

International Elbe Tour

With a length of almost 1,100 kilometres (680 miles), the Elbe is one of the longest rivers in Central Europe. It originates in the Riesengebirge at more than 1,300 meters (4250 ft) altitude. Supported by several locks, the Elbe can be navigated in Melnik even before meeting the river Vltava. The last dam of the Elbe is in Usti nad Labem. There begins a 623-kilometre-long (380 mile) paddle paradise. The Elbe flows without any disruption to Geesthacht. Just before Magdeburg the river Saale flows into the Elbe. At Havelberg it is the river Havel, whose inlet makes it even bigger and wider. These are only two of the many tributaries. Behind the barrier in Geesthacht the Elbe is already under the influence of the North Sea tides, into which it flows beyond Hamburg.

On the banks of the river, there are a variety of landscapes. At the border between the Czech Republic and Germany, the rocks of the Elbsandsteingebirge impress, around Dessau you find the old floodplain forests of the biosphere reserve Mittellelbe. Mostly behind high dikes, the expanse of the North German lowland is spreading when the Elbe flows past Niedersachsen to Hamburg. Large sections of the shore are nature reserves and provide the habitat for a variety of rare plants and animals. Sandy beaches attract the paddler to interrupt his journey and to take in the beauty of nature.

The river banks have always been important settlements for mankind. So it's no surprise that there are numerous places with great historic importance along the Elbe. Who hasn't heard of places like Dresden, Meissen or Hamburg? But also less well known settlements such as Torgau, Wittenberg, Magdeburg or Tangermünde are rich in historic and present treasures. All of these are reasons for paddlers to go on their journey to explore the river Elbe.

The German Canoe Association (Deutscher Kanuverband), with its local member associations along the river Elbe organises the International Elbe tour once a year. It is a trip along the free-flowing part of the Elbe in daily stages. The individual stages are set annually.

The participants take their own canoe and the accommodation is in tents. The tent pitches are usually at canoeing clubs, in rare cases public campsites. The camping equipment is taken in the canoes. On almost all stages, the local canoeing clubs provide basic food and drink. After the daily tour, the local organisers offer visits and guided tours to cultural sites and monuments of their home town. Importantly there are chances to have conversations, which offer opportunities to build new canoeing friendships or to maintain already existing ones. Although our instructions are communicated in German, we have been able to assist international participants in the past. On the water the paddlers are accompanied by a motorised rescue boat, which is staffed by first aiders, thus, medical assistance can be requested if required.

The daily stages are between 30 and 60 kilometers (20-40 miles) long. Basic knowledge and experience of canoeing is expected, in order to successfully manage weather conditions like wind and rain. The trip is funded by participant contributions. The number of participants is limited annually and participation must be notified to the organising office in writing.

All further information on the international Elbefahrt can be found at www.internationale-elbefahrt.de in German language.