

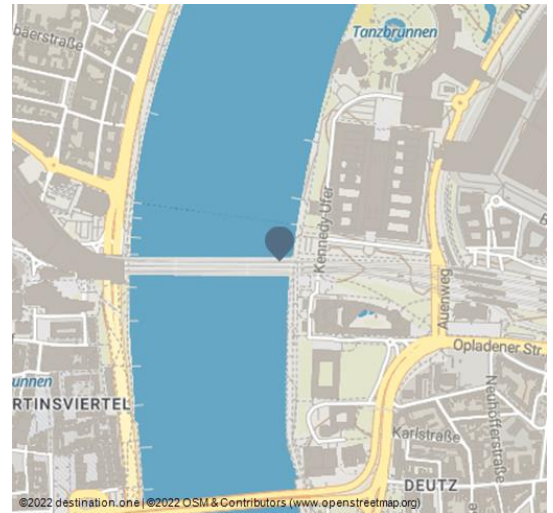


Love locks

street art/ art in public space



KölnTourismus, Foto: Christoph Seelbach



Love is on the bridge

Both the desire for eternal love and the need to indicate it with a sign have an unbroken tradition for many people: While it was once the carved heart in the tree or D+T with the sharpie pen on the school toilet door, today lovers in Germany and throughout Europe show and strengthen their love mainly with durable and extremely visible padlocks.

Since 2008, thousands of locks have also been glittering on the Hohenzollern Bridge in Cologne: close together, like a metal body full of vows of love. A stroll across the bridge to the Deutz side of the river and back is worth your while — especially on sunny days — not only because of the love locks but also because of the fantastic panorama of the city centre and the Rhine.

Tons of love stories: the number and weight of the locks

By the way, one of the most frequently asked questions in Cologne is how many love locks are already hanging on the Hohenzollern Bridge. While the estimates in 2011 were around 40,000, the amount of love locks today probably exceeds several hundred thousand.

On the basis of the density of locks per metre, a physicist calculated in 2015 that the number was somewhere between 50,000 and 200,000 locks — an enormous deviation from the estimate made a few years earlier. However, the weight of the locks (about 45 tonnes) is probably not a safety concern for the statics.

Engraved love locks: every lock represents a moment

Even if you certainly don't want to count the locks, it's worth looking at them. Behind every lock is a story, a moment when people made a promise to each other or wanted to set a sign: for love, friendship, gratitude, fellowship or even a memory of a beautiful time. You can infer something of this from the locks, the engravings and the inscriptions — and you won't be the first person this causes to think about life and love.

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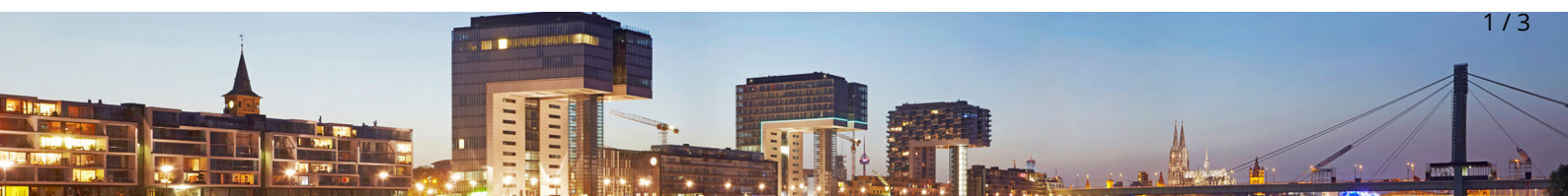
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Incidentally, not every lock was attached by a couple in love. As you stroll past the locks, you'll see that they can also stand for lasting friendships, love for a child or the memory of a special moment. In addition to the classic heart marked with the lovers' initials, there are also locks bearing short sayings, photographs or other motifs.

Many of the locks were probably planned and ordered long in advance. But if you spontaneously feel a desire to make your love or affection or gratitude public, you can find several shops in the city centre, close to the main railway station, where you can buy a lock and even have it engraved for you.

