BACKGROUND-INFORMATION

Facts and Figures / As of 2026

About the Zollverein Foundation

The Zollverein Foundation is responsible for the preservation and development of the Zollverein UNESCO World Heritage Site in Essen and owns the site's above-ground buildings and facilities. Known as the "most beautiful coal mine in the world", Zollverein has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2001. Preserved as an industrial monument that shapes the region's identity, The Zollverein Coal Mine and Coking Plant have been brought to life through museums, concerts and events. With around 1.7 million visits annually, Zollverein is the Ruhr region's most visited tourist attraction. It is also a growing business and innovation hub, home to numerous companies in the creative and innovation sectors.

The Zollverein UNESCO World Heritage Site

The Zollverein Coal Mine closed on 23 December 1986, making it the last of approximately 290 coal mines in Essen to cease operations. Essen was once the largest coal-mining city on the European continent.

In December 1986, the Shaft XII complex was listed as a historic monument by ministerial decree. The original Shaft 1/2/8 complex and the Zollverein Coking Plant followed on 20 June 2000.

In 1997, heritage conservationists Eberhard Grunsky and Udo Mainzer, Hans Kania of the Bauhütte Zollverein and Karl Ganser, Managing Director of the International Building Exhibition Emscher Park, submitted an application for UNESCO World Heritage status for the Zollverein Coal Mine and Coking Plant.

On 14 December 2001, the Zollverein industrial complex, comprising the coal mine and coking plant, was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It encompasses Shaft XII, Shaft 1/2/8 and the coking plant, covering a total area of 100 hectares. This is equivalent to approximately 100 full-sized football pitches and makes the Zollverein site larger than Essen city centre, which covers 94 hectares. In 2026, Zollverein celebrated the 25th anniversary of its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List under the motto "denk mal Zukunft" ("think future").
The site comprises 96 buildings, more than 200 technical installations and machines, approximately 2.7 kilometres of conveyor bridges, and more than 13.2 kilometres of pipelines.

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This makes the Zollverein UNESCO World Heritage Site one of the largest industrial monuments in the world.

The 55-metre-high double-rack head frame winding tower has become a landmark of the Ruhr region and an important symbol of regional identity.

The “Welterbe Forum” opened in 2026 as a central, digitally enhanced and accessible visitor information and experience centre. Located directly on Werner-Müller-Platz, it offers a concise and engaging introduction to the history, significance and present-day character of the World Heritage Site through interactive media stations and a film presented on a 14.5-metre-long LED media wall.

The Zollverein UNESCO World Heritage Site is being developed as a hub for the creative and innovation sectors – particularly art, culture and design – as well as for education, tourism and leisure. This development is based on the Zollverein Master Plan drawn up in 2002 by architect Rem Koolhaas and the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA). The master plan ensured that the core area of the World Heritage Site remained free from new construction, while existing buildings were adapted for new uses in keeping with their protected status. The conversions and new buildings developed for the site have received numerous awards.

The Zollverein UNESCO World Heritage Site is a distinguished design hub. The coal mine’s former boiler house is home to the Red Dot Design Museum, which showcases products and projects recognised by the Red Dot Award: Product Design and the Red Dot Award: Brands & Communication Design.

Since the Faculty of Design at Folkwang University of the Arts relocated to Zollverein for the 2017/2018 winter semester, the World Heritage Site has also become a centre for design research and teaching, with more than 500 students.

Covering approximately 70 hectares and featuring more than 20 works of art by nationally and internationally well-known artists, Zollverein Park is an important part of the Emscher Landscape Park. It was also one of the main venues of “European Green Capital – Essen 2017”. More than 540 species of plants, around 100 species of lichen, over 60 species of birds and more than 40 species of wild bees have been recorded in Zollverein Park. The park celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2025.

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As a hub for transformation and future-oriented development, the Zollverein UNESCO World Heritage Site seeks to bring together all dimensions of sustainable development: social, environmental, economic and cultural. This commitment was recognised with the 2026 German Sustainability Award in both the cultural and creative industries category and the nature transformation field.

PACT Zollverein – Performing Arts Choreographisches Zentrum NRW / Tanzlandschaft Ruhr – is internationally renowned for pioneering interdisciplinary work and projects in dance, performance, theatre, media and the visual arts.

More than 40 companies, predominantly from the creative and innovation sectors, are currently based at the Zollverein UNESCO World Heritage Site, and employ more than 700 people.

The "ZukunftsZentrumZollverein – Triple Z" start-up and business centre at Zollverein Shaft 4/5/11 is home to 110 companies operating across a wide range of sectors. Together, the Triple Z companies provide around 700 jobs at the site in Essen-Katernberg.

The Zollverein UNESCO World Heritage Site is a flagship example of successful structural transformation and heritage management in an industrial region. Internationally, it is regarded as a best-practice model for the sensitive preservation and reuse of outstanding monuments of industrial heritage.

Home to the Ruhr Visitor Centre and the Portal of Industrial Heritage, the Zollverein UNESCO World Heritage Site is a central anchor point on the regional Route of Industrial Heritage, a major anchor point on the international European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH) and part of UNESCO's global World Heritage Journeys platform. To mark the 25th anniversary of the Route of Industrial Heritage in 2024, the Portal of Industrial Heritage was updated with new media content and a new 360-degree film entitled "Rundum Ruhr".

Having received multiple awards as Germany's best event venue, the Zollverein UNESCO World Heritage Site hosts nationally established cultural festivals and art fairs. Regular events include the Ruhrtriennale, the Klavier-Festival Ruhr, ExtraSchicht, the Stone Techno Festival, lit.RUHR and contemporary art ruhr (C.A.R.). In 2025, Zollverein also served as a venue for the FISU World University Games and the Lidl Deutschland Tour cycling race.

The Zollverein UNESCO World Heritage Site records around 1.7 million visits annually. Guided tours of Zollverein allow visitors to experience the original, carefully preserved industrial facilities

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of the coal mine and coking plant. A team of 110 trained guides offers tours in up to eight languages. Around 260,000 visitors take part in a guided tour of Zollverein each year.

The Ruhr Museum is the Ruhr region's first museum of natural and cultural history with a nationwide profile. Since opening in January 2010, the Ruhr Museum has welcomed around 200,000 visitors each year to explore its permanent and temporary exhibitions.

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