



Central Germany

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Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

Central Germany's captivating landscapes await. From Thuringian Forest hikes, steam-train journeys deep into the Harz Mountains and riverside rambles past Saale-Unstrut vineyards to medieval castle ruins and restored Renaissance palaces, this region is the stuff of both fairy tale and history.

If you fancy yourself a philosopher, head to Weimar, Erfurt, Lutherstadt Eisleben and Lutherstadt Wittenberg, former stamping grounds of cultural titans such as Goethe, Schiller, Luther (harbinger of the Reformation) and Bach. Design-heads will delight in Dessau-Rosslau, birthplace of Bauhaus, while anyone with a camera will appreciate the time-capsule villages of Goslar, Wernigerode and Quedlinburg, all strikingly well preserved.

With outdoor options galore, sparkling and red wines to discover, a fairy-tale road to follow and health spas to soak away the days travels, the bucolic heartland of Germany is sure to delight.

When to Go

The warmer months from April to October are the best time to visit, when museums and sights have longer opening hours, leafless landscapes burst back to life, and the region's hiking and cycling is at its finest.

As the days grow shorter, the Saale-Unstrut wine region, the Harz and the Thuringian Forest are all picturesque autumn destinations, though weather can be fickle.

In winter, cross-country ski-hikes are popular in the Harz. For anyone who's dressed for the conditions, hiking here under blue skies and upon frozen ground can also be invigorating.

History

Life has been present in the hilly Thuringian forests and on the fertile plains of Saxony-Anhalt for thousands of years. Historical artefacts from as far back as the late stone age have been uncovered here, and the cities of Halle and Magdeburg are among Germany's oldest, dating well beyond 1200 years. Hildesheim celebrated its 1000th birthday in 2015.

In more recent times, many of the larger cities across the region suffered heavy allied bombing in WWII. Kassel was one of the most targeted, where over 10,000 civilians were killed and the city was razed. Magdeburg, Dessau and Weimar also all suffered heavy losses. From 1949 to 1990 much of what is now known as Central Germany belonged to the former German Democratic Republic (GDR; East Germany). Although it's difficult (but not impossible) to find signs of the former border today, there's still a discernible difference between what was 'West' and what was 'East', particularly in terms of architecture.

FAIRY-TALE ROAD

The 600km **Märchenstrasse** (Fairy-Tale Road; www.deutsche-maerchenstrasse.com) is one of Germany's most popular tourist routes. It's made up of cities, towns and hamlets in four states (Hesse, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia and Bremen), which can often be reached by using a choice of roads rather than one single route. The towns are associated in one way or another with the works of Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm. Although most towns can be easily visited using public transport, a car is useful for getting a feel for the route.

The Grimm brothers travelled extensively through central Germany in the early 19th century documenting folklore. Their collection of tales, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, was first published in 1812 and quickly gained international recognition. It includes such fairy-tale staples as 'Hansel and Gretel', 'Cinderella', 'The Pied Piper', 'Rapunzel' and scores of others.

There are over 60 stops on the Fairy-Tale Road. Major ones include (from south to north): Hanau, about 15km east of Frankfurt, the birthplace of Jakob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm (1786–1859); Steinau, where the Brothers Grimm spent their youth; Mar-


burg, in the university of which the brothers studied for a short time; Kassel, with a museum dedicated to the Grimms; Göttingen, where the brothers served as professors in the university before being expelled in 1837 for their liberal views; Bad Karlshafen, a meticulously planned white baroque village; Bodenwerder, where the rambling Münchhausen Museum is dedicated to the legendary Baron von Münchhausen, (in) famous for telling outrageous tales; and Hamelin (Hameln), forever associated with the legend of the Pied Piper.

Getting There & Around

BICYCLE

Visit www.weser-radweg.de for details of the much-loved riverside Weser Radweg (Weser Cycle Path), which also connects with some Fairy-Tale Road villages.

BOAT

From April to October, boats operated by **Flotte Weser** ( 05151-939 999; www.flotte-weser.de) travel from Hamelin to Bodenwerder on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday (€13.50, 3½ hours). A range of cruises and packages are available.

CAR

Hanau and Steinau are each a short drive from Frankfurt am Main. The road route is marked with signs along the way. From Hanau, take the A66 to Steinau, north of which the route leaves the autobahn and travels along minor roads. Following the B83 along the Weser River is a highlight. The Märchenstrasse website has a downloadable map that provides an overview of the routes and towns; a good German road map is also useful, as it will illustrate minor roads through the countryside. Factor in time to stop, walk around and explore the countryside along the way.

TRAIN & BUS

The Fairy-Tale Road is more of a road trip than a route to be followed by public transport, but catching trains and buses is easy if you want to take in the highlights. Take day trips from Frankfurt am Main to Hanau and Steinau, or take a train further afield to Marburg, Kassel or Göttingen.

From the Hauptbahnhof at Hamelin, bus 520 follows the Weser to/from Holzminden (€17, 1½ hours) via Bodenwerder (€13) hourly on weekdays and every couple of hours on weekends. From Holzminden at least five trains leave daily for Bad Karlshafen (€12, 50 minutes), with a change at Ottbergen. Direct trains run every two hours from Bad Karlshafen to Göttingen (€17, one hour).