

12. The World's Oldest *Kayak*

District 1 (Altstadt – Lehel), the State Museum of Ethnology (Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde) at Maximilianstrasse 42
U4, U5 Lehel; Tram 17, 19

The grand building at Maximilianstrasse 42, which was built in 1859–1865, housed originally the Bavarian National Museum (Bayerisches Nationalmuseum). From 1900 until 1923 it was used by the German Museum (Deutsches Museum) but since 1926 it has been home to the State Museum of Ethnology (Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde), the second largest collection of such material in Germany after Berlin. The heart of the collection dates from 1782, when exotic cultural 'curiosities' in the collections of Bavaria's rulers were brought together and displayed in the Munich Residenz. Although the collection today contains approximately 150 000 items, only a representative selection are displayed, enabling the visitor to take away a series of valuable and insightful impressions of traditional, non-European cultures.



An Oceanic ceremonial mask in the State Museum of Ethnology (Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde) on Maximilianstrasse

Spread across two floors, the collections are arranged geographically, each of which has its fair share of highly unusual objects. The Indian and East Asia collection on the first floor, for example, contains a small votive *stupa* of the Pala-Sena period, at the back of which is a peephole leading down to a miniaturised *stupa* within; there is also a *Shivalinga* shrine from South India here, and a finely-carved wooden Jain shrine. The Islamic collection on the same floor contains the reconstructed façade of a mosque, and a Punjabi garden scene, with pavilion and a pair of the most intricately carved wooden doors. In the adjacent Oceania collection are displayed fish traps from Papua New Guinea, as well as a Micronesian warrior's shark-tooth spear and Porcupine Fish helmet.



The world's oldest kayak is made of sealskin and dates back to the 16th century

On the second floor can be found the North American collection including objects from the sub-Arctic, such as a waterproof Eskimo child's *anorak* made from paper-thin seal intestine. Pride of place here goes to a simple sealskin *kayak* displayed on the balcony, which is not only the earliest identifiable object in the museum but also the oldest existing *kayak* in the world. It is thought to have arrived in Holland in 1577, together with another complete with its owners (!): a man, his wife, and their child. The family were probably brought to Europe during this time by polar explorers, to be exhibited as curiosities. It was the Count of Hanau who presented one of the *kayaks* to William V, Duke of Bavaria (1579–1597). A *kayak*, incidentally, differs from a canoe in that it is powered by a double-bladed paddle and its occupant is surrounded by a watertight seal.

Two final collections cover South America, with its Peruvian anthropomorphic ceramics and colourful fabrics, and Africa, with a collection of striking wooden Congolese statues and samples of the ever-intriguing bronzes of Benin.

Other places of interest nearby: 10, 11, 13