

Biosphere Reserve Swabian Alb -- Don't Touch Anything! ;-)

Germany is not exactly known for being a fly-off-the-cuff kind of country. Things take time, planning, that kind of thing. So it isn't anything out of the ordinary that it took eighteen years to make the Biosphere Reserve Swabian Alb a UNESCO site in 2009 after the idea was initiated back in 1991.

UNESCO is not exactly a quick decision maker, either. But, once it does, you're happy to have their designation.

There are quite a few romantic towns within the Biosphere Reserve Swabian Alb, or *Biosphärenreservat Schwäbische Alb* as it's called in German (or *Biosphärengebiet Schwäbische Alb*, same thing), which is 40% forest — mostly the deciduous trees, which are the ones every ooh & ahh over during Fall Foliage, with the rest being a variety of grasslands, orchards, and meadows.

It doesn't matter that only 2.6 hectares are totally (100%) protected. You know, in order to keep the UNESCO Biosphere title, you have to have a balance of ecology and social awareness. Not only do you gotta keep the people happy, you gotta keep the birds, orchids, and trees (like beech, oak, and maple) happy too.

The Biosphere Reserve Swabian Alb extends for just about 200km along a low mountain range in, well, the [Swabian Alb](#) — in the central part of the region. The southern boundary of the Biosphere is the [Danube River](#).

Working counter-clockwise through the Biosphere Reserve Swabian Alb, let's start in [Schelklingen](#) — home to the Spring of the Urspring River, where the old Benedictine Monastery was built.

After you go there (as well as the half-timbered *Rathaus*, the castle ruins, and the 14th century St. Afra Chapel), go see the *Hohle Fels* — a natural area created from limestone.

Actually, much of the Biosphere was created because of volcanoes. Don't worry, they're extinct now.

I hope... ;-)

95% of [Münsingen](#), once a military training area, lies within the Biosphere. I can't even begin to think about how they did military maneuvers around the six castles (some in ruins), the St. Stephen Church, all the timber-framed houses, and the Jewish cemetery.

No time to think about such things, Münsingen is where you'll find the Center for Nature & Tourism within the Biosphere Reserve Swabian Alb.

Ain't no time to consider much else in [Bad Urach](#). Why? Uhhh, it's a spa town.

What's totally cool about Bad Urach (besides a good spa treatment), there is a waterfall and a volcanic area that heats a spring to a whopping 61°C (142°F)!

I'm staying outta there — going to the Amanduskirchturm & Schloss, the *Zeughausturm* (Armoury Tower), and fortress ruins instead.

Best to go to the Royal Palace Museum and City Museum for good measure too.

Almost the entire shopping town of [Metzingen](#) lies within the Biosphere. This town is also known for its vineyards (yeah, wine), its old Wine Press, Art Market at Pentecost, its Christmas Fair, and its volcano.

Yeah, volcano — Metzingen and its many half-timbered houses lie on top of the Swabian Volcano. Again, its extinct — so no worries.

It's also a good place to go fossil hunting. There are plenty to be found in the Swabian Alb.

You're going to have to go cave-exploring in Grabenstetten. This is where you'll find the Falkensteiner Cave and the Gustav Jacob Cave, which is found underneath the ruins of the 13th century Burgruine Hofen.

For a look at the Biosphere's history in the days of the Celts, look no further than the *Heidengraben* — a 1st century Celtic Oppidum (a big word for settlement).

And the *Grabhügel* is a natural area where you can contemplate such a big word. ;-)

It's back underground in Westerheim (Württemberg), where you'll see the 212 meter cave, *Schertelshöhle*. Just don't touch the stalactites — that's a big no-no. And then there's the *Steinerne Haus*, or the Stoned House, with 55 meter cave too.

Westerheim has also stuff above ground, like the Church of St. Stephen, and a Christmas Market. If you've decided to travel along the *Schwäbische Albstraße* (Swabian Alb Road), you'll be coming through Westerheim anyway.

In the grand scheme of things, eighteen years to officially name the Biosphere Reserve Swabian Alb is nothing compared to the thousands (and thousands) of years it took to create this natural landscape of canyons and caves. Please... Germany is totally spontaneous compared to the workings of Mother Nature!

Then again, all good things are worth waiting for.