



CASTLES in the sky

BY DEBBIE ELKIND

Once upon a time, brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm travelled the land collecting folk tales that came to be read, performed, adapted and adored the world over. Today, visitors from around the globe pilgrimage to their homeland to experience a sprinkling of fairytale magic firsthand.



It seems fitting that our tour of the Fairytale Route is strewn with roses. It's summer in Germany and from the elegant gardens of the opulent Philippsruhe Palace in Hanau to the imposing tower walls of the Sababurg castle, the fragrant flowers are thickly in bloom everywhere we go.

We're here to celebrate the 200th anniversary the Brothers Grimm's first volume of fairytales, *Children's and Household Tales*, first published in 1812 and today the most widely published collection of stories in the world. To mark the milestone, more than 200 events are being held across Germany, the birthplace of the famous tome, penned with enduring classics including *Snow White*, *Rapunzel* and *Hansel and Gretel*.

Aside from pouring over pages of the book, the best way to get a taste for the Grimm magic is by following in the brothers' footsteps, exploring the 600-kilometre-long Fairytale Route – one of the oldest and best known of almost 200 scenic touring routes across the country – that links important places in the lives and works of Germany's most famous siblings.

We'll be on the road for the best part of 10 days, travelling from Hanau in Hesse to Bremen and on to Berlin. We begin in Hanau, a half hour's train ride from Frankfurt, and wind our way north to Trendelburg before circling back to Kassel. Along the way, we uncover a region rich in culture and history, where rolling green hills and mysterious forests meet enchanting medieval towns filled with handsome *fachwerkhäuser* (half-timbered houses) and grand, centuries-old castles.

HANAU

Hanau, which sits on the intersection of the River Kinzig and the River Main in the heart of Germany, is most famous for being the birthplace of the Grimms. In 1896, a national monument was erected in their honour outside the town hall. This is considered the official starting point of both the

Fairytale Route and the Hessian Apfelwein (apple wine) route. Wine, roses and fairytales, anyone?

Hanau has nine museums and a number of art galleries but the highlight for us is the stunning Schloss Philippsruhe, an 18th-century Baroque palace. Inside you can peruse exhibits focusing on the city's history and the Brothers Grimm or simply take a seat on the huge, sunny terrace and enjoy a coffee and cake while gazing out over the river and castle gardens.

The Brüder Grimm Märchenfestspiele (Brothers Grimm Fairytale Festival) is held every year from May through July in an amphitheatre in the park of the palace. We are treated to a spirited performance of *Snow White* and *Rose Red* one fine summer evening. Admittedly, it's hard to follow if you are lacking German language skills, but the costumes and sets are terrific and the crowd's enthusiasm infectious. Clearly, this is a highlight of the year around these parts and it's a nice way to feel like a part of the community for an evening.

STEINAU

As gorgeous as the Philippsruhe Palace is, it isn't until we reach Steinau that I truly feel like I'm retracing a magical part of history. Steinau is so picture-perfect that it may well have stepped straight out of a picture book. We explore cobbled streets lined with half-timbered houses that ring a magnificent Renaissance castle and town hall.

The Grimms lived in Steinau during their childhood and the

CASTLE CALLING

Above, from left: The town of Sababurg is home to some of Germany's most historic castles; the Schloss Philippsruhe, a Baroque summer palace on the banks of the River Main in Hanau.

Opening spread: According to local wisdom, you're never more than a 30-minute drive from a castle in Germany.

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Brüder Grimm Haus und Museum Steinau holds the largest, most significant collection dedicated to their work. After touring the gallery we fill up on the type of hearty Hessian fare they might have once eaten at Café-Restaurant Rosengarten. Among the traditional dishes on the menu are homemade *spätzle* (egg noodles) baked in masses of Gruyere and smothered with caramelised onions and home-style *sauerbraten* (sour roast) with red cabbage and crispy golden potato dumplings.

All of Steinau's attractions are in easy walking distance of each other. From here you can stroll to the town square, where a fairytale fountain depicts scenes from the stories. The palace is also well worth a visit, not in the least for its tower, which affords amazing views out over the town and valley beyond. In the palace's great hall is an exhibition tracing the history of puppet theatre in Steinau. We meet an enthusiastic pair of young puppeteers here who tell us that they are third-generation puppet masters, continuing the work of a company started by their grandfather half a century ago.

MARBURG

Marburg is a popular weekend getaway for Germans due to its medieval atmosphere and nearby River Lahn. The Grimms studied law at the 500-year-old Philipps University and it was also here that they first began collecting folk tales.

Unlike many towns in the region, Marburg was left virtually untouched by bombing during the Second World War. The historic *oberstadt* ("old city") is a lovely labyrinth of narrow, cobblestone streets and steep, crooked steps lined with classic examples of 17th- and 18th-century Hessian architecture. The city literally arises out of the storybooks, as the most famous of the Grimm's illustrators, Otto Ubbelohde, drew much of his inspiration from here, his home town.

You can tread a path in the footsteps of the Grimms by following a popular walking tour that encompasses the town's major sights (get information at the Marburg Tourism office on Pilgrimstein in the town centre). Among them is St. Elisabeth's Church, the first Gothic church built in Germany, and Landgrave Castle and its Museum of Cultural History.

Dotted around the city you will encounter fairytale remnants, from statues of the seven dwarves to Cinderella's slipper – in this case, a giant red high heel. A trip to the top of the Kaiser Wilhelm Tower is the best way to enjoy views out over the city.

