



HIDDEN BEAUTY: The Thuringia region in Germany is a well-kept secret just waiting for the explorer to experience unique history, culture, art, and architecture. TERRI HIRSCH

The cultural heritage of Thuringia, Germany (part 1)

By TERRI AND MARTIN HIRSCH

Thuringia, located in the heart of Germany, is a well-kept secret that many people have not yet discovered. It has a long and exciting history with age-old architecture still unspoiled by time. Thuringia in the present day features fortresses, castles, monasteries, churches and Renaissance, Baroque, and Art Nouveau buildings in cities full of history and culture.

Our journey began on Lufthansa Airlines nonstop to Frankfurt, Germany followed by an airport connection on Rail Europe's ICE Train for a two-hour ride to Erfurt. Upon arrival in Erfurt you can purchase the Thüringen Card which gives you free rides on buses and trams, admission to castles, museums, parks, exhibitions, and UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Our first two nights were at the Radisson Blu Hotel, located in the historical part of Erfurt. This modern hotel features 282 rooms, from standard to luxury, with wonderful views of the city and excellent facilities.

MEDIEVAL MAGIC

Erfurt, the 1,260-year-old state capital, is one of the best preserved medieval cities in Germany and within reach of all transportation. It is a city of bridges that were very important for commerce in the Middle Ages. A tour on the tramway, which has operated since 1894, will take you around to the most important sights of the city.

Our morning started at the Merchants Bridge, the longest medieval bridge in Europe, with a narrow cobblestone road that has 32 houses on both sides. While the top of the bridge still has families living in these houses, the bottom of the bridge has shops offering hand-painted ceramics, glassware, jewelry, woodcarving, and antiques.



ERFURT EXCURSION: The tramway in Erfurt, Germany, takes visitors on a tour to the most exciting and most important places to visit in the city. TERRI HIRSCH

From the Merchants Bridge we came upon the impressive St. Mary's Cathedral and the St. Severus Church standing side-by-side on top of Cathedral Hill. After we climbed the 70 wide steps to the top of the hill of these twin edifices, we reached the main entrance. The 500-year-old Gloriosa Bell was hanging from the central tower.

Although the cathedral has well-preserved, 14th century Gothic decorations and rich furnishings, the stained glass windows and a small altar with The Madonna and Child by Lucas Cranach were most impressive. In April 1507 Martin Luther was ordained in the cathedral. Every year on Nov. 10 Erfurt celebrates Martin Luther's birthday.

Adjacent to Cathedral Hill was the Petersburg Citadel, built between 1664 and 1707. It is the only extensively preserved fortress in all of Central Europe with an intricate maze of underground mysterious passageways beneath this ancient fortress.

We walked through the underground passageways into rooms with cannons and wooden soldiers dressed in clothing of that period and left these passageways through a small entrance leading to the fortress plateau. Outside the Citadel, the view across the city from this plateau was beautiful.

ART AND ARTIFACTS

The Jewish Synagogue in Erfurt is one of the oldest synagogues in Europe. During archaeological

excavations in the 1990s more than 600 items from the 13th and early 14th centuries were found and collectively named The Erfurt Treasure.

This treasure is displayed in the cellar with an extensive collection of medieval artifacts and consists of silver coins, silver ingots, jewelry, and a large gold wedding ring.

