

## Press Release

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# Christmas country Thuringia

Many Christmas traditions originated in Thuringia: including both the Christmas tree as such as well as the Christmas tree decorations, or also many classic Christmas carols. Hardly surprising, then, that Christmas is a very important season in Thuringia.

## Lauscha: the birthplace of the Christmas bauble

Lauscha is a small town on the southern end of the Rennsteig trail. Its main claim to fame, however, is the fact that the Christmas bauble was invented here. According to the legend, the Lauscha glassblowers were too poor to decorate their Christmas trees with nuts or apples. One of them therefore resorted to copying the fruit in glass. The first written record that mentions Christmas baubles dates back to 1847. However, it would take another 20 years to develop the technology that made it possible to mass produce thin-walled large baubles. The Thuringians received kick-start support from the USA: around 1880, F. W. Woolworth heard of the precious glass decorations and sold them for a whopping 25 dollars apiece in his shop in Pennsylvania. Around 1900, by which time Woolworth's had become a chain of department stores, the glittering baubles, angels, Santas and other variations of the theme in glass had already conquered the world. The Museum für Glaskunst in Lauscha is dedicated to the art of glassblowing and documents this successful episode in the region's history. The museum visitors can also learn how glassblowing developed here since the early modern age. Numerous companies in the region still make and decorate Christmas decorations by hand to this day. Glassblowers invite you into their workshops, where their fragile works of art are for sale. For the past 150 years, the stained glass works, where visitors can see the glass tubes and rods used by the local industry being made, have been the beating heart of the glassblower town Lauscha.

## A gherkin on the Christmas tree

Sometimes, things go together that have nothing in common all, at first glance. Like a pickled gherkin and Christmas, for example. However, a closer look reveals the obvious connection, as it is an old tradition to hang a pickled gherkin onto the Christmas tree as decoration. Its green colour makes it difficult to spot, but the first one to find it without touching the tree is also the first one to get their present. The first Christmas pickle, the "original gherkin", so to speak, was apparently blown in Lauscha in Thuringia way back in 1900. They are still genuinely handmade in the old traditional way here.

## Thuringian lady exported the Christmas tree tradition

The fact that the Christmas tree became famous all over the world is down to a lady from Thuringia. Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen (1792-1849) was Queen of the United Kingdom for seven years, and brought the German Christmas tree to Great Britain, to the delight of her numerous nieces and nephews. It is thanks to her that the Christmas tree became famous all over the world. Adelaide grew up in the theatre town of Meiningen in Elisabethenburg Palace, where the Blue Cabinet was furnished in honour of her memory.

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### Classic carols from Thuringia

Many German carols are well-known all over the world: "O Christmas Tree", "Alle Jahre wieder", and the famous "Weißt du, wieviel Sternlein stehen", and some of the best-known and most popular of these originated in Thuringia. "O Christmas Tree" was turned into a Christmas Carol by Ernst Anschütz; the other two songs were penned by the Thuringian Wilhelm Hey and by Martin Luther. You will also hear the song "O du fröhliche" being played almost permanently at the German Christmas markets. The lyrics of the first verse were written by Johannes Daniel Falk, an author and educator who lived in Weimar. During Weimar's occupation by Napoleon's troops, he had lost four of his seven children within only a few months, which prompted him to establish the "Society of Friends in Need". This charitable institution took in children and youths who had lost their parents and homes due to the war. In 1815, Falk wrote the lyrics to "O du fröhliche, o du selige, gnadenbringende Weihnachtszeit" for the children in his care, setting the words to the melody of a Sicilian fisherman's song. A member of his staff later added two further verses.

### The tradition of singing under the Christmas tree also began in Thuringia

Talking about Christmas carols and the fact that they are often sung under the Christmas tree: this tradition also originated in Thuringia. In 1815, the bookseller Hoffmann put up a Christmas tree on Weimar's market square for the poor children of the town. This was the first time a Christmas tree was put up in a public place in Germany, and the custom soon spread beyond the town's borders.

### Christmas stollen, a.k.a. "Schittchen" in Thuringia

In Thuringia, stollen is an essential Advent treat, although it is known as "Erfurter Schittchen" here. The first written records of the Thuringian Christmas stollen date back to 1329, making it one of the oldest in Germany. The establishment of a dedicated protection society, the "Thüringer Stollenverband", and the fact that a "Thuringian stollen queen" is chosen every year prove the importance of this culinary tradition to the locals.

### New and unique Christmas-themed holiday region

In March 2021, the German National Commission for UNESCO honoured the manufacture of mouth-blown glass Christmas decorations in Lauscha by declaring this artisan craft a part of Germany's intangible cultural heritage. A high accolade for the region, and also a motivation for future projects such as "Weihnachtsland am Rennsteig ®", a new and unique Christmas-themed holiday region currently under development in South Thuringia in order to highlight the local traditions and their history. It will open officially for the locals and visitors from elsewhere in December 2023.

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](http://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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