

## Stralsund

Stralsund is a city in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany, situated at the southern coast of the Strelasund (a sound of the Baltic Sea separating the island of Rügen from the mainland). In medieval ages, the Stralsund area was part of the West Slavic duchy of Rügen, which was part of the kingdom of Denmark since 1168. At that time, the Dänholm isle and a small fishing village, both at the site of the latter city, were named Strale / Stralow, meaning "arrow". In the course of German Ostsiedlung, lots of German settlers, gentry and merchants were called into the duchy, and eventually populated the Strale site, but also merchants from other countries as well as locals were attracted and made up for one third of the city's population. The Danish navy was using the isle, too. When the settlement was grown to town size, duke Wizlaw I of Rügen granted German Lübeck law to "our town Stralow" in 1234. In 1240, when the duke gave additional land to the city, he called her Stralesund.

The success of the settlement challenged the powerful city of Lübeck, which burnt Stralsund down in 1249. Afterwards the town was rebuilt with a massive city wall having 11 town gates and 30 watchtowers. The Neustadt, a town-like suburb, was merged to Stralsund by 1361. Schadegard, a twin town to Stralsund also founded by Wizlaw I nearby, but was not granted German law, served as the dukes stronghold and enclosed a fort. It was given up and teared down by 1269 under the pressure of the Stralsund Bürger.

In 1293 Stralsund became a member of the Hanseatic League. A total of 300 ships flying the flag of Stralsund cruised the Baltic Sea in the 14th century.

In the 17th century, Stralsund became a theatre in the Thirty Years' War. General Albrecht von Wallenstein besieged the city in 1628, until Swedish troops came to Stralsund's aid and forced the general to retreat. After the war the Peace of Westphalia (1648) handed Western Pomerania, Swedish Pomerania, and the city of Stralsund to Sweden. In the Great Northern War in 1715 Charles XII led the defence of Stralsund for a year against the united European armies. Stralsund remained under Swedish control until 1815, when it became a part of Prussia. The Brick Gothic historic centre is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

## Wismar

Wismar is a small port and Hanseatic League town in northern Germany on the Baltic Sea, in the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, about 45 km due east of Lübeck, and 30 km due north of Schwerin. Its natural harbour, located in the Bay of Wismar is well-protected by a promontory. Representative of Hanseatic League city brick construction as well as the German brick churches, the city has been included in the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites since 2002. The town was the setting of the 1922 vampire movie Nosferatu.

Wismar is said to have received civic rights in 1229, and came into the possession of Mecklenburg in 1301. In 1259 it had entered a pact with Lübeck and Rostock, intended to defend against the numerous Baltic sea pirates, which developed into the Hanseatic League. During the 13th and 14th centuries it was a flourishing Hanseatic town, with important woollen factories. Though a plague carried off 10,000 of the inhabitants in 1376, the town seems to have remained tolerably prosperous until the 16th century.

The centre of the old town is the huge Market Place, the largest in Germany (10,000 square metres), surrounded by elegant buildings with styles ranging from 14th-century North German Gothic to 19th-century Romanesque revival. The square's focal point is the Wasserkunst, an elaborate wrought-iron fountain imported from Holland in 1602. The northern side of the square is occupied by the Town Hall, built in neoclassical style in 1817-1819. Another notable building in the square is an ancient Gothic warehouse called Alter Schwede (The Old Swede), erected around 1380. The 80 m high tower church of St Mary (Marienkirche) is the only remainder of the original Brick Gothic edifice, built in the first half of the 13th century. It suffered heavy damage in World War II, and was deliberately destroyed in 1960 under the East German Communist government. The church of St Nicholas (Nikolaikirche), built in 1381-1460, with very lofty vaulting, together with the Marienkirche, are regarded as good examples of the influence exercised in these northern provinces by the large church of St Mary in Lübeck.

The elegant cruciform church of St George (St Georgen-Kirche) dates from the first half of the 13th century. It was destroyed in World War II and rebuilt in 1990.

The Fürstenhof, at one time a ducal residence, and later occupied by the municipal authorities, is a richly decorated specimen of the Italian early Renaissance style. Built in 1552-1565, it was restored in 1877-1879. The "Old School", dating from about 1300, has been restored, and used as a museum. The town hall, rebuilt in 1829, contains a collection of pictures.

Source: -- Wikipedia [<http://www.wikipedia.org>]