – 5 pm

www.museumreichenau.de

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Design: hggraphikdesign Heidi

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UNESCO World Heritage

Island of Reichenau

in Lake Constance



Reichenau Monastery



In 724, the itinerant bishop Pirmin founded the monastery on the uninhabited island of Reichenau at Lake Constance. By consent with the Franconian royal court, Pirmin took possession of the whole island for the foundation of the monastery. In the early Middle Ages, the monastery reached its peak – politically, scientifically and culturally: abbot Waldo and abbotbishop Heito took on political missions for Charlemagne, and Walahfrid Strabo († 849), abbot and author, was tutor of Charles the bald head at the imperial court in Aachen. From Walahfrid’s pen flew literary medieval masterpieces as “Visio Wettini”, but also the famous “Hortulus”, a treatise on horticulture. In 896, abbot Hatto accompanied Emperor Arnulf to his coronation in Rome, where he received the George’s relic, which he brought to the island of Reichenau.

On the scientific field, the name of Hermann the Cripple († 1054) stands out. The universally educated monk scholar was historian, mathematician, astronomer and musician and developed one of the early note systems in history of music.

During the 10th and 11th century, the island of Reichenau was a centre of art and culture. The mural paintings in St. George’s are an impressive evidence at the face, the famous Reichenau illuminations in magnificent works, however, can be found in libraries all over the world.

In the late Middle Ages, the heyday of the monastic island was over. In the 16th century, the monastery was incorporated into the diocese of Constance and in 1757, after a feud with the bishop, the last monks were expelled. Until its definite disbandment in 1803, the Reichenau monastery remained only as a pale reflection of a great history.

The Churches

Once, there were more than 20 churches and chapels on the island of Reichenau. Only three of them survived the centuries: the monastery church St. Mary and Mark in Reichenau-Mittelzell, St. Peter and Paul in Reichenau-Niederzell and St. George in Reichenau-Oberzell.

The oldest parts of the cathedral St. Mary and Mark – the easterly transept and the chancel – goes back to the Carolingian church, which was consecrated in 816. The western transept (the so-called Markus church and site of the Markus altar) was consecrated in 1048. The nave originates in the 12th century and the roof truss in the years 1236/37. The church was completed with the gothic choir in the 15th century, and in 1742, the baroque choir grid was installed.

St. Peter and Paul was founded by bishop Egino of Verona, who had connections to the founders and patrons of the Reichenau monastery. His church, which was consecrated in 799, was torn down and in the 12th century, a new church was built at the same place. This columned basilica with 3 naves is still standing. In 1900, medieval mural paintings were discovered in the apse. Since their uncovering, they are competing with the Rococo décor to impress visitors and to dominate the church.

St. George, built around the end of the 9th century, served to keep the George’s relic and remains in the style of the early Middle Ages. Inside, the church hall captivates with monumental mural paintings, showing the miracles of Christus. The paintings and ornaments in St. George are regarded as the only remaining church paintings north of the Alps, which are dated before the year 1000.



Cultural landscape & cultural monuments



The centuries-old history of the island of Reichenau as monastery island, offered an impressive residential and cultural landscape, which, until today, clearly shows the difference to the neighbouring mainland.

As the whole island was monastic land, each monk settled at his own fields. There was only a dense settlement around the former community square “Ergat“ in Mittelzell. Beside the “Amannhaus“ (town hall, today Reichenau Museum), there was also the secular centre of administration.



The significance of agricultural civilisation is also old: in monastic times, vineyards were cultivated on the island. Today, the agricultural focus is, however, no longer wine, but vegetables – the numerous greenhouses are simply a new variant on the old usage.

The monastic history is visible in many areas, including the grounds between the churches, which have always been used for agricultural purposes; the position of the harbour, north of the monastery, and the main streets, which even still today follow the paths of the monks. Only the road embankment to the mainland, which has been thrown up in 1838/39, is new.



Other buildings are reflecting the history of the monastery. At the end of the road embankment, for example, the old ruin „Schopflen“ – a former fortified building of the monasteries dating back to the 13th century; the “Herrenhöfe” in the “Burgstraße“, where the heads of the monastery lived between the 13th and the 15th century; large parts of the monastery wall, built in the 15th century; “Schloss Windeck”, which was a former monastery guesthouse; “Schloss Königsegg”, going back to the ministry seat of the Middle Ages as well as the chancellery buildings and library of the prince-bishop of Constance, Jakob Fugger, in the “Burgstraße”.