We cap off a busy day of exploring with a hearty multi-course meal at the lovely Restaurant Zur-Sonn, just off the town square. Highlights include *pfefferrahmschnitzel* (pork schnitzel with cognac-peppercorn gravy served with fried potatoes), and "red fruits" in jelly with whipped cream for dessert.

TRENDELBURG & SABABURG

"Nowhere in Germany are you ever more than half an hour from a castle," announces our ever informative guide Joachim as we journey onwards from Marburg. He adds that Germans can be "quite competitive" about which castles are considered the best. They'd be hard pressed to surpass the spectacular Dornröschenschloss, "Sleeping Beauty's Castle," in Sababurg, founded in 1334 by the Archbishop of Mainz.



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GRIMM FINDING

From top: A magical setting along the Fairytale Route; sunset in Sababurg; the forests around Hanau inspired many of the stories written by the Grimm brothers.



TOGA HOTELS



A THING OF BEAUTY

Right: Sababurg Castle, also know as Sleeping Beauty's Castle.



During the early 19th century, the castle, located on the edge of the Reinhardswald forest, fell into a state of wild, vine-covered disrepair. This led Germans to speculate that this is where the Sleeping Beauty story took place. Surrounded by the landscape of the forest and Weser River, it is certainly a location dramatically romantic enough to befit a bewitched princess. At the castle, the tale is kept alive today through fairytale trails, guided tours and Sleeping Beauty matinees. Unsurprisingly, it's also a popular spot for weddings.

Dornröschenschloss proves to be the gastronomic highlight of our trip, thanks to an indulgent rose-themed meal inspired by the recipes of Dorothea Grimm, the wife of Wilhelm Grimm. It begins with a glass of "Magic of Roses" (a sparkling, rose-flavoured non-alcoholic cocktail) and ends with a feather-light almond cake filled with white chocolate vanilla mousse and scattered with rose petals.

Nearby, Trendelburg is no slouch in the castle stakes either. We spend a night at Hotel Burg in the 700-year-old Trendelburg castle, where we meet with "Rapunzel" in her tower, which is adorned with a very long blonde braid. Even those with vertigo should dare to climb the steep stairs of her tower for the astonishing 360-degree view out over the glorious Diemel Valley and hills surrounding the Weser River.

KASSEL

Our final stop is Kassel, the capital city of Brothers Grimm-land, where they lived and worked the longest and where Grimm's Fairy Tales was compiled and edited.

What Kassel lacks in charming architecture – much of the city was destroyed and rebuilt after the war – it makes up for in art galleries, museums and, most of all, the 245 hectare Bergpark Wilhelmshöhe, the largest mountain park in Europe, complete with a Roman-style aqueduct, secret grottos and princely rose gardens. Its construction began in 1696 and took a further 150 years to complete.

The park's astonishing water features were first displayed in 1714 and can still be witnessed every Wednesday and Sunday afternoon from May through October. An incredible feat of hydraulic engineering, the display uses around 350,000 litres of water each time it runs. Visitors follow its path down the mountainside, as it tumbles down the cascades, past the Steinhöfer's waterfall, the Devil's Bridge and the aqueduct, before finally arriving at the lake, where a fountain flies 50 metres into the sky as a dramatic exclamation point to the spectacle.

The Löwenburg, Lion's Castle, lies just across the lake. And it looks like just the sort of place a storybook prince or princess might live in happily ever after. •

Photography by Debbie Elkind and courtesy of the GNT0.

travel facts

GETTING THERE

Emirates flies to Frankfurt via Dubai from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth. 1300-303-777; emirates.com
Asiana Airlines flies from Sydney to Frankfurt, via Seoul. 1300-767-234; au.flyasiana.com
Lufthansa flies from Sydney to Frankfurt, via Singapore. 1300-655-727; lufthansa.com

GETTING AROUND

Trafalgar offers guided experiences around Germany. 1300-663-043; trafalgar.com
Insight Vacations also offers upmarket tours around Germany. 1300-237-886; insightvacations.com

WHEN TO GO

Winters in Germany can be long and cold while summer is the peak travel season with larger crowds and higher prices, making spring and autumn ideal.

WHERE TO STAY

- Dornröschenschloss, Sababurg. 49-56/718-080; dornroeschenschloss-sababurg.de
Hotel Burg Trendelburg. 49-56/759-090; burg-hotel-trendelburg.com
Best Western Premier Hotel Villa Stokkum. 49-61/816-640; villastokkum.bestwestern.de
Vila Vita Rosenpark, Marburg. 49-64/216-0050; rosenpark.com
Hotel Gude, Kassel. 49-56/148-050; hotel-gude.de
Toga operate a number of hotels around Germany. togahotels.com

WHERE TO EAT

- Café-Restaurant Rosengarten, Steinau. 49-66/637-309; rosengarten-steinau.de
Restaurant Zur-Sonne, Marburg. 49-64/217-190; zur-sonne-marburg.de

WHAT TO DO

Learn more about the lives and work of the Brothers Grimm at these museums:
Brüder Grimm-Haus und Museum Steinau. 49-66/637-605; museum-steinau.de
Brüder Grimm Museum, Kassel. 49-56/110-3235; grimms.de
The Marburg House of Romanticism. 49-21/917-160; romantikmuseum-marburg.de

FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact the German National Tourism Organisation for information on travelling around the country. germany.travel



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