

Sonnenstein -- Fascinating Newcomer In The Ohmgebirge

Germany, how you manage to frustrate and fascinate me all at the same time. Frustrated because you “created” the town of Sonnenstein in [Thuringia](#) out of almost a dozen independent villages — none of which were named that way. The name, however, comes from the nearby mountain in the Ohmgebirge.

The rest of Sonnenstein (or whatever you want to call it) is fascinating (didn't I already say that?). The hamlet of Bockelnhagen, with its population of around 400 people, once fell within the “exclusion zone” in the former Inner German border. But, it's also where you'll find the Ellerburg, a medieval castle ruin originally from the 12th century.

As for the Middle Ages, Gerode once had a Benedictine monastery from the time period, and its church ruins are here for you to see. As for Gerode, the village was swallowed up by Weißenborn-Lüderode.

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Weißenborn-Lüderode itself gets to boast the oldest church in the area, and the village itself dates back to the 9th century. Yup, that's pretty gosh-darn old.

It's hard to pick a favorite place in Sonnenstein, but Zwinge sure makes a strong claim to the title. Maybe it's the half-timber constructed Church of St. James, or the nature reserve that's part of the *Grüne Band* (or Green Belt).

The Green Zone might be a modern concept, the Goethe Oaks are not. These trees have been around the better part of five hundred years, so imagine what stories they could tell if they could talk.

You're sure to see quite a number of trees along the hiking trails in Werningerode, just be sure to stop to admire the old church with its Gothic windows and black "tower."

Steinrode is actually two villages combined (Epschenrode and Werningerode). Either way, its St. Jacobi Church also has Gothic beginnings, but these days it's a blend of architectural styles — which can be a good thing.

In sticking with old churches in my train of thought, I have to mention the framework Church of St. Nicolai in Silkerode. And you'll find some other half-timbered houses here and there, as well as bilingual street signs written in Low German.

Hmm, that's pretty cool, and exactly why Sonnenstein is fascinating, wouldn't you say?