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German National Tourist Press Office

New York, 19 December, 2007

Baden-Wuerttemberg - State of Kings **Visitors delight in a Royal Road and celebrate in Castles**

Baden-Wuerttemberg could be described as a State of Kings. The Houses of Hohenzollern, Stauffen, Baden and Wuerttemberg produced many of Germany's counts, princes, Prussian Kings and German emperors.

The House of Hohenzollern is one of the oldest and most significant royal families in Baden-Wuerttemberg and Germany. By the early 12th century the Hohenzollerns were rulers of an area extending from the Neckar valley to the Danube river.

The 'Hohenzollern Route' takes visitors back to the times of the 12th century. One of the highlights is Hohenzollern Castle near Hechingen. The ancestral seat of both the Prussian-Brandenburg and the Electoral-Catholic lines of the House of Hohenzollern. It is one of the finest castles in Europe. The spectacular panoramic views across the Swabian Alb were admired by Kaiser Wilhelm II, no less, on his visit to the castle in 1886. Today it is a popular venue for weddings. Another famous stop on the route is Sigmaringen, the Hohenzollern's former seat on the Danube. The castle in Sigmaringen towers majestically atop a mighty cliff. Once a medieval fortress, it has become over the centuries a grand residence rife with towers, turrets, alcoves and porticos, worthy of its Hohenzollern counts and princes. Its collection of weapons is one of the largest in Europe and is proof of the history of these noble lords. > www.germany-tourism.de .

Outside of Stuttgart, Ludwigsburg Residential Palace, former residence of the House of Wuerttemberg, is one of the largest baroque palaces in Europe. Visitors can enjoy the extensive baroque gardens and visit the Porcelain Museum, the Museum of Historical Fashions, the Baroque Art Gallery as well as the rococo state rooms. The New Palace (Neues Schloss) in Stuttgart was built in 1746 as a representative baroque residential palace for Duke Carl Eugen von Wuerttemberg. The Solitude Palace on the heights southwest of Stuttgart, with a magnificent view of the lowlands, is considered one of the outstanding architectural ensembles of the 18th century in the German Southwest.

The Dukes of Baden are associated with one of Germany's most unique tourist attractions, Mainau Island, "The Flower Island in Lake Constance." In Mainau, luxurious plants blossom all year and sit along side 150 year old trees as well as the baroque splendour of the castle grounds and church creating a Mediterranean flair. Alongside fascinating vegetation, the island is home to Germany's largest butterfly house where 25 species of exotic butterflies can be observed at close range. The island also offers special activities for children such as nature walks, a children's village with cave-like dwellings, a wooden train and water play areas > www.mainau.de.

Baden-Wuerttemberg is also home to Heidelberg castle, one of Germany's most famous and visited castle ruins. It was the residence of the Prince Electors of the Palatinate from the 13th to the 17th century and celebrates the Castle Festival with the legendary "Student Prince" from July to August and the Castle Illuminations on June 6, July 12 and September 6 next year. In 1720 the court of the Prince Elector moved

from Heidelberg to Mannheim where the newly renovated baroque Residential Palace dominates the modern city. Mannheim is also the starting point of one of Germany's most famous scenic routes the 'Castle Road'. The Castle Road leads visitors from one amazing castle, palace or town to the next. Sights include gems of medieval architecture and romantic towns galore > www.castleroad.de.

Castle restaurants and hotels all over the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg do not only revive past times but also offer guests the opportunity to spend a night under a king's roof, spend days like a prince, eat like a knight, marry romantically, celebrate in style or recover in fairy tale surroundings. For instance, at the Stauffer castle Guttenberg high above the beautiful Neckar valley, guests can enjoy meals from 13th-15th century served by squires and maids in historical garments > www.burg-guttenberg.de. In contrast, the luxury Schlosshotel Buehlerhoehe near Baden-Baden offers relaxation in exquisite surroundings > www.buehlerhoehe.de. Other popular castle hotels are Liebenstein (www.liebenstein.com), Staufenneck (www.burg-staufenneck.de), Haigerloch (www.schloss-haigerloch.de), Hornberg (www.burg-hotel-hornberg.de), Heinsheim (www.schloss-heinsheim.de) and Reinach (www.schlossreinach.de) where guests can enjoy excellent meals, relax and indulge in the romantic surroundings.

For more information about Baden-Wuerttemberg and its castles go to > www.tourism-bw.com. To get to know more about the state-owned palaces and gardens in Baden-Wuerttemberg see www.schloesser-magazin.de

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