

## Romanesque Route -- Strasse der Romanik

I don't know where exactly it was where I fell in love with [Saxony-Anhalt](#). It had to be somewhere on the 1200-km-long Romanesque Route, a.k.a. *Straße der Romanik*, that leads us through sixty-five gracious towns in this state. I really don't remember if it was on the Northern or the Southern Route, that figure-8's through the state, starting and ending in [Magdeburg](#).

Maybe you'll find a place that you can fall in love with, too. But, before you travel all this distance, I have to tell you something...

If you're not a lover of art history (including architecture) this route might not be for you since it's filled with castles, churches, abbeys, and monasteries all built from the mid-10th century through the mid-13th century.

Whatever you're going to travel first, the Northern or the Southern portion of the Romanesque Route, you'll likely start off in Magdeburg.

The reason this amazing town is on the route is the Magdeburg Cathedral, one of the oldest Gothic cathedrals in Germany. It's also the town's landmark and houses the 10th century tomb of Otto II. A few centuries later Martin Luther preached here; and the views from the waterbridge is nothing less than spectacular.

### Romanesque Route — Northern Route

Let's travel the Northern Route first. And, coming from Magdeburg, this leads us to Groß Ammensleben, a village of barely 2000 residents and nowadays part of the town of [Niedere Börde](#). Groß Ammensleben earns its spot on the route for its Benedictine Monastery (built 1129) that was the center of religious life just shy of 700 years.

Easily reached by rail from Magdeburg is [Haldensleben](#). This is a Roland town and the only place where you'll find him sitting upon a horse in the world. Take a guided city tour to the Hundisburg castle & garden, Templar House, before visiting the 19th century Jewish cemetery and Local History Museum.

Bebertal (part of [Hohe Börde](#)) and its reason for being on the Romanesque Route is the St. Jacobi Church (it's part Romanesque & part Baroque), found right off the Marktplatz. The village also has its own castle, Burg Alvensleben, where you'll go to show at the town's markets and party at the castle's Garden Festival.

There are ruins of the medieval Romanesque in Walbeck, which is now part of the town of [Oebisfeld-Weferlingen](#). The Brothers Grimm went to school here. Perhaps some of their stories were inspired by the town's 13th century towers?

The Village Church in the hamlet of Wiepke (nowadays part of Gardelengen), is a 12th century Romanesque beauty — and the Salzwedeler Gate takes a great picture.

Gardelengen itself is more infamous for what happened here in April 1945, when a barn filled with over 1000 prisoners from a nearby concentration camp were burned — for which there's a memorial at Isenschribbe Barn. But, it's also well known for its Heritage Day and Blossom Festivals, and a 14th century brewery.

Traveling to Engersen, which is now part of Kalbe, there are a few Romanesque sites to see. Start at the ruins of Burg Kalbe, built at the turn of the 9th/10th centuries. Don't think that just because Engersen's Nicolai Church has Baroque features that it doesn't qualify to be here — it used to be a Romanesque Basilica built in 1170.

Almost at the border of [Lower Saxony](#) is Diesdorf, a town that receives very little rainfall. So no worries about traveling on a rainy day to see the Abbey Church (one of the oldest in the [Altmark](#)) built in 1161, and the megalithic tombs (that would be prehistoric tombs).

Hidden within the forest trees is the mid-12th century monastery in [Arendsee \(Altmark\)](#). Afterwards swim in Lake Arendsee (this is a health resort town after all), and visit the Prehistoric Museum. Oh, did I mention that Arendsee is also on the [German Stork Route](#)?

So is the next town of [Havelberg](#). OK, 100,000 or so visitors come here for the annual Horse Market (1st weekend of September), but thousands also come here on the Romanesque Route to see the grand Romanesque Havelberger Dom (a Cathedral, built 1170) that now houses the Local History Museum.

Getting around in Sandau (Elbe) by ferry is quite fun. But, to see why Sandau is on the *Straße der Romanik* you need to visit its Romanesque church with its three naves and brick architecture. While it was built in 1200, it was destroyed in 1695 and in the 1850's it underwent a Baroque facelift.

Schönhausen (Elbe), birthplace of [Otto von Bismarck](#), is next. He was born in the Castle Schönhausen I (which was demolished in 1958). But, that's not WHY it's on this route — it's because of the brick Romanesque Church (built 1212).

Wust-Fischbeck is on the Romanesque Route, but it's also where you can find a school that teaches American History, English, literature, art, and a Puppet Theater. But it also has a Romanesque church (with a Baroque interior and a crypt).

Jerichow is unique in that it has two villages that belong on the *Straße der Romanik*. Jerichow itself has a beautiful Abbey (with a monastery museum) that was built in 1144. This convent church dedicated to Sts. Marien and Nicholas also has a quiet and serene garden.

Redekin, one of those villages, has a church that was built in 1200, a Rococo style organ, and a tomb of a nobleman from the 16th century. That's a lot of history all under one steeple, isn't it?

