

Saxon Switzerland (Sächsische Schweiz)

This wonderful area of [Saxony \(German: Sachsen\)](#) earned its name as Saxon Switzerland (German: *Sächsische Schweiz*) because of its location in the Elbsandstein Mountains. It's an upland area of sandstone formations which splits the German-Czech border southeast of [Dresden](#), and has been protected since 1991 as the *Sächsische Schweiz* National Park.

Its been known as Saxon Switzerland since the 18th century, when two Swiss artists who were studying at the Art Academy in [Leipzig](#) began incorporating its landscapes into their paintings. They were responsible for bringing tourism into the area, although the mountains of Saxon Switzerland pale in comparison to most of Germany's other mountains, with their highest peak standing only 562 meter, or 1800 feet.

What the mountains of this region lack in stature, they more than make up for in interest. The Elbe River has eroded cliff faces into fascinating and sometimes grotesque forms, and pillars of rock stare each other across steep ravines. The otherworldliness of the landscape is said to have inspired Richard Wagner's opera Lohengrin.

If you decide to visit Saxon Switzerland, you won't have any better way of seeing it than to board the steamer which runs along the [Elbe](#) from Dresden to Schmilka on the Czech border. You'll pass some of the most striking features of the park, and can return by car to view them on foot.

One of the most popular stops on the Saxon Switzerland River Cruise is the one at Rathen, where a health spa has been created close to an open air theater created from the natural amphitheater floor from the cliff walls.

Nearly 366 meter or 1200 feet above you stands Königstein Fortress, where Johann Friedrich Böttger was imprisoned in 1706–1707. He is widely credited with inventing the first European porcelain while practicing alchemy to create gold. You can either climb to the fortress on foot, or take the shuttle.

Not far down the river is Bad Schandau, another spa town with a tramway which will transport you up the Kirnitzschal Valley to the eastern regions of the *Sächsische Schweiz* National Park. If you return to the area by car following your river cruise, head for the quaint hilltop village and castle at Hohnstein, and then continue on to Bastei.

The Bastei is one of the true natural wonders of Saxon Switzerland, a collection of sandstone pillars, clips, and crags standing nearly 1000 feet above the Elbe riverbed. Its name means bastion, and if your nerves allow, you can explore out a series of railings intended to keep you from plunging into the depths below!

Beyond the Bastei, in the direction of Dresden, is a faux-Chinese riverside palace which Augustus

the Strong intended as a summer residence when he began construction in 1720. The Schloss Pillnitz has a magnificent riverside stairway and a Camellia house which shelters la 200-year-old Camellia. It also has its own church, the *Weinbergkirche*, nestled among hillside vineyards.

As you drive toward Dresden, you will cross the Elbe on what was one of the technical wonders of its day, the 1893 steel suspension bridge known as the Blue Miracle, or *Blaues Wunder*.

One more must-see attraction in Saxon Switzerland is the riverside town of Pirna, located about halfway between Dresden and Königstein. A major medieval trading center, the market place at Pirna is being restored to its former glory. The Town Hall, which dates back to 1485, exhibits the architecture of five different centuries. Climbing the tower of the Church of St. Mary, just east of the marketplace, will give you a great view of Saxon Switzerland. :-)