



Cologne Cathedral: An Architectural Masterpiece and a German Icon

Description

Explore with us one of the largest Gothic churches in Europe and a UNESCO World Heritage site

“The fact that it survived so many violent times, and still stands, speaks, volumes of its symbolism to its people and Germany!”

Aaron Goetsch



Cologne Cathedral

Our visit to Cologne, Germany, centered around one remarkable sight: the Cologne Cathedral. As we approached the cathedral, its towering spires and intricate Gothic architecture took our breath away. Inside, the atmosphere was awe-inspiring, with sunlight streaming through stained-glass windows and illuminating centuries-old artwork.

In the end, we didn't really explore much of the city itself, as our travels were taking us to Luxembourg that day. We plan to return to give the city a closer look as we know people who enjoyed their visits to Cologne. Despite skipping the city's other attractions, the cathedral alone made our trip unforgettable, offering an incredible glimpse into the history and the spiritual world.

The Magnificent Cologne Cathedral

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Cologne Cathedral (Cathedral Church of Saint Peter) is a Catholic cathedral in Cologne, North Rhine-Westphalia. It is the seat of the Archbishop of Cologne and the administration of the Archdiocese of Cologne. It is a renowned German Catholic and Gothic architecture monument that was declared a World Heritage Site in 1996. This is Germany's most visited landmark, attracting an average of 20,000 people daily. At 515 ft, the cathedral is currently the tallest twin-spired church in the world. It is the second tallest church in Europe after Ulm Minster and the third tallest church in the world. It is the largest Gothic church in Northern Europe and has the second-tallest spires. The towers, for their two massive spires, give the cathedral the largest façade of any church in the world. The choir has the largest height-to-width ratio, 3.6:1, of any medieval church.

Construction began on Cologne Cathedral in 1248. However, construction stopped around 1560, leaving the structure unfinished for centuries. Work did not restart until the 1840s and the edifice was completed according to its original medieval plan in 1880.

Cologne's medieval builders had planned a grand structure to house the reliquary of the Three Kings. It would fill its role as a place of worship for the Holy Roman Emperor. Despite being left incomplete during the medieval period, Cologne Cathedral eventually became unified as "a masterpiece of exceptional intrinsic value." This was "a powerful testimony to the strength and persistence of Christian belief in medieval and modern Europe." Only the telecommunications tower is higher than the Cathedral.

Ancient site with a fascinating history



Construction began on the present Cologne Cathedral in 1248 with the foundation stone. Several previous structures had already occupied the site. The earliest may have been for grain storage, and it was possibly succeeded by a Roman temple built by Mercurius Augustus. However, from the 4th century on, the site was occupied by Christian buildings. These included a square edifice known as the "oldest cathedral" commissioned by Maternus, the first bishop of Cologne.

The east end of the present cathedral sits where a free-standing baptistery dating to the 7th century was located. Unfortunately, it was demolished in the 9th century to build the second cathedral. During

excavations of the present cathedral, graves were discovered in the oldest portion of the building. These included a boy richly adorned with grave goods and another of a woman, popularly thought to be Wisigard. Both graves are considered to be from the 6th century. Only ruins of the baptistery and the octagonal baptismal font remain today.

The second church, the “Old Cathedral,” was completed in 818. On 30 April 1248, during demolition work to prepare for a new cathedral, it was destroyed by fire.

Medieval beginning



In 1164, the Archbishop of Cologne, Rainald of Dassel, acquired the relics of the Three Kings. The Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, previously had taken them from the Basilica of Sant’Eustorgio, Milan, Italy. (Parts of the relics have since been returned to Milan.) The relics have significant religious significance and have drawn pilgrims from all over Christendom. It was important to church officials that they be properly housed. Thus, they began a building plan in the new Gothic architecture style, particularly in the French cathedral of Amiens.

Archbishop Konrad von Hochstaden laid the foundation stone on 15 August 1248. Master Gerhard directed the completion of the eastern arm, which was consecrated in 1322 and sealed off by a temporary wall to be used as the work continued. Eighty-four misericords, a mixture of mythical beasts and everyday human activity, within the choir date from this building phase.