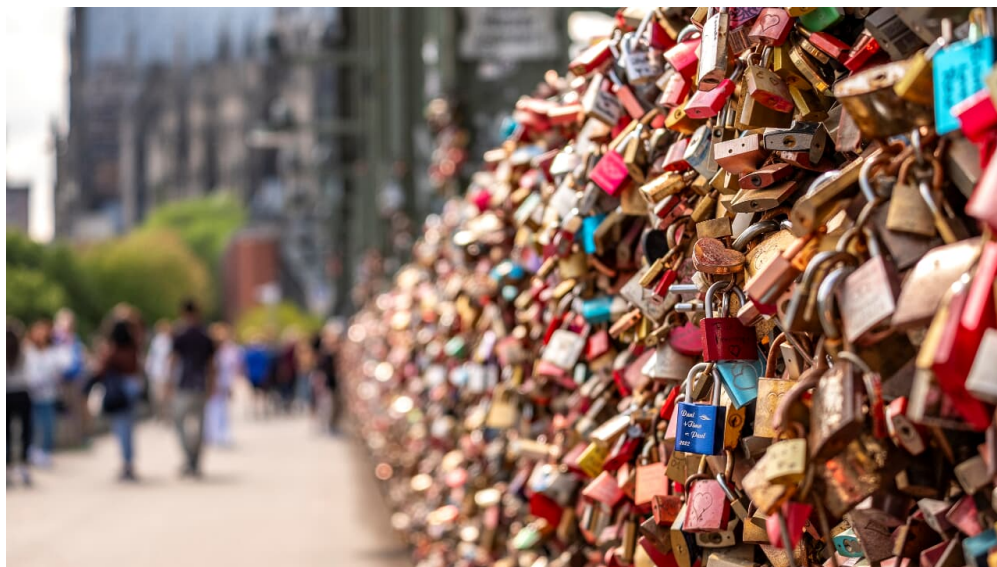
A brief digression: more details about the custom of hanging love locks

After you've designed a love lock that corresponds to your wishes and attached it to the bridge, you have to throw the key down from the Hohenzollern Bridge into the Rhine in order to make your commitment irreversible. The custom with the locks probably originated in Italy, and from there it has inexorably spread to other countries. The locks are mainly hung on bridge railings. Depending on the stability of the bridge, the weight of love is of course an issue, so some cities have already issued bans, especially on listed bridges.

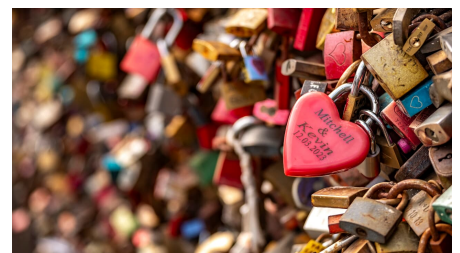
Other bridges with love locks in Europe: collapses and lock bans

In 2014, for example, the railing of the Pont des Arts bridge in Paris collapsed under the weight of the locks. If you hang a lock on the Rialto Bridge in Venice, it can cost you up to €3,000 in fines.

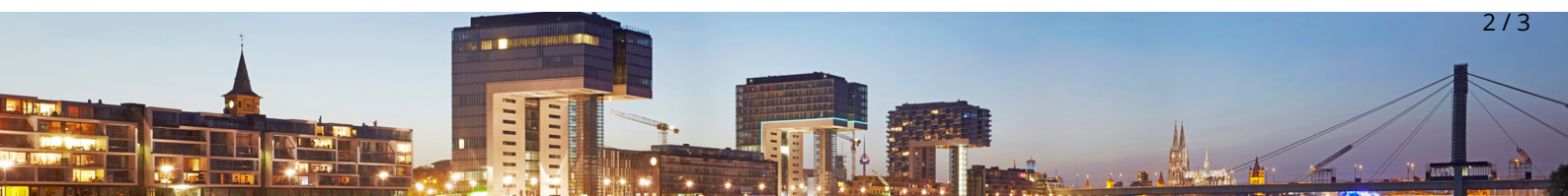
In Cologne, you can still immortalize your love in the form of a lock, because Deutsche Bahn does not currently consider the love locks to be a danger to the bridge statics. The statement from 2018 that all the love locks on the Hohenzollern Bridge would have to be removed over the next few years was retracted. All you have to do now is find a free spot for your expression of attachment.



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