

Saale River -- Plenty Of Sites And Wine Along The Way

There's only one place in the world where you're going to find the Saale River. That's right, Sweetheart, only in Germany. And not all of Germany, either. "Just" [Bavaria](#), [Thuringia](#), and [Saxony-Anhalt](#).

What, that's not enough? Sure it is. There's plenty of wine packed along parts of the 413 kilometers (257 miles) that has some 25 tributaries like the Weiße Elster, the Ilm, the Bode, and the Unstrut, before it eventually feeds the [Elbe](#).

Before we can get to the Saale-Unstrut Wine Route in Saxony-Anhalt, we gotta go to where the Saale River starts. Which is going to be in the [Fichtelgebirge](#) at a mountain called Großer Waldstein, near the village of Zell im Fichtelgebirge (enjoy the Naturpark, the Farm Museum, the Autumn Fair, and Christmas Market there).

It's not a quick how-do-you-do at the Großer Waldstein in [Upper Franconia](#). You got a "red" castle ruin to see. The Rotes Schloss was built in the 14th century, and it's got chapel ruins too. Experts think the chapel was destroyed in 1430, yet no one's too sure.

What kind of expert doesn't know? Hmm, must be the wine talking — let's move on before I get myself into trouble... ;-)

An expert isn't needed to know that Oberkotzau is great too, not only because it's part of the [Franconian Forest](#), but because it's so peaceful and serene along the Saale banks after a good snow.

All right, you can come when it's warmer to see Castle Oberkotzau and the Gothic St. James Church. I'll wait for winter again.

You mustn't leave Bavaria before you've seen [Hof](#). You'll know you're here when you start seeing all sorts of street signs from around the world at the *Fernweh*park (Wanderlust Park). A walk around the pedestrian zone is nice, as is going to see the 13th century Lorenzkirche, the medieval watchtower, the Bismarck Tower, and the Hof Sauna for a swim and a spritz.

Leaving Hof, the Saale was once the border to East Germany. Great, now everyone can travel freely. Sweet Saale, that's great!

From here the Saale sweeps along toward the Slate Mountains of Thuringia. In Dognitz, a village of less than 700 people, there's a Mineral Museum — a good idea for an old mining town.

Compared to Dognitz, [Rudolstadt](#) is a downright metropolis with its 24,000 or so residents. These lucky people can see its Heidecksburg Castle and City Church anytime they want. However, they

gotta wait for the annual Folk & World Music Festival (on the last weekend of July) like the rest of us.

I hope you like college towns, because that's what you're going to find in [Jena](#). Not only is it a place for brilliant minds to think of the future, but it embraces its past. Luther was a frequent visitor, has a Goethe Memorial, a number of bridges to cross the Saale, and has a thriving cultural scene (check out the museums and theaters and you'll see what I'm talking about).

[Dornburg-Camburg](#) is the next town that deserves a stop. Its neighborhood of Dornburg is quite small, not even 900 people, but Goethe saw something in that place. I'm thinking it could be triple castles that are part of a "complex" of sorts.

The Renaissance castle as an English Renaissance Garden, while the Rococo castle has a Baroque/Rococo Garden — go figure. And I think you'll love the medieval castle, even if there isn't a medieval garden.

Ohh, I found me a spa town: welcome to Bad Kösen (who is part of [Naumburg](#) nowadays; go figure why they did that, anyway...)! The end of April kicks the spa season into high gear, and the wine only enhances it. You'd be surprised how many people show up here in September for the Park & Light Festival that makes the *Gradierwerk* all aglow.

Hello Uta. I forgot you were here, a mere lapse in memory — it's not proper to forget a lady.

Uta, BTW, is a statue at the Naumburg Cathedral alongside her husband — a proper tribute to two of the church's biggest patrons. If you see nothing else in Naumburg, make sure the cathedral is it.

The Saale is unique here in Naumburg, because the river doesn't run right through the middle of this famous town in Saxony-Anhalt — it circles around its city center. And it's time to follow this winding river to somewhere else.

That someplace else is not the [Saale-Unstrut Wine Route](#), which Naumburg is part of, but [Merseburg](#), and its legend of the Raven. A long ago duke lost a ring, accusing his best friend of the theft. Turns out, the ring was found in a raven's nest. Let that be a lesson in acting in anger — the duke has his poor friend executed for a "crime" he didn't commit.

Merseburg is another cathedral town, and its *Orgeltage* (Organ Days) in September are really popular. The cathedral has pretty gardens and a Palace Festival in June, if you're interested.

No jokes right now because [Halle \(Saale\)](#) is jam packed with stuff to do. No wonder a quarter of a million people live here — they're trying to see it all. Yup, the city's got castles, a 19th century synagogue, a cathedral, other churches, and a planetarium to mention just a few. The bestest, bestest, bestest part of the city is the Handel Festival every June.

[Bernburg](#) is unique — it's where you'll find what's called the *Alte Bibel* or Old Bible Cemetery, where the gravestones all have Bible verses carved on. There's a Jewish cemetery too — but if the whole graveyard thing is a bit morbid, then a visit to Bernburg Castle is a good idea (it overlooks the Saale), and the 12th century St. Stephani Church (the reason Bernburg falls on the [Romanesque Route](#)).

Nienburg (Saale) is also on a [scenic route](#) — a couple of them really. And don't say I didn't warn you that the Saale Cycle Route or the R1 European Cycle Path aren't one of the easiest routes to take.

Too strenuous? Maybe the Romanesque Route is a better option to see the 11th century Monastic Church of Sts. Mary & Cyprian. Or, maybe you'll just want to stroll along the [German Avenues Route](#) until you get to the Jewish cemetery.

Whatever scenic route you've chosen, they all managed to lead you to the banks of the sensational Saale.

The last town along the Saale before it flows into the Elbe is Barby, found in the Middle Elbe Biosphere Reserve. Hiking along the mining lakes is great, while strolling along the historic *Stadtmauer* and visiting the old churches (like the 14th century St. Mary's) is a real treat.

All of the Saale River has been a treat. Let's go back and start all over, just in case we missed something. ;-)