Work on the west front commenced under Master Michael in the mid-14th century. The work stopped

in 1473, leaving the south tower complete to the belfry level and crowned with a giant crane. The crane remained a landmark of the Cologne skyline for 400 years. At times, some work was occurring on the structure of the nave between the west front and the eastern arm. This also stopped during the 16th century.

19th-century Completion of the Cologne Cathedral



With the commitment of the Protestant Prussian Court, it was finally decided to complete the cathedral. This was due to the 19th-century Romantic enthusiasm for the Middle Ages and the discovery of the original façade plans. It was achieved by community effort; the Central-Dombauverein, founded to promote and finance the completion of Cologne Cathedral, raised two-thirds of the enormous costs.

The Prussian state supplied the remaining third. The state saw this as a way to improve relations with the many Catholic subjects they gained in 1815. After 1871, it was especially regarded as a project to symbolize German nationhood.

Work resumed in 1842 to the original design of the surviving medieval plans and drawings. They utilized more modern construction techniques, including iron roof girders. The nave was completed, and the towers were added. The bells were installed in the 1870s. The largest bell is St. Petersglocke.

The completion of Germany's largest cathedral was a national event on 14 August 1880, celebrating 632 years after construction began. Emperor Wilhelm, I attended the celebration. With a height of 516.3 ft, it was the tallest building in the world for four years until the completion of the Washington Monument.

The Impact of World War II and post-war History

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The cathedral suffered fourteen direct hits by aerial bombs during World War II. Badly damaged, it remained standing in an otherwise destroyed city. The twin spires were used as an easily recognizable navigational landmark for Allied aircraft bombing.

Repairs of the war damage were completed in 1956. An emergency repair to the northwest tower's base was carried out in 1944 using poor-quality brick from a nearby ruined building. This remained visible as a reminder of the war until 2005 when it was restored to its original appearance.

Repair and maintenance work is constant in one section or another. It is almost never completely free of scaffolding, as wind, rain, and pollution slowly eat away at the stones. When we visited, we saw several places that had scaffolding. The Dombauhütte, established to build the cathedral and keep it in repair, is said to employ the best stonemasons in the Rhineland. The Dombauverein still bears half the

costs of repair and maintenance.

The Cologne Cathedral in the 21st century



On 18 August 2005, Pope Benedict XVI visited the cathedral during his visit to Germany as part of

World Youth Day 2005 festivities. An estimated one million pilgrims visited the cathedral during this time.

On 25 August 2007, the cathedral received a new stained glass window in the south transept. The German artist Gerhard Richter created the 1,220 sq ft of glasswork. Donations paid the €400,000 cost. It is composed of 11,500 identically sized pieces of colored glass resembling pixels, randomly arranged by a computer, which create a colorful “carpet.” Since losing the original window in World War II, the space had been temporarily filled with plain glass.

If you can climb to the top of the Cologne Cathedral



Climbing to the top of Cologne Cathedral is an adventure that rewards you with breathtaking views and a sense of accomplishment, though definitely out of breath, too. The ascent involves 533 steps up a

narrow spiral staircase, which might seem daunting, but each step brings you closer to an unparalleled panorama of the city as well as seeing close-up the interior structures of the Cathedral. As you reach the viewing platform, about 300 feet above the ground, the entire city of Cologne is before your eyes, with the Rhine River winding through the landscape and the spires of other historic buildings dotting the skyline.

I took on the challenge of climbing to the top and found it to be an unforgettable experience. Despite the physical effort, the view from the summit made every step worthwhile, offering a unique perspective of the city and its surroundings. For anyone visiting Cologne, this climb is a must-do, providing not just a stunning visual reward but also a deeper appreciation of the history and grandeur of the cathedral itself.

Where is Cologne Cathedral?



View from the top of the Cologne Cathedral

Cologne Cathedral, also known as Kölner Dom, is located in the heart of Cologne, Germany. It stands right next to the city's main train station (Köln Hauptbahnhof) and is a central landmark, easily accessible from various parts of the city. The cathedral is situated along the Rhine River, making it a prominent feature in Cologne's skyline.

