

Thuringian Forest Is Germany's Green and Glorious Place

How inspiring is the Thuringian Forest (German: *Thüringer Wald*)? As far as the Germans themselves are concerned, the Thuringian Forest is the poetic and philosophical soul of their country. Often referred to as Germany's "Green Heart," it is in upland Paradise of some 4700 sq. km. (2900 sq. mi.), blanketed with emerald woodlands.

The unspoiled highlands of the Thuringian Forest are dotted with sleepy but completely charming villages. If you listen intently while strolling their streets, you may hear strains of Bach or the voices of Germany's great poets echoing in the breeze.

The immortal composer Johann Sebastian Bach entered the world in the Thuringian Forest hill town of [Eisenach](#). Here the poet and novelist Fritz Reuter lived out his days. Martin Luther, who played in its streets as a schoolboy, later spent eleven weeks translating the New Testament into German in 1521 while living incognito at Eisenach's Wartburg Castle.

More than 250 years later, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe translated the entire Bible into German at the same castle. His is the spirit which undoubtedly dominates the Thuringian Forest, capturing the essence of the area perfectly with the simple question, "Where else does one find so much beauty in such a small place?" :-)

One of the best ways for you to experience all the wonder of this wondrous place is to follow the 168km (104mi) length of the parallel *Rennsteig* hiking and cycling trails. The trail has extended from Horschel on the [Werra River](#) to Blankenstein on the [Saale River](#) since the 19th century, when it formed a border for of the German Empire's smaller states.

Hiking the *Rennsteig* trail will leave you breathless in more ways than one. You'll have the challenge of negotiating some of its steeper passages, like the 15km (9 mi) leading into Blankenstein and the 30km (18 mi) departing from Eisenach. You'll also find breathstopping natural beauty along and near the trail.

If you have the stamina to arrive at its highest points, 982m (3220 ft) Mount Beerberg and 978m (3208 ft) Mount Schneekopf, you'll be close to both the winter sports Mecca and the *Rennsteig* garden at Oberhof. Thanks to the unusual climate in this part of the forest, nearly four thousand different plants indigenous to mountains from all over the world thrive as they would in their native lands. You'll benefit immensely by taking in the Garden's informational lecture before exploring on your own!

Other natural and cultural delights include the deep dark crevasses of Dragon's Gorge (*Drachenschlucht*), moorlands and flower-robed hillside pastures bordered with dense forests of pine and beech trees, and mountain streams with hidden waterfalls. Perhaps its most whimsical feature, however, is found in [Ohrdruf](#), a small town at the northern edge of the forest.

Ohrdruf's St. Michael's Church is where Johan Sebastian Bach's brother Christoph was the organist. It's also the town which gave the world the rocking horse and the original Kewpie doll. Plan to celebrate both by taking in a concert at the town's Ehrenstein Palace, which also houses a museum where you can learn all about the German art of toy making!

You'd expect toys to be a big attraction in the part of the world where the first kindergarten was established, and your trip to the forest will put you within a stone's throw of that place at Bad Blankenburg. Located at the southern end of the Thuringian Forest, the spa city of Bad Blankenburg lies in the shadow of the Schwarza Valley and the remnants of the 13th-century Greifenstein Castle.

With each hour you spend on your journey through the Thuringian Forest, you'll feel as if you were moving deeper into a dream. Before long, you'll find yourself singing aloud a stanza from Herbert Roth's "The Rennsteig Song":

"I remain as long as I like and call it out to all:
Prettiest spot in the world, there I find my peace."

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