

THE VALUE OF TOURIST THEME ROUTES: GERMANY'S ROMANTIC ROAD



Millions of tourists arrive each year on the Romantic Road. Germany's best known theme-route between the Main River and the northern Alps.

What is the Romantic?

Perhaps it is not the combination of unique historic heritage, scenic sites and economic values of different regions being integrated by a new tourism concept in the 1950s. "Romantic" is a feeling of **fantastic, enthusiastic, quixotic or wild and scenic** describing a historic part of a transcontinental medieval trade route (Flanders - Venice).

After all, for poets like Goethe or musicians like Beethoven nature provided the powerful inspiration for their literature and music, when history and social criticism were en vogue.

What to experience on the Romantic Road?

The official starting point is Würzburg. Here, the Main River valley flows through the warm beds of soil layers, where famous "Franken-Wine" is grown. Centuries ago its harvests have filled the treasury of ruling bishops. They invested in the largest Baroque castle in Europe which Napoleon once had called "the most splendid parish house in the world".

Following the route are the three "medieval wonders", namely the Free Imperial Towns of 13th to 19th century. Rothenburg-upon-Tauber with mighty walls has been eternalized by the Romantic painter Carl Spitzweg. It focuses on an emanating city hall famous since 17th century (30-years war), when the town converted to Protestant confession and cooperated with its Swedish occupiers. Re-conquered in 1631 by the Catholic League it was pardoned from pillage and destruction under the strange condition that the Lord Mayor had to drink "ex" a huge mug of wine - an event still celebrated as "Meistertrunk-Fest" ("festival of the master draught") and watched by daily tourist crowds.

Next follows Dinkelsbühl with similar gorgeous town walls, a mighty gothic (catholic) church and neighboring Germany's most beautiful wood timbered house pub. An annual show, the "childrens revelry" (Kinderzeche), since 350 years recalls the salvage of the town from Swedish destruction by the town's children.

Once crossing the 49th latitude, the basin of the Ries crater opens. Some 15 million years ago the impact of a meteorite had created the "Suevit" (Swabian stone) - better known as "moon-stone". It can be touched at Nördlingen's impressive Saint George church and its 90m high clock tower. A breathtaking view from its top pulls up the green fields and rural villages of the crater basin, and beneath the red roofs of the 500-years old circular town. "Unspoiled by tourism" it is guarded by an undisrupted and walkable medieval wall and mighty tower-gates.

Beyond Donau River (Danube) the pre-alpine plains lead to the Roman town of Augsburg: "Augustus-castle". In 1500 Jacob Fugger "The Rich" financed Charles V who in 16th century ruled "an empire where the sun never set. Other celebrities were e.g. Rudolph Diesel, the inventor of the Diesel engine, or the national economist Friedrich List who wrote "The National History of Political Economy". Just a few years later the world's first passenger train left for München (Munich), signing in the modern industrial age.

Only Bavaria's King Ludwig II (Louis II) stuck to a waning Romantic world: with castles like Neuschwanstein (Newswanstein: 1886) he created his own "Disney World". A cluster of mock-medievalism, with turrets and Byzantine, neo-Romanesque and neo-Gothic styles presented the scenery for Wagner's operas and Elysian Gods and Goddesses. Today, never-ending tourists stream flows to this illusive castle, the terminal of the Romantic Road below the Alpine limestone peaks

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