There are several convenient ways to reach Cologne Cathedral (Kölner Dom), depending on your starting point:

1. By Train

- **Local Trains (S-Bahn, Regional Trains):** The cathedral is adjacent to the Köln Hauptbahnhof (Cologne Central Station). Upon arriving at the station, simply follow the signs for the Dom (Cathedral) exit, and you'll find yourself right at its doorstep.
- **Long-Distance Trains (ICE, IC, EC):** If you're coming from other cities in Germany or neighboring countries, many long-distance trains stop at Köln Hauptbahnhof. Once you arrive, it's just a short walk from the platform to the cathedral.

3. By Bus

- **Local Buses:** Numerous bus routes serve the central bus station at Köln Hauptbahnhof. From there, it's a short walk to the cathedral. Routes like 132, 133, and 250 have stops nearby.
- **Tourist Buses:** Hop-on-hop-off sightseeing buses often stop near the cathedral, making them a convenient option for tourists exploring multiple sites in Cologne.

4. By Car

- **Parking:** While driving directly to the cathedral can be challenging due to limited parking, there are several parking garages nearby, such as the Parkhaus am Dom and Parkhaus Köln Hbf. From these garages, it's a short walk to the cathedral.
- **Traffic:** Be aware that the area around the cathedral is often crowded, especially during peak tourist times, so consider using public transportation if possible.

5. By Riverboat

- **Rhine River Cruises:** Some river cruise docks are near the Hohenzollern Bridge, which is just a short walk from the cathedral. This can be a scenic way to arrive, especially if you're traveling from other parts of the Rhine River region.

Map of Cologne, Germany

UNESCO World Heritage Site



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In 1996, the cathedral was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List of culturally significant sites. In 2004, it was placed on the “World Heritage in Danger” list as the only Western site in danger. This was due to plans to construct several high-rise buildings nearby, which would have visually impacted its visual presence in the city. The cathedral was removed from the list in 2006, following the authorities’ decision to limit the heights of buildings constructed near and around the cathedral.

Cologne Cathedral is a major attraction for tourists and pilgrims as a World Heritage Site and host to the Shrine of the Three Kings. It is one of Northern Europe’s oldest and most important pilgrimage sites.

There is ongoing conservation at the cathedral to address the problem of the black discoloration caused by the sandstone reacting with sulfuric acid during rainfall. The acidic rain is a consequence of

air pollution.

St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Washington, D.C., was modeled after the cathedral.

What are the top 10 things to do in Cologne, Germany



AdobeStock Cologne Old Town

Excluding the Cathedral, there is lots to do in Cologne.

1. **Chocolate Museum (Schokoladenmuseum Köln)**

This museum is a paradise for chocolate lovers. It traces the history of chocolate from its origins to

modern production. Visitors can watch chocolates being made, sample various treats, and even create their own chocolate bars. The museum's location by the Rhine River offers scenic views, making it a delightful blend of indulgence and culture.

2. Cologne Old Town (Altstadt)

The Altstadt is a charming area filled with narrow streets, traditional houses, and cozy breweries. It's a great place to explore the city's history, enjoy local food, and experience Cologne's vibrant atmosphere. The area is especially lively during the Christmas market season, with festive decorations and unique handmade goods.

3. Museum Ludwig

Museum Ludwig houses one of Europe's most important collections of modern art, including works by Picasso, Warhol, and Lichtenstein. The museum's architecture itself is impressive, with large, open spaces that allow for an immersive art experience. It's a must-visit for art enthusiasts interested in 20th-century and contemporary works.

4. Hohenzollern Bridge (Hohenzollernbrücke)

This iconic bridge over the Rhine is famous for the thousands of love locks that couples attach to its railings. The bridge offers stunning views of the Cologne skyline and is a popular spot for photography. Walking across it, you can feel the vibrancy of the city and its connection to the river.

5. Rheinauhafen District

A modern urban development along the Rhine River, Rheinauhafen is known for its sleek architecture, including the distinctive crane houses (Kranhäuser). The area is perfect for a leisurely walk, with art galleries, restaurants, and stunning river views. It's also a great example of Cologne's blend of historical and contemporary styles.

