

Welcome Centre

Philipps

Universität
Marburg

The Town of Marburg



1.1 Welcome to Marburg

We are delighted to welcome you to the university town of Marburg with its historic old town nestled between the river Lahn and the castle and its attractive surrounding countryside. You will soon notice that Marburg and Philipps-Universität are closely linked with one another.

The old town has made its mark on Marburg. It was here that the town's 750th anniversary was celebrated in 1972, although the castle and market town are much older. Indeed, in 1140 the town minted its own coin, the "Marburger Pfennig". Today, too, this venerable university town spans the bridge between past and present. A town, in which you still get a feel of the Middle Ages: whether you wander through the narrow alleys of Marburg's upper town, admire the crooked timbered houses below the "Landgrafenschloss" (Landgrave's Castle) or spend a while on the historic "Marktplatz" (town square), you feel as though you have been transported back to mediaeval times. The Russian poet

Boris Pasternak who spent a semester studying in Marburg in 1912, put this feeling into words: "If it were but a town! But it is a mediaeval fairytale." As you walk through the upper town you will soon see what Boris Pasternak meant.



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It is not for nothing that the Upper Town – the old town between the river Lahn and the castle – has the name it does: the road climbs up steeply to the historic town square and then there are lots of steps leading up to the castle. From the top you have a wonderful view over the Old Town, the Lahn Valley and the early Gothic Church of St. Elisabeth, one of the town's landmarks. Despite this, the vast numbers of students mean that Marburg is still a young town with a vibrant educational and cultural life. The 20,000 students from all over Germany account for a quarter of the population and certainly shape the townscape.

As a result, Philipps-Universität Marburg is the largest employer in the town, followed by the privatised "Universitätsklinikum Gießen und Marburg" (university hospital) and the former "Behringwerke" which now partly belong to the international concerns CSL Behring and Novartis Vaccines. The "Deutsche Blindenstudienanstalt – Blista" (German Academy for the Blind) comes in fourth place and is the only dedicated grammar school for the blind and visually impaired starting from Year Five in Germany. As such, the town has been confronted with the special problems faced by blind and visually-impaired people for decades and has always tried to find solutions. In Marburg, for example, there are not only tours of the town especially for blind people but there is also a plan of the town in Braille.

1.2 A Brief History of the Town

The most recent research has shown that the original foundations of the castle complex date back to the 9th/10th centuries. However, the town only really started to become important in 1228 when Elisabeth of Thüringen, widow of the Landgrave of Thüringen, moved to Marburg. She built a hospital at great personal sacrifice and dedicated herself to caring for the sick and infirm. Although she died at the age of 24 (1231), she is still considered to be one of the most important people ever to have been active in Marburg. Many legends exist about her saintliness and, indeed, she was canonised in 1235. The "Deutscher Orden" (Teutonic Order) started constructing a church over her grave the same year which became one of the most beautiful Gothic buildings in Germany. Pilgrims from all over Europe came to visit the saint's grave and helped Marburg to become a flourishing town.

With short interruptions, Marburg was the residence of the Landgrave of Hessen from 1248 to 1604. This was where Sophie of Brabant, the daughter of St. Elisabeth, and her three year-old son Heinrich allowed the citizenry to pay homage to them in 1248, laying the foundation stone for the State of Hessen.

At the time of the Reformation in 1527, Landgrave Philipp the Magnanimous founded the second Protestant university in Marburg (the first Protestant university had existed in Liegnitz in Silesia from 1526 to 1530). Since then, the university has been the town's most important economic factor. Marburg has the university to thank for its importance. After the annexation of the Electorate of Hessen by Prussia in 1866, the university experienced a stormy upturn which brought about enormous growth in the town. Within a few years and decades, the population increased three-fold and the number of students ten-fold. By 1929, Marburg had 26,000 inhabitants including more than 4,000 students.



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Insider Info:

The town hall bell on the Renaissance gable of the "Rathaus" (Town Hall) is also something of a Marburg landmark. Why don't you go round there on the hour and hear for yourself ...

After the Second World War in 1945, the town was surrendered to US troops without fighting and accepted a large number of refugees. Only since then have a considerable number of smaller and medium-sized industrial enterprises grown up.

