

Via Sacra -- A Holy Route To Leave The Fast-Paced World Behind

How many people out there are plugged in every minute of every day? People are bombarded just about every second with television, Internet, landline phones, mobile phones, PDA's, email, etc etc...

What would you say if I told you that you can go back to a quieter time? A chance to unplug from the modern world, and see one of the best of Europe's scenic routes of religious art and architecture, if you will?

Via Sacra, it is.

FYI, I say Europe, because the Via Sacra, or *Heilige Strasse* (in German) or Holy Route (in English), isn't just limited to Germany; it travels along to the Czech Republic and Poland.

The German portion of the Via Sacra encompasses approximately half of the route, traveling to about ten towns within [Upper Lusatia](#). But, don't let the fact that there aren't that many stops stop you. Quality is better than quantity, isn't it? :-)

Starting Point of the Via Sacra

[Zittau](#) starts the Via Sacra in Germany, and its Lenten Veil is the reason for being on it. Depicted on the "Big Veil" are some 90 scenes of stories straight from the Bible, created in 1472. A century later the "Small Veil" was created — its scene being the story of the Crucifixion.

In keeping with the religious theme, the Museum of Cultural History at the Franciscan Monastery is a stop right on the money. As well as a stop at the Baroque Mountain Chapel (built 1734) that used to be an old synagogue.

For something a bit more modern, come see the 19th century steam locomotive and the town's zoo.

All right, time to move on to Oybin — a town also known as Kurort Oybin (*Kurort* meaning spa). It lies along the Zittau Narrow Gauge Railway, but the reason it's on the Via Sacra is the Burg and Kloster high in the Zittau Mountain.

Construction started on the castle in the 13th century, and the monastery (founded by the Order of Celestines under the order of Emperor Charles V) started a century later. After only 200 years (give or take), the monastery was dissolved; and it is now used as a concert venue, while the castle is a ruin.

From Good Friday to October, a small train runs to the monastery — so you don't have to hike it.

Yeah, thanks for mentioning hiking. The natural rock formations in and around Oybin (a lil' town of only around 1500 people) have interesting names like Broody Hen and Chalice Rock. Whatever you call them, they're just stunning.

Our next town is [Herrnhut](#), whose *Evangelische Brüder-Unität* is your reason for being here. The *Brüder-Unität* is a Moravian Church that's famous for its 26-point star, that's also known as the Moravian Advent Star or Herrnhut Star. If you've been lucky enough to have shopped at the Dresden Stretzelmarkt you many have seen this "3D" pointed star for sale.

The church even offers classes on how these magnificent looking stars are made — and the church is the center of the world's Moravian community.

Of course, Herrnhut has a local history museum & its old trains station acts is now an art gallery, if you're so inclined to visit.

Time to leave, heading towards [Cunewalde](#) in the Lusatian Mountains. It's contribution to the Via Sacra is because you'll find one of the largest village churches in the world here, holding more than 26,000 people. Actually, the church's interior looks more like an opera house than God's house — but either way, stunning is an understatement.

Also, it's Fall Festival in the middle of September is a fun way to complement your visit.

Cunewalde is close to [Bautzen](#), which is our next destination. Located on the [Spree River](#), Bautzen's Dom St. Peter's Church is the reason for being here. It's thought to be the oldest church in [Lusatia](#) (built over a thousand years ago), decorated with all sorts of reliefs and known for its sundial.

St. Peter's is also known as a Simultaneous Church, one of the first in the world. What's a Simultaneous Church? It's a church where more than one denomination worships — and has been since the days of the [Protestant Reformation](#).

The church is also said to howl, caused by the winds blowing off the tower. Locals use it to know when "bad" weather is coming.

Bautzen's bellowing church isn't all that you're going to see here (I mean, hear here). The town offers a Sorbian Museum, a City Museum, a *Hexenturm* (Witches Tower), a *Stadtmauer* (Defense Wall), and Ortenburg Castle.

While you're here, buy some traditional gifts — Bautz'er Mustard & beer.

Got your stuff? Good. We're now heading to the Kloster (Monastery) Sankt Marienstern in Panschwitz-Kuckau, established in 1248. You won't find any abbey ruins here. It's still home to 17 Cistercian nuns who tend to its church, garden, monastery museum, and cloister shop.

St. Marienstern used to have its own brewery; and although the stuff isn't brewed on the property any longer, you can still buy the stuff with the Marienstern label.

Another *Kloster*, the Monastery Church of St. Anne, is in [Kamenz](#). Created in the 15th century, this Franciscan convent was created under the auspice of the King of Bohemia. It's 16th century altar is an incredible piece of religious artwork, and the complex has a museum and is a venue for all sorts of concerts.

For our next stop on the Via Sacra we'll need to head to the east to the Polish border.

By the time you've reached [Görlitz](#), you've gotten to the most eastern part of Germany. The town's landmark is known as Peter's Church, built in 1425. St. Peter's has everything from vaulted ceilings, to Romanesque entryways, and Baroque frescoes.

The oldest church, however, is St. Nicholas — built in 1100. But, what everyone really wants to see is the Holy Grave, an exact replica of Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre that was built in 1504.

Do yourself a favor, find a few minutes to travel along the Stations of the Cross along the *Schönhof*, see the old synagogue (at Otto-Müller-Strasse 3), the Jewish cemetery, the zoo, the Silesian Museum, and the town's "real" landmark: a volcanic mountain called the *Landeskron* (State Crown).

Partygoers will appreciate Görlitz's *Altstadt* (Old Town) Festival on the last weekend of August, or the yearly Film Festival in February. What a way to enjoy the winter!

I'm sorry to say our sacred journey on the Via Sacra ends (in Germany) once we get to the Kloster St. Marienthal in Ostritz. This Cistercian monastery was opened for women over 900 years ago, and it's motto is *Ora et labora* (Latin for Prayer and Work), following the guidelines of St. Benedict.

Everything within St. Marienthal is self-contained (it's got its own laundry, garden, bakery, and market), and you're more than welcome to join in the services that take place six times a day (the nuns pray seven times), seven days a week.

There couldn't possibly be a better place to totally withdraw from the rigors of a 24/7 lifestyle, than at St. Marienthal. And there couldn't be any better place to end your Via Sacra pilgrimage in Germany. It's been so long since I used my fancy modern-world gadget — I can't even find it now! ;-)

Via Sacra Web Site

Here's a Web site about — and more details on — the [Via Sacra](#).