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AdobeStock Cologne Cable Car

6. Cologne Cable Car (Kölner Seilbahn)

The Cologne Cable Car provides a unique way to see the city from above, traveling across the Rhine River. The ride offers spectacular views of the city's landmarks, parks, and the river below. It's a short but memorable experience, perfect for families and anyone looking to see Cologne from a different perspective.

7. Flora and Botanical Garden

Cologne's Flora and Botanical Garden is a peaceful retreat with over 10,000 species of plants. The beautifully landscaped gardens are perfect for a relaxing stroll, and the glasshouses showcase exotic plants from around the world. It's a great place to escape the hustle and bustle of the city while enjoying nature.

8. 4711 House

The birthplace of the world-famous 4711 Eau de Cologne, this historic building is a must-see for perfume enthusiasts. You can learn about the history of this iconic fragrance, explore the shop, and even create your own personalized scent. The building itself is a piece of history, with a classic facade that adds to its charm.

9. Cologne Zoo (Kölner Zoo)

Established in 1860, Cologne Zoo is one of the oldest and most diverse zoos in Germany. It's home to a wide variety of animals, including elephants and lions, and a dedicated aquarium. The zoo is well laid out, making it easy to explore, and it offers a fun and educational experience for visitors of all ages.

10. KölnTriangle

The KölnTriangle is a high-rise building with a viewing platform offering panoramic views of Cologne. From the top, you can see all the major landmarks, including the Rhine, the Altstadt, and the cathedral in the distance. It's an excellent spot for photographers or anyone looking to get a bird's-eye view of the city.

When to visit Cologne



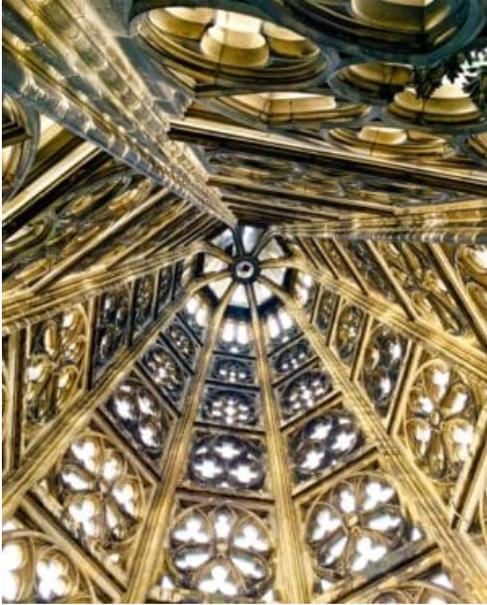
Choosing the right time to visit Cologne, Germany, largely depends on your preferences for weather, events, and crowds. The city experiences a temperate climate typical of Western Europe, with distinct seasons offering unique experiences throughout the year. Summer, from June to August, is the peak tourist season when the weather is warm and pleasant, ideal for exploring Cologne's outdoor attractions like the cathedral, riverside promenades, and historic squares. This time also coincides with various festivals and events, such as the Cologne Gay Pride Parade and the Cologne Summer Festival, adding vibrancy to the city's cultural scene.

For those seeking a quieter visit with fewer tourists, consider visiting in the shoulder seasons of spring (April to May) and autumn (September to October). Our visit occurred in late March, and the weather was cool and dry. During these times, the weather is mild, making it comfortable to wander through Cologne's charming neighborhoods and enjoy the city's many museums, breweries, and parks. Spring blooms add color to the city, while autumn brings a crispness to the air and the opportunity to experience traditional German festivals like Oktoberfest celebrations and the Cologne Lights festival along the Rhine River.

Winter, from December to February, can be chilly, but it offers a magical atmosphere with festive Christmas markets throughout the city, where you can warm up with mulled wine and seasonal treats while shopping for unique crafts and gifts.

Ultimately, the best time to visit Cologne depends on your preferences for weather, activities, and the kind of experience you seek in this historic and lively city.

Where to stay



Cologne, a 2,000-year-old city with over one million people, spans the Rhine River in western Germany and is the region's cultural hub. As a result, there are many choices of accommodations throughout the city. Check out the links below that offer hotels and vacation rentals.

