

Princes Of Reuss Route -- From Knights To Ruling Princes

I'd wager money that most people have heard about the Hohenzollern and the Hohenstaufen family in [German history](#). Who they might not have heard about was the Reuss family.

The Reuss family started simple enough in the [Thuringian](#) part of the [Vogtland](#) region as unfree knights in the 12th century. Throughout the subsequent centuries, these "unfree" fellows rightfully earned higher titles until they eventually becoming reigning princes.

Loyalty has its rewards, I guess.

Anyway, the 110km (68mi) long Princes of Reuss Route (*Reussische Fürstenstrasse* in German) takes you along to some of the historical sites of this little known pedigree; a family that ruled and reigned over the Thuringian Vogtland for more than eight centuries.

Start of the Princes Of Reuss Route

The Princes of Reuss Route starts off in Hirschberg (Saale), right about to the border of [Bavaria](#). The area belonged to Heinrich LXXII (that would be the 72nd in case you're wondering) and the Reuss the Younger Line right up to the 20th century.

In 1644 Reuss' Henry X bought Hirschberg Castle (a 13th century medieval original), converting it to a Baroque castle in 1678. If you're here for the 4-day Meadow Festival in August, you've kicked off this [scenic route](#) in the grandest of styles.

Don't fret if you don't want to leave the castle. There are ruins of one (it's got two 35-meter high towers) in the next town of [Bad Lobenstein](#). Aww, forget that — this is a spa town, so what you'll really want to do is take advantage of the *Ardesia-Therme*.

Go ahead, pretend you're a ruling prince while you're getting pampered properly. Then go visit the Regional History Museum and City Church.

Saalburg-Ebersdorf is the mother lode of Reuss history. The palace was the home of a Count who was the great-granddaddy of England's Queen Victoria. One Countess went on to help establish the Moravian Church.

The town is also on the Saale Cycle Route, has Baroque English Gardens, an Enchanted Forest detailing the stories of the Brothers Grimm, a summer tobogganing track, and hiking trails passing 350 million year old rock formations.

It's back to the castles when arriving in cute lil' Burgk. Schloss Burgk is everything a medieval castle should be — it's got a Great Hall, a dungeon, and a drawbridge. What it's also got are rooms

with Baroque and Rococo designs.

Yes, it's easy to see how the Reuss family could love living here.

Had you come to the town of [Schleiz](#) before 1945 you'd have seen how beautiful the Schleizer Schloss was. It was originally the archives of the Reuss family (did you know Napoleon stayed here?), but was destroyed by bombings during [World War II](#).

Plothen might be a small village (only 286 or so residents), but its Stilt House (built over 300 years ago) is now a museum, has a Winter Church, and belonged to the Reuss' right up until [World War I](#)

[Zeulenroda-Triebes](#) was also ruled by the Reuss and settled by the Sorbs. Whomever lives or visits now will enjoy hiking along the Planet Trail, and spending time at the Municipal Museum and local zoo.

We've just about reached the middle of our Princes Of Reuss Route and the town of [Greiz](#) — known as the Pearl of the Vogtland.

Yeah, it's a gem — with its two palaces (official home of the Reuss' until 1918). The Upper Castle is the older of the two, built during the Middle Ages undergoing a Renaissance renovation in 1540. The Lower Castle didn't come along until the 16th century, but a fire in 1802 forced the owners to rebuild. Today it's home to a local museum and the Tourist Office.

Greiz isn't just historical, it's fun. The Park Fest is every June, the Autumn Theater every September, the Jazz Fest in May, and the obligatory Christmas Market takes place in the Castle Garden.

Berga (Elster) wasn't just ruled by the Reuss Family. Excavations near the rock formation known as the Devil's Pulpit have found artifacts dating back to the Stone Age. The town also lies on the Elster cycle Route, and its 13th century castle is beautiful.

In between Berga and the next town of [Weida](#) are the small villages of Waltersdorf (part of Reinsdorf), Mohlsdorf, Kühdorf (only 24 inhabitants!), and Nitschareuth (part of Langenwetzendorf). You'd do yourself a disservice by not stopping to see the 150 year old farmstead, the *Waldhaus* (Reuss the Older's hunting lodge), and maybe spend the night in a 200 year old farm that's been converted to a guesthouse.

Welcome to Weida, the oldest of all the Reuss Family towns. One local son of the Reuss' went on to become a [Teutonic Knight](#). Oh, can you just imagine him leaving on his noble quest on his noble steed from the gates of the 12th century castle?

I can. I also can vision all the peasants heading off for Sunday services at the 12th century Peter's Church.

Peter's Church might be considered old at nine centuries. But, the Church of St. Vitus in the next town of Wünschendorf is over a thousand. There's no way you'd get me to leave before seeing the Kloster Mildenfurth (a pilgrimage monastery that was founded by Reuss' Henry II), the 13th century wooden bridge, or the ruins of the Cronschwitz Monastery.

OK, maybe if you tempted me with the town, er, the city of [Gera](#). Which, just so happens, to be our next stop on the Princes of Reuss Route. The St. Salvator Church is the final resting places of Heinrich Posthumus and his wife.

Heinrich Posthumus, BTW, was so named because he was born after his father (Henry XVI) died. Both of whom lived in the 12th century Schloss Osterstein. Another Henry (the XXV) lived at the Wasserschloss Tinz in the 18th century.

It doesn't matter too much who lived where — just enjoy Gera's Cave Festival in October, Botanical Garden, and/or its Museum of Natural History.

What I really want to do is change the Princes of Reuss Route around a bit. After Gera you're supposed to head off toward [Bad Köstritz](#), then towards Posterstein, and eventually ending in [Schmölln](#).

But, you've come this far — wouldn't it be nice to end in a spa town? So, thank you for letting me take dramatic license and do the route my way.

Oh, I just assumed you wouldn't mind that I would shake things up a bit. ;-)

So, [Schmölln](#) it is; known for its lemonade and vienna-type sausages. It's also noted for its medieval *Stadtmauer*, Altstadt (Old Town), its Kirchplatz, and Regional Museum.

If I were a ruling prince of Reuss, I'd be quite proud to show off Schmölln. But, I'm leaving for the village of Posterstein — more specifically Posterstein Castle.

Posterstein Castle is much bigger than it looks. It was built in 1191, but not coming into the Reuss possession until around 1305. The Keep of the castle isn't too tall (around 12 meters), and its Baroque rooms are now part of a museum.

OK, you've made it to Bad Köstritz. Köstritz Palace was home to a number of notable Reuss members, but honestly, the town's really known for its *Schwarzbier* (Black Beer) — which has been made at the local brewery since the 1540s. Uh, yeah, that's almost 500 years.

Of course, if you'd rather learn about Heinrich Schütz (the composer) head on to his house. Or, if you want to know more about Henry LII (the 52nd) career as a General of the Royal Bavarian Army, then you're most certainly in the right place.

I, however, will be enjoying a much needed massage (and as many other spa treatments as I can get) at the local spa. All that's needed now is a castle for me to lord over — just like the Reuss'.

Princes Of Reuss Route Web Site

Here's the official Web site of the [Princes Of Reuss Route](#).