

Press Release

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www.visit-thuringia.com

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The green Belt in Thuringia Nature knows no borders

'Nature knows no borders' is the name of a joint campaign of the Thuringian Department of the Environment and the Thuringian Tourism Board, aiming at developing Thuringia's Green Belt as a destination for travellers. The fact that the area was inaccessible for people over decades has created a special biotope where rare species have found a place to live. In 2018, the 763 km long Thuringian Green Belt was made a National Monument.

Thuringia: protected environmental area pioneer with the German Green Belt

Nature conservationists from Thuringia and the neighbouring federal state of Franconia realised immediately after the Fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 that the unique countryside along the former border fortifications, despite the fact that these certainly had to be dismantled, called for protection. Over the years, it had become the habitat of some otherwise extremely rare bird species such as whinchats, great grey or red-backed shrikes, for example. Only a month later, on 9 December 1989, BUND Friends of the Earth Germany passed a resolution for the protection and development of the border strip at its first-ever meeting attended by environmentalists from both sides of the former border in Hof. It remains in place to this day. The strip was named the "German Green Belt". With a total length of 1,193 kilometres, the belt is now a protected environmental area that runs through Germany from Travemünde on the Baltic Sea to the border with the Czech Republic near Hof. The majority of this belt, a length of 763 kilometres in total, is located in Thuringia. In late 2018, Thuringia was the first German federal state to designate its share of the German Green Belt a "Nationales Naturmonument (NNM)", a national natural monument, to mark the 19th anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall.

A treasure trove of biodiversity

Today, the German Green Belt is one of the German reunification's major success stories, a living monument to the area's history and a treasure trove of biodiversity. It is home to over 1,200 of the species on Germany's Red List of Threatened Species. Some of these can be observed on various hikes along the German Green Belt.

Hiking through the National Natural Monument

Several hiking routes lead through the National Monument and take visitors to forests, meadows, river valleys and viewing points. The Thuringian Green Belt forms a unique landscape, where nature and history are part of a rather contemplative experience. Approximately 1,200 endangered species live here, on an area covering 6.500 hectares. Tours take you through the Eichsfeld region, the Rhön and the Thuringian Forest. Border museums await visitors to allow insights into the time of Germany's separation and life at the border.

Little Berlin in Southern Thuringia

Mödlareuth in Southern Thuringia is often called 'Little Berlin'. Just like its much bigger namesake it had been split into two halves by a wall for decades. The village had long had a Bavarian and a Thuringian part, with the little Tannbach marking the border line.

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After World War II, this became a problem: the Bavarian part came under American administration whereas the Thuringian part was incorporated into the Soviet zone. Today, about 100 metres of the wall in 'Little Berlin' are preserved as a monument. They belong to the German-German Museum in the village. Annually about 80,000 people visit Mödlareuth, which only has around 40 inhabitants.

Rural idyll in the Eichsfeld: Hof Sickenberg

A terrace amid a romantic farmer's garden, home-baked cakes, vegetables and fruit from the garden and the scent of fresh-baked bread in the air: Hof Sickenberg in the Eichsfeld is a rural idyll. The 200-year old farm house used to stand right at the separation line between East and West. For a long time, the timber-framed building had been left to decay, until after the unification of Germany Kristina Bauer, an agricultural engineer from Göttingen, bought the building and turned it into a picturesque pension with café. Now it has become an insider tip for romantics and a beautiful place to rest your soul in the middle of nature. Not far from the historical farm yard is the border museum Schiffersgrund. It shows old military vehicles and helicopters from East German times along with the longest preserved part of East German border installations.

Point Alpha – the hottest spot in the Cold War

Point Alpha was the name of a US observation post in the so-called 'Fulda gap', the hottest spot in the Cold War, where NATO expected the Warsaw Pact to strike in a worst-case scenario. Today located at the Green Belt, the observation post and the old border installations form a memorial and a museum. A hiking path takes you there and to the 'House on the Border' museum. The exhibition focuses on everyday life at the border and shows watch towers, border installations, photographs and documents. The 14.6 km long hiking path leads along the 'route of hope', where 14 monumental sculptures by artist Ulrich Barnickel mark a stretch of the former death strip between Hesse and Thuringia.

For a sustainable future

Treasure chamber of nature and memorial for later generations: Thuringia's Green Belt attracts above all visitors who seek intensive experiences, a dialogue with nature away from mass tourism. Traditional agricultural management plays an important role here, and 'green' local concepts' help develop a sustainable tourism to the region. Nature forms a comforting contrast to the past. And the fact that the traces of the German separation are beginning to disappear under a carpet of trees and wild plants stands symbolically for the power of the good and the hope that it will overcome the evil, eventually.

Information and brochures on the holiday state of Thuringia, accommodation and travel programmes, event information, tickets and last-minute offers are available from the Thuringia Tourist Board on the hotline +49 (0) 361-37420 or on the internet at www.visit-thuringia.com.

Thüringer Tourismus GmbH (TTG)

The company Thüringer Tourismus GmbH (TTG) is the tourism marketing organisation of the Free State of Thuringia. Its main activities and objectives include external marketing, image and product advertising and providing services in the tourism market. With nearly 10 million overnight stays, a gross turnover of more than 3.1 billion euros and over 100,000 jobs, the tourism industry represents an important economic factor for the state. The State of Thuringia is the sole shareholder of the company Thüringer Tourismus GmbH.

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