It is important to price out accommodations on various sites. [Expedia](#) is a US-based company, whereas [Booking.com](#) is Europe-based. Not all properties appear on both, so it is ideal to check both out. Our personal first choice is [Booking.com](#). If the establishment has a website, check the price there as well. Click the link below to check out hotels and vacation homes in the area. It may be just the motivation you need to start planning that next grand adventure.

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Final Thoughts



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The Cologne Cathedral stands as a towering testament to the city's rich history and architectural grandeur. The wonderment we felt upon seeing the intricate Gothic spires against the sky was matched only by the serene beauty inside, where sunlight filters through stunning stained glass, illuminating the ancient art and relics. This experience, although singular, is powerful enough to make the cathedral one of the highlights of our travels, leaving an indelible impression that calls us back to explore more of what Cologne has to offer.

Reflecting on our journey, it's clear that the Cologne Cathedral is not just an iconic landmark but a beacon that draws visitors from around the world. Its majestic presence offers a deep connection to the past and a sense of wonder that transcends the bustling city outside. While our time in Cologne was

centered around this magnificent structure and brief, it set the stage for future explorations, ensuring that our memories of the cathedral will remain a cherished part of our travels.

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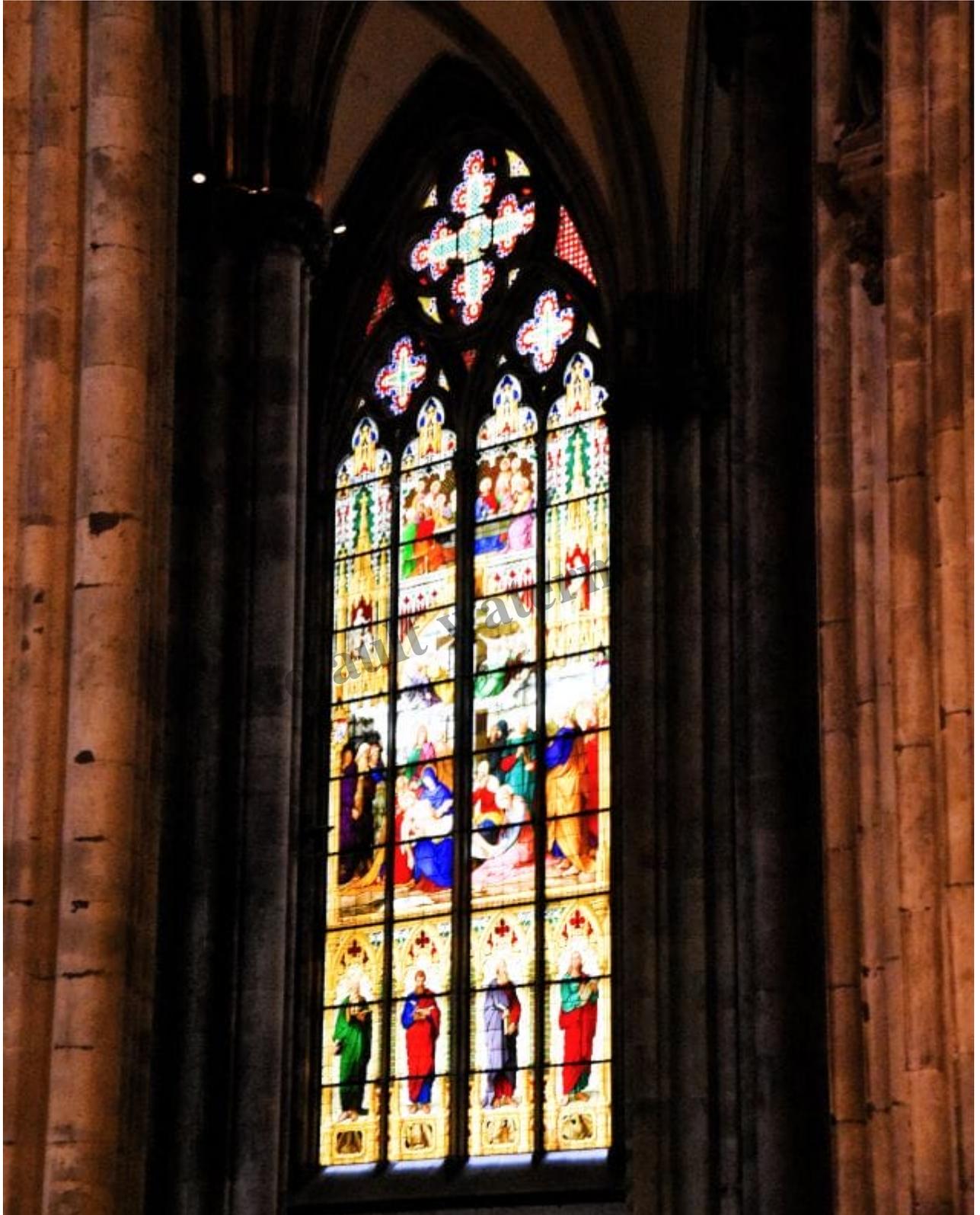


