

VIA REGIA -- God Save The King's Road!

Whether you choose to call this scenic route the VIA REGIA or the King's Road (*Königsstraße*), the game remains the same. It's still a medieval royal route that was (at one time) under the laws and protection of the King (whomever that may have been at the time).

The VIA REGIA is a fairly long route that goes from Santiago de Compostela, Spain all the way to Kiev, Ukraine. Its German portion covers 600km (373mi) through 2,000 years of astounding history.

FYI, this one hasn't got a "theme" like many other scenic routes in Germany. It's rather just a nice, leisurely way of seeing and getting a sense of a bygone era.

Start of the VIA REGIA in Germany

The German portion of the VIA REGIA starts in the city of Frankfurt am Main, a city on an old trade route to Leipzig. It's a city filled with museums, theaters, festivals, and an International Book Fair. It's also a major hub for rail and Autobahn connections ? making the start of your trek along the VIA REGIA quite easy.

The VIA REGIA then goes on to Hanau, hometown of the Brothers Grimm. Good place for a Fairytale Festival, a castle (Philippsburg Castle houses the Regional History Museum), and an outdoor market twice a week. You might also be tempted to pick up the German Fairy Tale Road at this point, but you'll miss out on the rest of the VIA REGIA.

Now you pick-up the VIA REGIA along what's known as the Birkenhainer Straße, running along the Spessart to the town of Gelnhausen. You've got half-timbered houses, a *Hexenturm* (Witches Tower) that's now a museum, a 12th century castle, and even better ? a 13th century wine cellar.

Still following the Birkenhainer Straße you arrive in Steinau an der Straße, another town of the Brothers Grimm. Besides the

13th century Schloss Steinau (the Local History Museum), make sure you see the museum of the Brothers Grimm housed in their childhood home.

I got so caught up with the Grimms, that I almost left out Steinau's artificial lake ? a nice place to just chill out for a while.

The king's soldier's might not have been the only ones to trek along the VIA REGIA, many pilgrims along the Way of St. James traveled these roads. They often found themselves in the town of Neuhof (Fulda), stopping at the Church of St. Michael. You'll find yourself coming for the Church Festival (Nov. 5th) or the *Heidelbeerfest* on the 2nd weekend of August.

VIA REGIA's road changes course a bit, now onto the Federal Highway 84 towards Fulda, the next town on our journey. Don't leave before seeing the *Hexenturm* (once used as a women's prison), the *Schlossgarten* (with a theater, pool, and sports activities), and especially the Cathedral whose crypt is the final resting place of St. Boniface.

As exciting as you'll find Fulda, wait until you arrive in the Thuringian Forest town of Eisenach (which you'll get here on the A 7 autobahn) ? dominated by the massive, formidable, breathtaking Wartburg Castle. You might have heard of it ? it's where Martin Luther translated the New Testament into German. And Johann Sebastian Bach was baptized in the Church of St. George.

Your next town is Erfurt, another town that's synonymous with Luther. He was a monk here at the Augustinian monastery, and it's where you can stay the night since it has a hostel. Don't go expecting lavish digs... this is a "monks cell."

Rest up, you still need to see the Church of St. Severus, Molsdorf Palace, and all the houses along the Merchants Bridge.

If you got to see another castle, don't worry ? you'll find it the town of Eckartsberga. The Eckartsburg is the town's

landmark, as it should be with its 36-meter high keep. Besides a museum with Stone Age artifacts and a Dutch Windmill, you'll find an amusement area with a summer toboggan track, a fun maze, and miniature golf.

Travelers can't live by history alone, can they? Uh, depends on who you're asking. ;-)

I know what you can live on along ? wine. No, maybe spa treatments. Good thing you'll find both in Bad Kösen (on the B 87 highway) so you can choose. You can also party 'til the cows come home ? at the Fountain Festival in late May or at the Festival of Lights in early September.

I guess it's back to history when you come to the town of Naumburg (Saale), whose cathedral attracts thousands of visitors a year. It also lies along the Romanesque Route, Bach played at the Wenzelkirche, and its Cherry Festival has been taking place every year since the 16th century.

Your trip along the VIA REGIA now takes you to Leipzig. A visit to the zoo or all the cafes, bars, pubs, museums, and shops will keep you happily entertained.

As you leave Leipzig, you're now entering the Upper Lusatia region, and the town of Großenhain ? which just so happens to be on the Way of St. James as well. Here's your chance to visit the ruins of a medieval monastery, visit the *Heimatmuseum*, and see a castle.

Sounds good right? It gets better. Großenhain was also the site of one of the first airfields ? and a training facility for the likes of none other than Manfred von Richthofen. Yup, the Red Baron himself.

It's hard to leave the old haunt of the world's most famous pilot, but it's on to Königsbrück ? where you'll see a miniature model of the VIA REGIA, a military cemetery, a castle (with a castle festival), a medieval market, and an Oktoberfest.

In Kamenz, you'll find it to be a small town with tiny, medieval lanes; charming shops, hiking & biking trails, guided walking tours, and a museum with the works of writer Gotthold Lessing.

Bautzen is pretty awesome, too. A visit to the *Friedensbrücke* (Peace Bridge), Schloss Ortenburg, and the Observation Tower rounds off a lovely visit.

We've come to the last town on the VIA REGIA, the town of Görlitz. There's a church here that's a replica of Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and a Marktplatz with buildings that run the gamut from medieval, to Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque architecture.

Our time on the VIA REGIA ends at this point in Germany, leading off to Breslau in Poland. But, with so much to look at in Görlitz, I think you'll be here for while.

I hope you've enjoyed the King's Road a.k.a. *Königsstrasse* a.k.a. VIA REGIA.

God Save the King, isn't that the saying? Better yet, how about God Save The King's Road! ;-)

VIA REGIA Web Site

Here is the official Web site of the VIA REGIA ? with more details about the route that goes from Santiago de Compostela, Spain to Kiev, Ukraine.