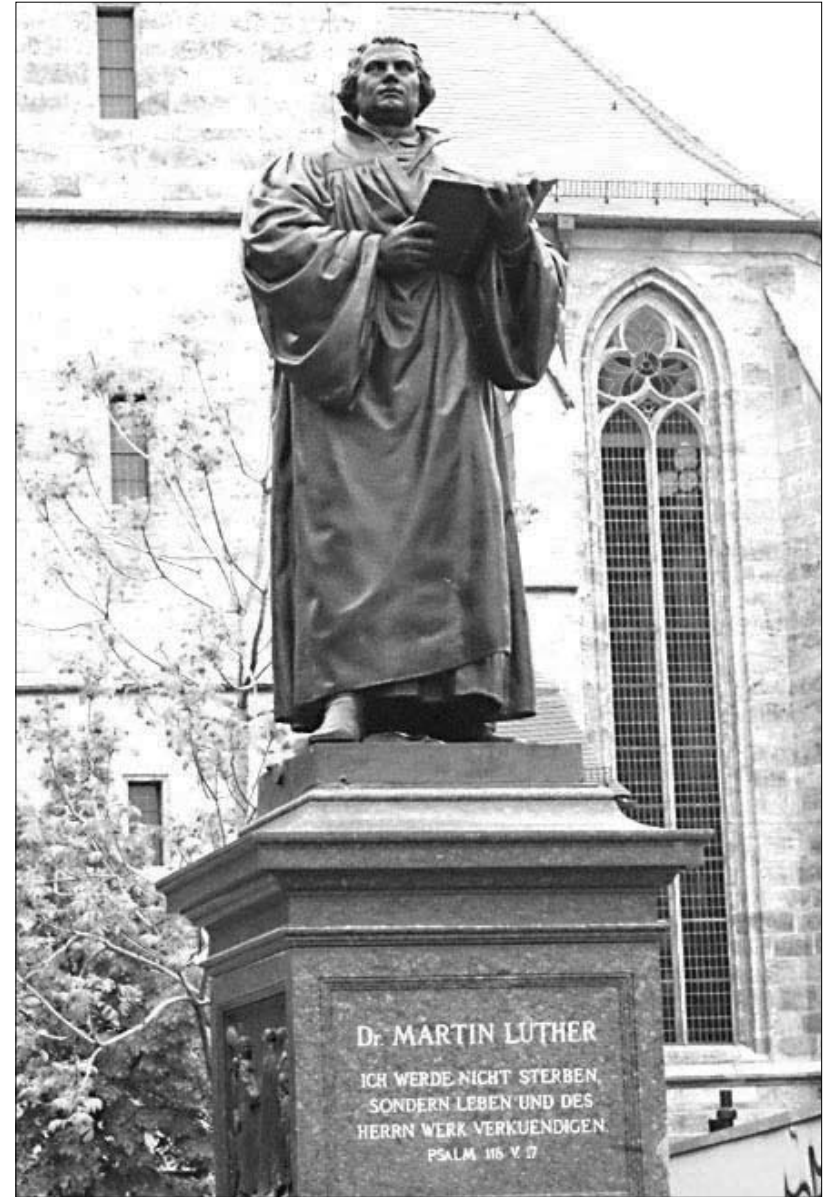
The following day we left for the Friedenstein Castle located in the middle of a spacious park high above the City of Gotha. It is the largest early baroque castle complex in Germany and includes the Palace Museum, the Museum of Nature, the Museum of Regional History, the Thüringen State Archive, and the Gotha Research Library. This triple-wing building required the work of 1,000 craftsmen and labourers.

The art collections at the Friedenstein Castle included paintings by Lucas Cranach, one of the most influential German painters of the Middle Ages. There were many examples of renaissance art, including the famous painting Gotha Lovers, which dates back to 1484.

One of the rooms in the castle had sculptures while another room was filled with Egyptian mummies and jewelry. Numerous rooms were filled with furniture, art, and antiques that can be traced back to the 17th and 18th centuries.

An East Asian collection consisted of artistic porcelain and earthenware from China and Japan and included a collection of almost 300 fans. The Napoleon room had unusual ceiling decorations of stucco zodiac signs reflecting facial features in the wall portrait of Napoleon Bonaparte.

In the west tower of the castle is the Conrad Ekhof Theatre, founded in 1774. It is the oldest theatre in Europe and the first theatre in Germany to have per-



MONUMENT: A statue of Martin Luther in Erfurt, Germany. His birthday is celebrated in Erfurt every Nov. 10. TERRI HIRSCH

manently employed actors. The original wooden stage equipment, which features special effects such as wind and thunder, traps, and flying ropes used in early dramas, has survived to the present day. Pulled by three people, it enables the scenery to be changed within seconds

with the curtain open. Today, you can still see performances using the old stage machinery during the Summer Ekhof Festival.

Terri and Martin Hirsch travel extensively and are freelance travel writers.

The Epoch Times Geography Guru™

"Growing your geography knowledge"

Quiz #278



OLD MAN RIVER: Which of the following American cities is on or near the Mississippi River or one of its tributaries?

- | | | |
|---------|-------------|-------------|
| Atlanta | Denver | Minneapolis |
| Casper | Great Falls | Pittsburgh |
| Chicago | Las Vegas | Wichita |
| Dallas | Memphis | |

Read The Epoch Times next week for the answer!

Answer for Quiz #277

LONG FLIGHTS: Cities and location close to being on the opposite side of the globe:

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Hong Kong—Bolivia | São Paulo—Siberia |
| London—New Zealand | Sydney—Greenland |
| New York—Indonesia | |

Sudoku

2					8		
		6		9		5	7
			8	4	3		
1	2			4		8	
	4		5			9	
	7		2			1	5
			4	8	6		
8	1		7			5	
		4					8

Fill in the boxes using numbers between 1 and 9 so that each column, each row, and each 3x3 square contain all nine numbers only once.

Exclusive Epoch Times puzzle by Sudoku Works. Sudoku puzzles and software at: www.SudokuWorks.com.

6	9	4	3	1	5	2	7	8
8	1	3	7	6	2	9	5	4
4	5	2	8	9	6	3	7	1
1	7	5	4	8	6	9	3	2
9	2	6	3	2	3	7	8	4
5	3	4	8	1	7	9	2	6
3	4	8	6	9	5	7	4	1
1	5	9	7	4	6	5	8	3
5	6	7	8	4	3	1	2	9
7	4	8	6	1	2	9	3	5
4	8	6	1	2	9	3	5	7
2	3	1	5	6	7	8	4	9

This week's solution