Cologne Cathedral Photo Gallery











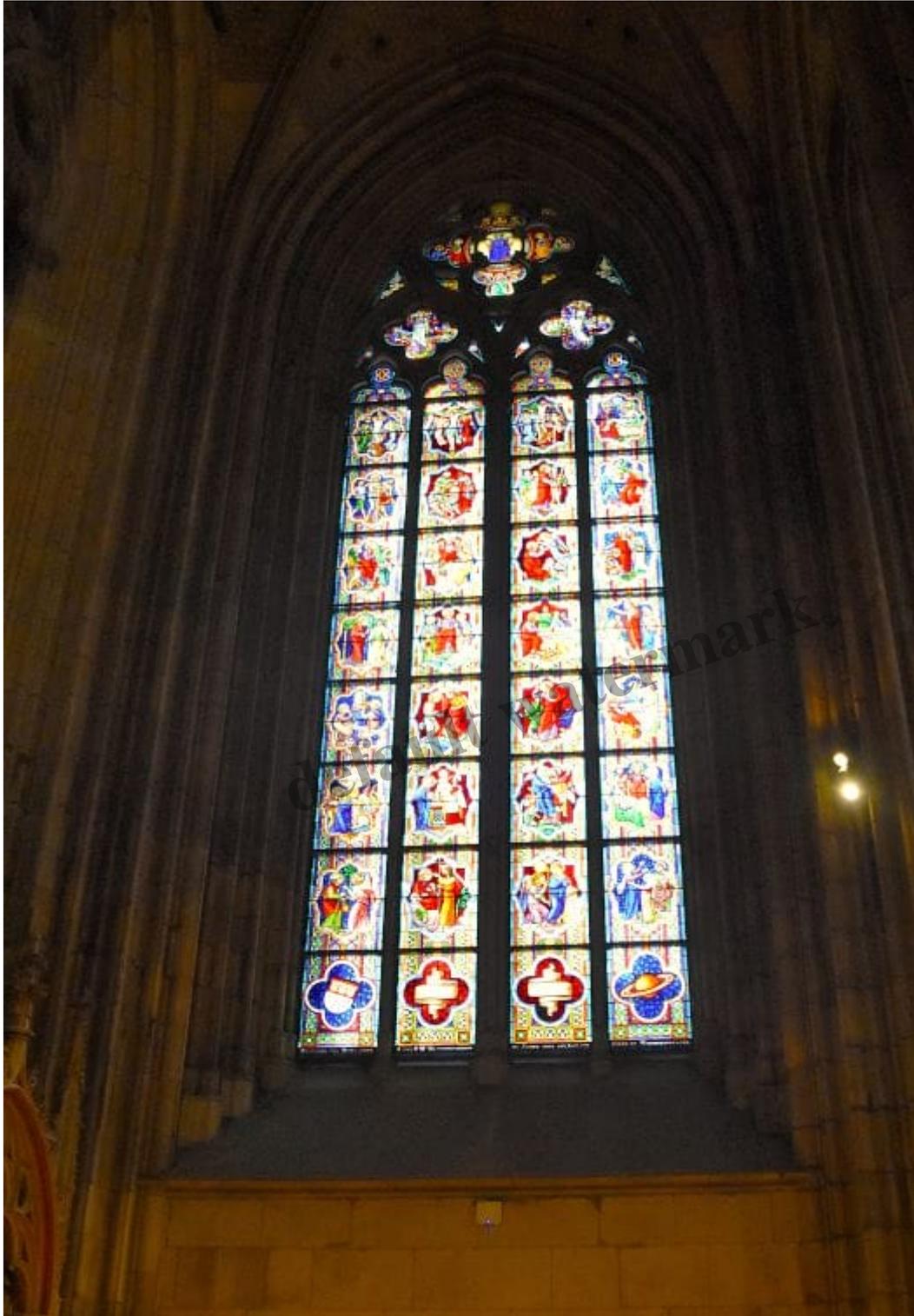








