Thuringia’s mystique has long been on the radar of German travellers, but, for most foreign visitors, this former East German state is usually terra incognita. Those who do visit, however, most surely enjoy what they encounter. Places like Weimar, for instance, which became a keystone of German culture and thought during the Age of Enlightenment and later gave birth to the hugely influential Bauhaus movement. Or Eisenach, remarkable for being both a centre of historic German Lutheranism and of car manufacturing. Jena, of course, has kept alive its legacy as a city of science and optics to this day. And don’t forget the state capital, Erfurt, which wears its medieval splendour with pride.

Once you’ve done cultural and historical Thuringia, however, it’s time to shake off all those civilising influences and explore the rich natural offerings of the Thuringian Forest. Its sleepy villages are the portals through which hikers, cyclists and anyone in need of stress relief can indulge their love for the outdoors. You can walk in the footsteps of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, feeling embraced by thick forest and liberated by vistas that send the spirit soaring.

Although its roads and trails are well trodden and its cities were long ago etched onto the world cultural map, Thuringia brings many unexpected rewards for visitors who put aside frantic activity and immerse themselves in the gentle momentum of slow travel.

HIGHLIGHTS
- **Culture Vulture** Find out why Germany is known as the ‘land of poets and thinkers’ on a saunter around Weimar (p269)
- **Going for Goethe** Follow in the footsteps of Germany’s favourite genius by hiking the Goethewanderweg (p286) from Ilmenau (p285) to Stützerbach
- **Castle Cravings** Go behind the scenes of the Middle Ages at the Wartburg (p281), Martin Luther’s one-time hiding place
- **Glamour Grotto** Go hunting for fairies in the underground world of the Feengrotten in Saalfeld (p293)
- **Science, Seriously** Peer through a microscope and into the starry skies in Jena’s Optical Museum and planetarium (p290)
- **Rennsteig Ramble** Tackle a leg or two of the Rennsteig (p282), Germany’s oldest trail, by foot or on your bike from Eisenach (p280)
- **Wild Ride** Rattle across meadows and through the trees aboard a nostalgic tram (p277) running from Gotha (p276) to beautiful Friedrichroda (p284) and beyond

- **POPULATION:** 2.28 MILLION
- **AREA:** 16,172 SQ KM

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Eisenach  Gotha  Weimar
Ilmenau  Friedrichroda  Jena
Saalfeld
Information
For pretrip planning needs, the Thuringia Tourist Board (www.thuringia-tourism.com) has put together a nifty website. Once you’re here, you could also swing by their brick-and-mortar office in Erfurt (opposite). The board issues the Thüringen Card (1/3/6 days adult €14/33/53, child €9/20/31), which gives you free admission to more than 200 attractions and also includes some public transportation. It’s sold online, at local tourist offices, hotels and other participating venues.

Getting Around
Trains are supplemented by local bus networks and an efficient road system. There are two good-value discount train tickets available in Thuringia. The Thüringen-Ticket (€28) gives up to five people unlimited travel within the state from 9am to 3am the following day or, on Saturday and Sunday, from midnight to 3am the following day. It is valid in 2nd class on RE, RB and S-Bahn trains, as well as on buses and trams. The version for single travellers costs €19. Another good deal is the Hopper-Ticket (€6), which is valid for a day return to any town within 50km of your starting point, including places in Saxony-Anhalt. All tickets costs €2 more if bought from a train station agent instead of a vending machine.

Thuringia also has an extensive bike trail system. The website www.rad-thueringen.de has lots of information, but unfortunately only in German.