1972 saw the beginning of the first phase of restoring the old town, a process which has continued systematically since then. Numerous prizes and awards are indicative of its exemplary success. Historical buildings are no longer demolished, but carefully restored. This is evident in the growing number of refurbished timbered houses to be seen around the town.

One of the major tasks of the day is to promote the town as a shopping centre and business location, particularly for companies involved in new technologies. Furthermore, it is necessary to consolidate research and teaching as well as health provision at the Gießen-Marburg University Hospital, which is a product of the merger and privatisation of the university clinics in Gießen and Marburg. The productive symbiosis of university and town is demonstrated by a number of facts. With very few exceptions the research and technology potential of Philipps-Universität, for example, embraces all the important areas of future technology.



Philipps-Universität Marburg

1.3 Places of Interest in Marburg

"Elisabethkirche"

The Church of St. Elisabeth is Marburg's most famous building and a magnet for visitors, be they pilgrims, tourists or the people of Marburg themselves. The church was actually dedicated to Our Lady because it was originally built in the 13th century by the extremely powerful and affluent "Deutscher Orden" (Teutonic Order) which always consecrated its churches to its own patron saint, the Virgin Mary. However, in the minds of the population the central function of the church was never that of a monastery church but rather the burial place of St. Elisabeth (1207-1231, canonised 1235) and the pilgrimage church over the saint's grave. In time, the name Church of St. Elisabeth established itself.

"Landgrafenschloss"

The Landgrave's Castle, which now belongs to Philipps-Universität, is one of the main attractions amongst the places of interest in Marburg. The oldest parts of the building visible from the outside date back to the 13th century. The first Landgrave Heinrich I of Hessen, grandson of St. Elisabeth, built his residence here. The most recent building is the "Wilhelmsbau" (Wilhelm's Tract), the foundation stone of which was laid in 1493. Today, its five floors house the "Universitätsmuseum für Kulturgeschichte" (University Museum for Cultural History). In the basement of the west wing visitors can still find remains of the old castle foundations from the 9th and 10th centuries.

Impressions of Marburg

- ① Historic Town Hall
- ② "Spiegelslustturm" (viewing tower)
- ③ View over the river Lahn to the town centre
- ④ Church of St. Elisabeth
- ⑤ Landgrave's Castle
- ⑥ Steinweg
- ⑦ Old University (next page)

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**"Rathaus"**

The Town Hall long ago got too small to accommodate all the nearly 1,000 employees working for the municipal administration. But the historic Town Hall (built between 1512 and 1527) and the town square are still the hub of urban life. Tradition has it that the town square in Marburg was the site of the founding of the State of Hessen in 1248. On the death of Heinrich Raspe IV, the last of his dynasty, Sophie of Brabant, the oldest daughter of St. Elisabeth, is supposed to have been standing at the fountain on the town square when she proclaimed her four year-old son Heinrich Landgrave. After tortuous struggles about inheritance, Heinrich actually did become the ruler of Hessen, taking the title of Landgrave in 1292. By so doing, Heinrich I, who was always known as "the Child", made Marburg into his residence.

"Alte Universität"

The foundations of the Dominican Monastery that was established in 1291 are certainly old, and it was on them that the edifice now known as the "Old University" was built in neo-Gothic style towards the end of the 19th century. But this had been a centre of learning since 1527 when Philipp the Magnanimous, Landgrave of Hessen, established the oldest newly-founded Protestant university to have survived to this day. He designated the Dominican Monastery to be its first building.

"Kaiser-Wilhelm-Turm" aka "Spiegelslustturm"

It is the highest point in Marburg, has a wonderful view and can be seen from afar: Marburg's Kaiser Wilhelm Tower or "Spiegelslustturm" is now one of the favourite destinations in Marburg. This is a result of the engagement of the landlord of the café and cultural centre located there, the "MOBiLO e.V." project (employment for people with mental health disorders).

The tower gained an added attraction in the anniversary year of St. Elisabeth when a 1.4 ton, 8 metre diameter light installation in the form of a heart entitled "Siebensiebenzwölfnullsieben" (Sevenseventwelvezevseven) was mounted on the tower.

Entry prohibited before your first exams!

Student legend has it that no student should climb "Spiegelslustturm" and enjoy the view until he or she has taken their first exams otherwise they will never manage to pass a degree in Marburg. Every six months, freshers are let in on this secret at the induction week so that no-one who has just arrived in Marburg should make this fatal mistake.