[Genthin](#), the next stop, will become one of your favorite places. It does have a charming stone church from the 1820's, but don't fool yourself... there's been a church on this spot since the 12th century. There's another Romanesque church in the village of Altenplathow, where the Baroness Elizabeth of Plato is buried.

We're coming around to [Burg bei Magdeburg](#), which means we're almost at the end of the Northern Route of the Romanesque Route. This is another Roland town with its 14th century Berlin Gate, historic *Rathaus*, Jewish cemetery chapel, and the reason for your visit... the Church of Our Lady, built in 1186.

Lookout in Loburg (which is now part of [Möckern](#)) for its medieval Wendgräben Castle (that looks more like an English manor house). However, it's the ruins of the Church of Our Lady that will tug at your heartstrings.

I can't think of a more fantastic way to end this northern section of the Romanesque Route than in Leitzkau (which belongs to [Gommern](#)). There's the Castle Hobeck (with castle church), Schloss Neuhaus, and the Parish Church of St. Peter, with 13th century grave stones and its medieval flooring.

If you thought the Northern Route was exciting (and LONG), wait 'til you get a gander at the Southern Route! ;-)

## **Romanesque Route — Southern Route**

I'm going to skip Magdeburg, so your first town going south is [Hecklingen](#). Not only will you find the 12th century church of St. George (check out the Romanesque stucco artwork), but there's a gorgeous city palace and the cute Castle Gänsefurth.

Nienburg's contribution to the route is the Monastery Church Nienburg, built in 1004. There's also a Jewish cemetery in town, too.

Petersberg. What can I say about Petersberg? Oh, how about that it has a 9th century castle, a Local History Museum, a Romanesque Church (umm, this is why you're here, right?), and a 13th century church, too?

[Landsberg \(Saale\)](#) might have started out as a Stone Age settlement town, but its *Nikolaikirche* is the reason you're here now. Don't leave before seeing Landsberg's *Rathaus* (Town Hall) and *Doppelkapelle* (Double Chapel).

Oh, [Halle \(Saale\)](#), birthplace of Händel! Long before Georg Friedrich Händel came along and started composing Halle belonged to Roland (he shows up a lot around these parts, huh?). There are gardens, opera performances, the Moritzburg Palace (built 1503), and the *Roter Turm* (Red Tower, early 15th century). But, it's the Giebichenstein Castle, built in 961, that keeps bringing folks like us to travel this Romanesque Route.

The ruins of St. Sixti is another reason, but this one's in the town of [Merseburg](#). Well, there's also the Merseburg Cathedral. It was built in 1015, rebuilt again in the 13th century, and yet again in the 16th. Schloss Merseburg is now the town's Cultural History Museum; and there seems to be a festival of some sort going on just about every month.

Waste not, want not should be Goseck's motto. Its Castle Goseck, built in the 9th century, was once a castle (duh!), then a monastery, then a tavern (oops!). The Schloss is also the site of many musical concerts, too.

[Zeitz](#) has a pretty amazing history. Yes, it has the well-known *Stadtmauer* (medieval defense wall), a castle, a museum (a baby carriage one, actually), but its *Michaeliskirche* (a Romanesque basilica) houses some of Martin Luther's original 95 theses.

Tradition is a good thing, don't ya think? It must be because the town of [Naumburg \(Saale\)](#) has been holding its Cherry Festival (last weekend in June) since the 16th century. That's still not anywhere near as long as the Church of Sts. Peter & Paul has been here — it's a Romanesque and Gothic church that was built between the 13th and 15th centuries.

Only one village stands between you and one of Germany's spa towns: Schulpforte, a neighborhood of Naumburg, has a Romanesque basilica monastic church (built 1251) to see before you arrive in the spa heaven of Bad Kösen (which is now also part of Naumburg, which I don't understand; why in the world did they dissolve a certified, independent SPA town of more than 5,000 people?).

Anyway...

Ohh, hard choices... massages, saunas, and facials? Or, museums, the Rudelsburg Castle ruins (with dungeon), and the Romanesque House with a museum on monastic life? Don't sweat it. Stay a night or two longer and enjoy it all! :-)

The landmark of Eckartsberga is the Eckart Castle. The town's also got Stone Age exhibits at its Local History Museum, a Dutchman Windmill, and the chance to go tobogganing on its *Sommerrodelbahn* in the summer (which is super, awesome, scary fun!).

No tobogganing in our next stop of Memleben (part of Kaiserpfalz), but you got an animal park, an Imperial Palace, a lovely Village Church, a Romanesque Chapel, and the ruins of the Memleben

Abbey that was founded by Otto II in 973.

Since the Romanesque Route is a large church route, it's no wonder that we'll find a birthplace of a saint. [Querfurt](#) is where St. Bruno was born. Plus, it has a castle (Castle Querfurt) with a Castle Festival, and an archaeological park (with Bronze Age artifacts).

Take a bit of a detour on the spur route to [Lutherstadt Eisleben](#) where Luther nailed his 95 theses to the Castle Church. Eisleben celebrates Reformation Day every year on October 31; and you can also visit the Luther House, City Church, the Town Hall, and the Marktplatz. The town also has a large Pottery Market (end of Sept.).

