



# Emsland

The Emsland is a Landkreis (district) along the lower Ems River, in Lower Saxony (state), in the northwestern part of Germany. It lies on both sides of the river, from the town of Lingen to the Ems estuary. Comprising a belt about 93 km long from south to north and 56 km wide from east to west, the Landkreis includes the landscapes Emsland and Hümmling. The area is imprinted by the rivers Ems and Hase and their affluents, the vast bogland of the Bourtanger Moor, which stretches across the Dutch border, and the Geest of Hümmling and Lingener Land. Highest hills are the Windmühlenberg (91,7 m above sealevel) and the Windberg (72,7 m above sealevel). Lingen, Papenburg and Meppen (district town) are the biggest towns. The Emsland was Germany's largest Landkreis concerning area until 1993.

Plattdeutsch/plattdütsch, the language of Lower Saxony, is still spoken by the native population in many places in the Emsland, especially in rural areas. With 107 inhabitants per squarekilometre (2005) it is one of the most sparsely populated districts in Germany. Different from other parts of Lower Saxony the Emsland's population, which counts 309.613 (2005), is mostly Roman Catholic. Because of additional population from East Europe the percentage of Roman Catholics has receded to 82.3 % according to the census of 1987, while the percentage of Protestants is 13.4 %. The birth rate is one of the highest in Germany.

In 1950 the Emsland Plan was agreed by the German government in order to improve the standard of living in the undeveloped Landkreis. The Emsland GmbH was founded in 1951 not least financed with American aid money. Until 1989 more than 2.1 Billions DM mainly provided by the German government and Lower Saxony state were spent.

Reasons for this effort were:

- The structural backwardness of the region
- Dutch claims for land
- The settlement of fled and evicted farmers from the formerly German parts of Eastern Europe
- Economically prospective oil and gas discoveries
- The unsafe food situation

With the aid of enormous deep-ploughs, so called Ottomeyerploughs that could dig up soil as deep as 2,4 m, vast moor areas (e.g. Bourtanger Moor) as well as heathland were dug up and made agriculturally usable, understable at that time, but to be seen rather critically from today's point of view considering nature conservancy. This started a dramatic change to the region, including the building of new roads and other traffic routes, farms and even completely new villages or neighbourhoods.

Initially working life was formed by agriculture and peat cutting. Today modern industry and trade dominate the Emsland economy. Besides a number of small-scale businesses, one finds engineering, vehicle construction, paper manufacture, food industry, ship-building (Meyer-shipyard in Papenburg) and oil and gas industry, the test line for the magnetic suspension railway Transrapid, the Mercedes-Benz test track. The unemployment figures are below national average.

## Employees contributing to social security:

1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2003	2004	2005
65.157	64.777	74.482	84.691	90.007	90.722	89.460	89.365

## Unemployed persons:

(Stand Oktober 2006)

Unemployed	Unemployment figure	vacancies
10.425	6,9 %	1.386

Furthermore tourism becomes more and more important. Emsland develops with it's people, it's tradition and history a unique regional culture, reflecting what is outstanding and pleasant here. This regional culture has been used to embark upon a special form of cultural tourism. The distinctive landscape, the cultural offers as well as the criterions "family-friendly" and "environment-friendly" are supposed to attract tourists to the Emsland.

Examples for this new cultural tourism are the cross-border Tour of the Mills, the KULTOURsommer as well as leaflets "Gardens and Parks in the Emsland", "Megalithic burial sites in the Emsland" and "Village renewal in the Emsland".