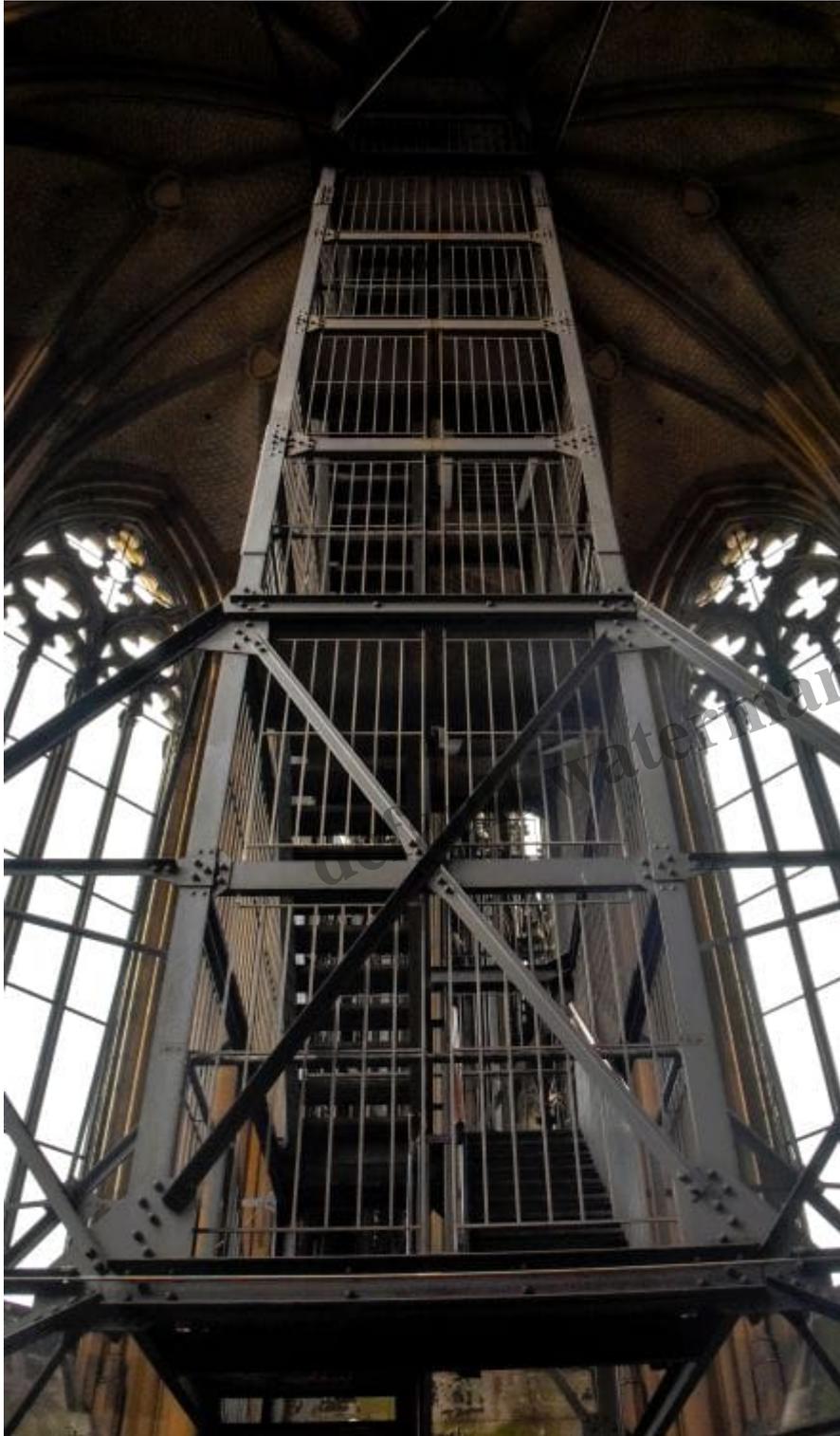












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