A quick visit is all it'll take in Seeburg (nowadays part of [Seegebiet Mansfelder Land](#)) to see the area around the castle that's been used since prehistoric times. Then in the Middle Ages and Renaissance times, a castle was built.

[Allstedt](#) is another town on the Romanesque Route where it doesn't rain a lot. Making its sunny weather great to see its castle museum, play some sports, and (of course) see its 9th century Burg Beyernaumburg (burial place of the von Bulows).

Tilleda (part of Kelbra) is unique in that its original castle is gone, but its area is now a large outdoor museum. Be sure to leave enough time in Tilleda to see the Salvator Church and the town's War Memorial.

The *Alte Rathaus* in [Sangerhausen](#) wasn't built until 1431, it's St. Mary's Gothic Church in 1350 — and neither of which give it reason to be on the Romanesque Route. No, it's the Church of St. Ulrich (built 1116) that does.

In the Ermsleben district of Falkenstein (Harz), it's both the Konradsburg Monastery (built 1021) with its crypts and Castle Falkenstein (built 1120, now a museum & restaurant) that make this one of the best places on the *Straße der Romanik*.

Stop in Frose (part of [Seeland](#)) to see the Romanesque Church of St. Cyriac (built 10th century), then travel onwards to the Gernrode neighborhood of [Quedlinburg](#) to see its giant cuckoo clock, tons of framework houses, its *Stephanuskirche*, and party on Heritage Day on the 2nd weekend of September.

Quedlinburg proper has a lot going on, too. Another Roland town, there are even more half-timbered houses, the St. Servatius Church, and one of the most dark, imposing, beautiful castles you will ever find. This Burg, looking like it belongs in some Bela Legosi film, is filled with all sorts of artwork, artifacts, and books.

You've reached the northern foothills of the [Harz Mountains](#) by the time you get to [Blankenburg](#).

This is another health resort town, but that's secondary to the ruins of the Luisenburg Castle, the Church of St. Bartholomew, and the 12th century Blankenburg Castle and Michaelstein Abbey.

I'm not sure how the nuns of the 10th century Benedictine Abbey Drübeck in [Ilseburg \(Harz\)](#) would feel now that it's a conference center? But, at least you don't have to take a vow of silence or anything. ;-)

Ilseburg's got another Abbey, this one built between the 11th & 12th centuries. It also has the Ilseburg Castle, in case you want to see it.

[Osterwieck](#)'s most famous visitor was Charlemagne back in the 8th century — long before Romanesque architecture was popular. Too bad, he probably would have liked to have seen the St. Stephen's Church and the more than 400 framework houses, which is why Osterwieck is on the [German Framework Road](#), too. Ohhh, two routes for the bargain basement price of one!

The Huysburg Abbey (also known as Huysburg Priory) in Huy was built in 1080 and is one of the few to actually survive the [Protestant Reformation](#). Buried inside the church is Ekkehard of Huysburg, an 11th century Abbot.

And while Dedeleben is also politically part of [Huy](#), we'll give it its own honorable mention. The Westerburg Castle is the oldest moated castle in Germany. You'll just love the burg, its gatehouse, and its Baroque chapel.

It's the St. Pankratius church that makes Hamersleben the next stop on the Southern Route of the Romanesque Route, but remember the village is now part of Am Großen Bruch.

The same thing applies over in Hadmersleben, now part of [Oschersleben \(Bode\)](#). This is a town that once had a satellite camp of the Buchenwald concentration camp. Much older than its 20th century history, you'll find grave hills that date to 3000 B.C., a 15th century church (the Church of Our Lady), a castle, and, of course, a Romanesque Monastic Church.

You've finally reached the end of this Southern Route when you arrive in Seehausen (which is also part of the German Stork Route). Well, sorry, that's not entirely correct. Seehausen is ON the Stork Route, but this village now belongs, politically, to the town of [Wanzleben-Börde](#).

Still, Seehausen deserves to be mentioned on its own because of its St. Paul Church, whose origins date to 830 A.D., then updated to a Romanesque church in 1148. You'll like the St. Lawrence Church, too, even though it's not as old.

Castle Wanzleben in Wanzleben proper was built in 968. It's been used as a medieval castle, a hotel, a conference center, and a restaurant. Oh, I bet some medieval crotchety German baron is having a cow over that... ;-)

Aah, who cares! Castle Wanzleben isn't the only thing to see medieval. The town's *Rathaus* (Town Hall) was built in 1376 and the St. Jacobi Church was built in 1263, but the *Stadtmauer* didn't come along until the 14th century.

## **The End Of The Romanesque Route**

Can you believe we've come to the end? On this page we've traveled over 1200km (746mi) together (wasn't that easy?) seeing the most amazing architecture and art from a fascinating time in [German history](#).

Oh, sure, it's easy to romanticize the time period plagued with well, plague, war, and famine. But, for whatever their hardships they built some of the most incredible structures that have stood the test of time.

For this, let's give a big THANK YOU!

## **Romanesque Route Web Site**

In case you need it, here's a Web site about the [Romanesque Route](#).