

SO YOU WANNA DRIVE THE RING

ENJOYING THE NÜRBURGRING IS EASY, WITH A LITTLE PLANNING

Words Nate Hassler
Photos Lisa Linke

I won't waste your time explaining what the Nürburgring is. Maybe you've seen a YouTube video or two, perhaps you're a walking encyclopedia on the place, or you're somewhere in between. If you've read this far, you've got at least a casual interest in "The Ring." You know it's a 20km racetrack in the German hill country where people travel the world over to see and drive, but maybe you're not sure how difficult it is to actually get behind the wheel on the famed Nordschleife? While it might seem like quite the undertaking, no worries, my dude. It's actually very easy to get yourself set up for a lap (or many laps) on the world's coolest racetrack.

One of the first questions you need to ask yourself before seriously considering seat time on The Ring is this: Do you want to try and set a lap record, or do you just want to have fun? If you answered "yes" to the first option, you don't belong anywhere near the Nordschleife. Or any race-track for that matter. It doesn't



matter how good a driver you think you are, or how many laps you've done in Gran Turismo. I'm sorry, but no. The real Nordschleife is extremely dangerous and indeed deadly when not treated with respect. Please make sure you have your head on straight and check your dreams of lap times at the door where they belong. Don't worry, laps times don't mean a thing in reality and the good news is, the Nürburgring really is as cool as everyone says. You will never look back on your first trip to the Nürburgring and think, "Man, I wish I had timed those laps." Promise.

Right, so now that we have that out of the way, for the purposes of this article, I will assume that you are a non-German-speaking, non-EU resident who would like to make the pilgrimage to The Ring for the first time. If you've been before, there's still information of value for you, but I'm aiming mostly at true Ring virgins here.

The first thing you need to do when planning your trip is pick the right time of year to travel to Germany. The Nürburgring season usually stretches from mid-March to mid-late December, but please check the calendar on the official Nürburgring website before booking. Another good resource for the Nürburgring schedule and other Ring-related news is Bridge to Gantry, a blog site run by British expat and Nürburgring-residing expert race driver Dale Lomas. For those of us traveling from EU-friendly countries (including USA, Canada, U.K., etc...) you don't need a special visa to travel to Germany. Just pack your bags and boogie. Tell the customs officer you're going to drive the Nürburgring and they'll give you a big thumbs-up.

Once you have your rough time frame in mind, you need to decide if you would like to attend a public driving session called Touristenfahrten (literally translated, it means "tourist driving"), or if you'd rather have a go at a privately operated track day. Your choice—there are benefits to both.

Touristenfahrten laps can be extremely crowded, or totally open depending on luck and what time of year you plan your trip. The cost of one Touristenfahrten lap is €25 on a weekday (Monday through Thursday) and €30 on a weekend (Friday through Sunday). To reiterate, that price is per lap, not per day. Weekends are usually busier, avoid holidays, and don't even think about trying what they call "Car Friday" unless you literally hate yourself. Best bet is a weekday not immediately before or after a holiday or long weekend.

Also keep in mind that Germans celebrate a lot of holidays you've likely never heard of, so look into it. Touristenfahrten will run rain or shine; snow, ice, all is fair game, so be prepared. The track is big enough that you can experience two or three weather patterns in the course of one lap. It's not a rumor; it really does happen.

Track days are typically a little less busy, with the cost ranging anywhere from €500 for a half day to upward of €1000, depending on who the organizer is. Track days typically have the option to hire an instructor, which is 100 percent worth it, and the line is usually not as long to get on track when compared to a Touristenfahrten day. One important note: If you've never driven on a track shared with extremely fast GT cars, you might find yourself overwhelmed by the race cars that will buzz you all day long. Touristenfahrten laps are only open to vehicles registered for use on public roads. Motorcycles are allowed, whereas most track days are separated and allow only cars or bikes, not both. Most track days allow race cars or street cars, so you will find yourself with a face full of M6 GT3s or AMG GT3s, or even SCG003s more than once—that's just a given. But don't worry; they'll definitely pass you. Track days are typically "open pit lane" format, which means you can take as many laps in a row as you would like with no requirement on when you must pit.

Touristenfahrten is a different format, where you scan an access card to enter the track, and then you take one lap and must exit, get back in line, and repeat the process. Both track day and Touristenfahrten use corner workers and flag stations and shut down for accidents. If you do happen to crash, the Armco (guard rail) bill is on you. I don't know the exact price breakdown, but it's not unheard of to rack up €2,000-€5,000 in damages and fees (or higher) depending on the severity of your crash. So be careful! I highly suggest getting travel insurance or at the very least, making sure your health insurance covers foreign incidents and hospital stays. Better safe than sorry.