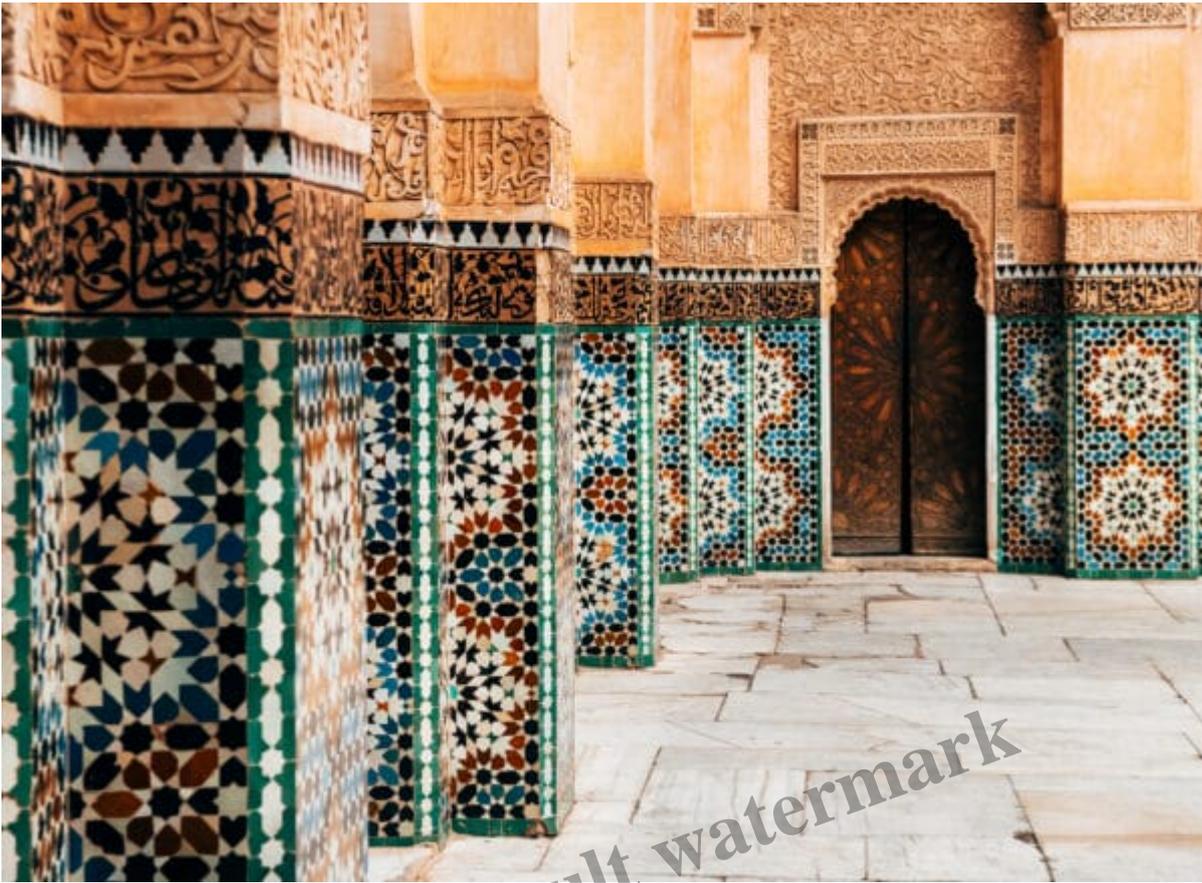
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