

The Uckermark -- Empty Spaces Filled With Wonders

Bordering on the [Mecklenburg Lakes](#), Germany's thinly-populated Uckermark is a land of more than 400 lakes, peaceful rivers, moors, meadows, and forests. It's also prime hiking and cycling country.

The best way to experience the full contrast between life in [Berlin](#), just 50 miles (80 km) to the south, and life in the Uckermark is to follow the the 161-mile (260km) Uckermark Circular Cycle Route.

Extending from Stolpe in the Odertal National Park to [Schwedt](#), the industrial center of the Uckermark, this cycling route connects with every other major biking route in the Uckermark. When you've finished exploring it, there won't be much about the region that you don't know! The smiling Uckermark logo signs will guide you, and the fun of your trip will have you returning those smiles! ;-)

Your first stop after Stolpe will be about 6 miles (10km) west in the town of [Angermünde](#), located within the Schorfheide-Chorin Biosphere Reserve. Visit St. Marien Church with its Wagner organ, and notice the extensive use of fieldstone in the town's structures and pavements. Just outside the city gates are the Blumberg Ponds, and a fascinating nature center known as the "Blumberger Mill," designed to resemble a hollow oak tree trunk. Visit the exhibition room, jump on a bike, and begin pedaling for a virtual view of what lies outside in the Reserve!

Or choose the real thing, and bike the shortest circular route through the Biosphere, which lies within the 34 acres (14 ha) around the Nature Center. The Biosphere Reserve is a centuries-old hunting resort with landscapes ranging from beech and oak forests to swamps, lakes, and open grasslands. Some of its oaks have been standing for six centuries! Watch for the cranes and black storks which share the terrain with a variety of eagles.

When you've completed the trip around the Blumberger Mill, follow the Cycling Route 28 miles (46km) across the Biosphere Reserve to the town of [Templin](#), dating back to 1270 A.D. Remarkably, its one-mile (1700 m) city wall (including 50 watch towers and three gates) is still intact! Within the *Prenzlauer Tor* gate is the Folklore Museum (*Volkskunde Museum*) displaying tools historically used by Uckermark's artisans, farmers, and fishermen.

You, however, probably wouldn't dream of escaping from Templin without enjoying one of its thermal salt water spas or saunas! After refreshing yourself at Templin, head about 12 miles (20 km) northwest to the delightfully-situated old town of Lychen, on an island surrounded by no less than seven of the Uckermark's lakes. Why not take a break from your bicycle and pedal a "railbike," or draisine, along the railroad between Lychen to Fürstenberg (Havel), the way railway inspectors did two centuries ago?

After your stay in Lychen, head east toward the Uckermark's capital, [Prenzlau](#). At Boitzenburg, immerse yourself in the romantic atmosphere of the 16th-century Boitzenburg Castle. Trade in your bike for four-legged transportation to explore the surrounding countryside on horseback! Then it's on to Prenzlau, at the northern end of Unterucker Lake.

Spot the city from afar by looking for the towers of Gothic St. Marien Church. Climb the towers for a magnificent view not only of the town but of the surrounding Uckermark landscape. Visit the Cultural Museum at the restored 13th century Dominican monastery, where you can learn much more about the Uckermark. Prenzlau is less than an hour by car from the Baltic Sea, if you want to break up your Uckermark with a trip to the shore!

From Prenzlau begin the final leg of your Uckermark tour to the [Oder River](#) and [Schwedt](#). Schwedt, dating to 1265 A.D., is the city where the Huguenots brought tobacco to the Uckermark early in the 1700s. Its surrounding area remains Germany's second-largest tobacco producing region. Visit the city's Tobacco Museum and St. Catherine's Church, or spend a few quiet hours in a rowboat on the Hohensaaten-Frederichstal Waterway. It will give you time to reflect on all that you've seen and done in the Uckermark!

There are a few other Uckermark highlights, including the amazing ship lift at Niederfinow on the Oder-Havel Canal, and the ancient Gothic Cistercian Abbey in Chorin, where thousands of people come to enjoy the Chorin Summer of Music Concerts. But those will have to wait for your return trip!