

Harz Mountains -- Following The Footsteps Of Goethe

The Harz Mountains are a vacation paradise. Here you will find the Mount Brocken, the tallest mountain in northern Germany. If you stand on its heights looking down into a mist with the setting sun behind you, you will glimpse the Brocken Spectre. Is it, as legend suggests, a true Spectre, or merely a trick of light and shadow?

The only way to discover its reality for yourself is to journey to Harz, the national park which spans 860 square miles in the heart of Germany. This is a region of thickly forested mountains, pristine lakes and rivers, and unspoiled villages where the locals welcome you with the three “w” — warm smiles, warm meals, and warm beds. :-)

Traveling to and through the Harz Mountains will put you in the footsteps of both Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Heinrich Heine, who ventured into the largely unexplored region in the late 1700s and early 1800.

Goethe journeyed up the slopes of Mount Brocken in December of 1777 despite a heavy layer of snow. The inspiration Goethe received from his struggle stirred him to create his masterpiece Faust, and Harz was discovered for all time! Sadly, the exact route he followed to the summit is not known.

That mystery will remain forever unsolved, but I suggest that you follow the Goethe trail of today if you want to make the most of your visit.

During the summer you can hike along a boardwalk leading away from the main trail and onto the Great Torfhaus Moor, at more than ten thousand years old one of the oldest in the area. The Moor's Ice Age origins are reflected in two of its indigenous plants, the bog sedge and the dwarf birch.

Also along the Goethe Trail is the Abbegraben, a water channel constructed by area ore miners in the late 18th century as part of the *Oberharzer Wasserregal* (Oberharz Water Regal National Monument). This water transport system was intended to simplify their labor. For a closer look at what life in the mines was really like, stop in at the Wettelrode visitor mine.

The mining industry was so prosperous that the city of [Goslar](#), one of the 10th-century seats of the [Holy Roman Empire](#), has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is well worth a visit. The city was the site of the grandest of Germany's imperial palaces, from which both the Saxon and Salesian emperors ruled. Goslar's forty-seven churches, Gothic Town Hall, and medieval market square have earned the city a designation as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Spend some time exploring Goslar's Frankenberg district with its miner's houses, and take in the Market Square puppet show for a simple tale about Goslar's mining past. Finish your visit with a

trip to the mine on Rammelberg Hill overlooking the city.

Another city which shared the glory of the Harz Mountains' past is [Halberstadt](#), where the Cathedral of St. Stephanus holds the largest collection of clerical robes in the world. Close by is the Liebfrauenkirche, with magnificently carved choir stalls representative of woodworking throughout the town.

If your vacation would be incomplete without a day on skis, go to the place where skiing came to these Mountains. Braumlage is the city where, in 1892, the first winter sports club in all of Germany began. You'll love the cross country trails and illuminated ski run! :-)

Finally, tackling all the outdoor activities that a stay in the Harz Mountains has to offer is sure to take a physical toll. So don't head for home without treating yourself to a holistic Kneipp hydrotherapy spa treatment in Bad Lauterberg, where the spas have been in operation since 1839.