

## Saalfeld (Saale) Is Old, Bold, And Full Of Holes

Saalfeld sits on the banks of the [Saale River](#). The railway station and industrial zone are on the eastern side of the river, and the old town is on the western side of the river. This is picture-perfect because leaving the train station the first thing you get to do is appreciate how the river and Thuringia mountains frame the town.

The mountain and river combination shape everything above and below the town. More than 1,000 years ago, the first settlers in Saalfeld put up walls to protect their resource-rich town. Several gates and chunks of wall still protect the old town now, and standing on the cobblestones under the Blank Burger Gate you can't help but be amazed at how well medieval construction holds up even now!

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The gates aren't the only thing that's strong here. Watch the guys throwing full-size Christmas trees at the Winter Market contests, or see the rail yard junction loaders at the docks! They're showing off the brawn that kept Saalfeld militarily dominant in the old days, and a major mining and resources player now.

Yet the town does have a softer side — they just keep it underground. The Saalfeld Fairy Grottoes (German: *Feengrotten*) are the world's most colorful show caves, according to the Guinness Book of World records. Dripping river water formed caves in the mountain rock with elaborate natural shading and formations.

The Fairy Grottoes have been a tourist attraction for nearly 100 years, and in the Guinness Books for decades. Saalfeld locals even get married in the caves, so watch out that tours are suspended during wedding ceremonies.

If you want more of the caves, you can do a spa program inside the caves to detox your system and improve your overall health. Just watch out that you'll be more than 50 feet underground the whole time! ;-)