As a first-timer, you can expect to fit about 10 comfortable laps in a single day, regardless of whether you decide to do a track day or Touristenfahrten. Keep in mind that 10 laps might not sound like much, but 10 laps on the Nordschleife is more than 200 km of high-stress driving. While it's physically possible to do more, I don't recommend overextending yourself. Things on track get very dangerous as you become fatigued. It's far wiser to take your time, enjoy the track, have a nice lunch break, breathe, relax, and honestly just enjoy the time you get to spend at this amazing place. People have been having fun in cars and bikes on the Nordschleife since 1927. Think on that while you're there. You get to be part of a 90-year tradition. Make sure to be respectful to yourself, the place, and to others who have traveled to enjoy the Nordschleife just like you.

Once you have decided between a Touristenfahrten and track day, you need to find a car to drive. Again, no worries, mate. It's easy. Don't try and enter the Nordschleife with a rental car from Hertz; that won't fly. "Normal" rental cars are not allowed on the Ring, and for good reason. This is where my good friends at RSR Nürburg come in. The RSR team has been a staple in the European



track day community for years, and they are much more than simply a rental car agency. RSR Nürburg has a wide variety of rental cars to choose from, all of which are meticulously cared for and expertly maintained. You can rent anything from a Renault Twingo to a Porsche GT3 RS!

Prices vary depending on what you want to drive, of course. Keep in mind that RSR won't let you rent all of its cars if you are a first-timer. That would be dumb, and the company is anything but. You'll have more fun in a Ford Fiesta than a GT-R if it's your first time anyhow.





RSR Nürburg are experts on all things Nürburgring, acting as a full-service hospitality agency when needed; if you feel so inclined, they can help you with every detail of your trip, including inside tips and info about the local towns, lodging accommodations, where to eat, where the best schnitzels are at, who's got the cheapest hefeweizen, stuff like that. All you need to do is ask, and they can take care of you.

The last track day I attended was a Skylimit Events open pit lane day with a VW Scirocco rented from RSR, and I opted to have some instruction from RSR's media boss and Ring Master Kostas Sidiras. Kostas knows the track inside and out, and his instruction helped immensely. With 73 corners, there's no way to "quickly" learn the track, not to mention all the small surface variations, places to use curbs, where to brake or turn in on blind corners, the list goes on. Long story short, get an instructor. You'll have a better time. Another service RSR Nürburg offers is a Ring "taxi service." You pay to experience a lap around the Nordschleife from the passenger seat while an experienced driver shows you the line at an extremely brisk pace. These drivers do not mess around!

RSR organizes track days themselves, offers rental cars for other track days or Touristenfahrten, runs tours of the Eiffel region, and can arrange for payments and even get your Touristenfahrten tickets for you. Talk about a turnkey track day experience—these guys came up with the concept. RSR has offices at The Nürburgring, Spa-Francorchamps, as well as Portimao Circuit along the coast of Portugal. One last thing, RSR is a multinational company with employees from many different countries, so you don't need to worry if your Deutschsprachen isn't that, ummm, gut. Kein problem, buddy. Everyone there speaks more proper English than you.

I need to make a quick aside and give a big thank you to Andy Jaenen and the whole Skylimit crew. The organization has always proven to be top-notch



over the multiple years I've attended its events. The first time I drove the Ring was at Skylimit trackday and I will continue to drive with them as often as I can drag myself to Europe. I highly recommend looking into one of these events at the Nurburgring, Spa-Francorchamps or the home track of Circuit Zolder in Belgium.

So there you have it. Not as hard as you thought, right? Long story short, you can get yourself a seat on the Nordschleife pretty easily. It requires some planning, but it's really just a matter of your budget and how bad you want to make the jump between talking about it and actually doing it. The Nürburgring is unlike anywhere else on Earth, and sadly, it might not be around forever. With ever-updating regulations and changes frequently being made to the track for safety, it's anyone's guess as to whether the Nordschleife as we know it will be around in 20 years' time. It probably will... But if you want to have a drive, there's no time like the present. 🇪🇺

SOURCES

Bridge to Gantry
bridgetogantry.com

Nürburgring Official
nuerburgring.de/en

RSR Nurburg
rsmurburg.com

Skylimit Events
skylimitevents.com

