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A Stars and Stripes Community Publication

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PLAN AHEAD

By Katie Wells



BAVARIA

Dachau Volksfest

AUG. 9–18, 2025

This folk festival is one of Bavaria's most popular, hosting over 300,000 people each year. It has its origins in horse races first held in 1652 and maintains the old Bavarian folk festival experience for modern-day visitors, located in the center of Dachau at the foot of the Old Town Hill. There will be a wide range of shows and fair rides for children and adults each day. On Aug. 15, visitors can partake or cheer from the sidelines as the annual international bicycle race around the historic old town takes place for the Assumption of Mary holiday. Don't miss an impressive, colorful fireworks display above Dachau Castle; it's a crowd favorite.



KAISERSLAUTERN

Middle Moselle Wine Festival, Bernkastel-Keus

SEPT. 4–8, 2025

An easy day trip one and a half hours from the KMC, this is one of the most popular wine festivals to attend. The highlight is trying local wines from the Moselle region which lies along the wine route. The program includes plenty of other attractions like the traditional Moselle Flower Evening as well as a grand parade and a magical fireworks display. There will be live music spread across five stages while you sip wine and enjoy tasty festival food like *kartoffelpuffer* mit *apfelmus* (potato pancakes with freshly made apple sauce). If you attend on Friday, don't miss the coronation of the new *Mosella*, the wine queen of Bernkastel-Keus.



STUTTGART

Lab Fest, Stuttgart

AUG. 29–31, 2025

Every year for over 40 years, this volunteer-based and free family-friendly music festival takes place during the last weekend in August at the Berger Festplatz in the Lower Castle Garden. Musicians and artists perform a mix of different music in the garden tent for thousands of visitors. Musical genres include blues, singer-songwriter, jazz and world music. In true festival fashion, there will also be cabaret, plenty of culinary delights from around the world to try and an arts and crafts market where visitors can leisurely shop handmade, regional items. On Saturday and Sunday there will be children's theatre performances, face painting, a circus and a play area.



WIESBADEN

Mainfest, Frankfurt

AUG. 1–4, 2025

The Main Festival in Frankfurt takes place right on the banks of the River Main. The festival reflects the blended culture and liveliness of the city. Traditionally, it was a fishing festival that "paid homage to the river and its bounty." There will be plenty of festival traditions for young and old including rides, regional food and cultural programs. Additionally, there is a fishermen's joust where courageous participants dressed in historical costumes compete against one another with long wooden poles while balancing in boats. Try "ox on the spit" (a specialty roasted ox) and sip wine from the fountain of justice, where wine instead of water flows from a historical city fountain. You can also shop from many market stalls selling handmade and regional items. ■

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The Medieval Waldumgang



©MATTHIAS CS DREYER/KULADIG.DE

By Kat Nickola

The image above is the back of a **Notgeld** issued by the Kaiserslautern government in the year 1923. Notgeld was emergency money printed to counteract inflation and currency shortages during World War I. On it, they have chosen to highlight one of the city's unique medieval traditions: the **Waldumgang** (and its interesting spanking ritual).

During the Middle Ages, every ten years or so, walks around the forest boundary were held in Kaiserslautern and other villages whose citizens had woodland rights. These forest walks are called a "Waldumgang" and the first one in Kaiserslautern is documented in 1514.



The goal of a Waldumgang was to remind the youth of the village, especially the young men, about their responsibility to maintain the forest borders for use by the citizens. **Stone markers** in the woods marked out the perimeter of the city forest, and they were checked during the walk.

As part of the tradition, one of the young men (we assume they took turns) had to bend over each stone to receive three spanks by the city mayor. He used a switch made from layered beech wood that was supposedly more loud than painful. Why? We can only guess that it was a multi-sensory way to beat that location, and the importance of the forest, into their memory.

You can still find these boundary stones and other interesting stone monuments in the forests south of Kaiserslautern, and around other towns, while hiking in the woods today. ■

Visit Kaiserslautern's free Wildpark for a glimpse at the forest's native creatures.

Scan here for more information.



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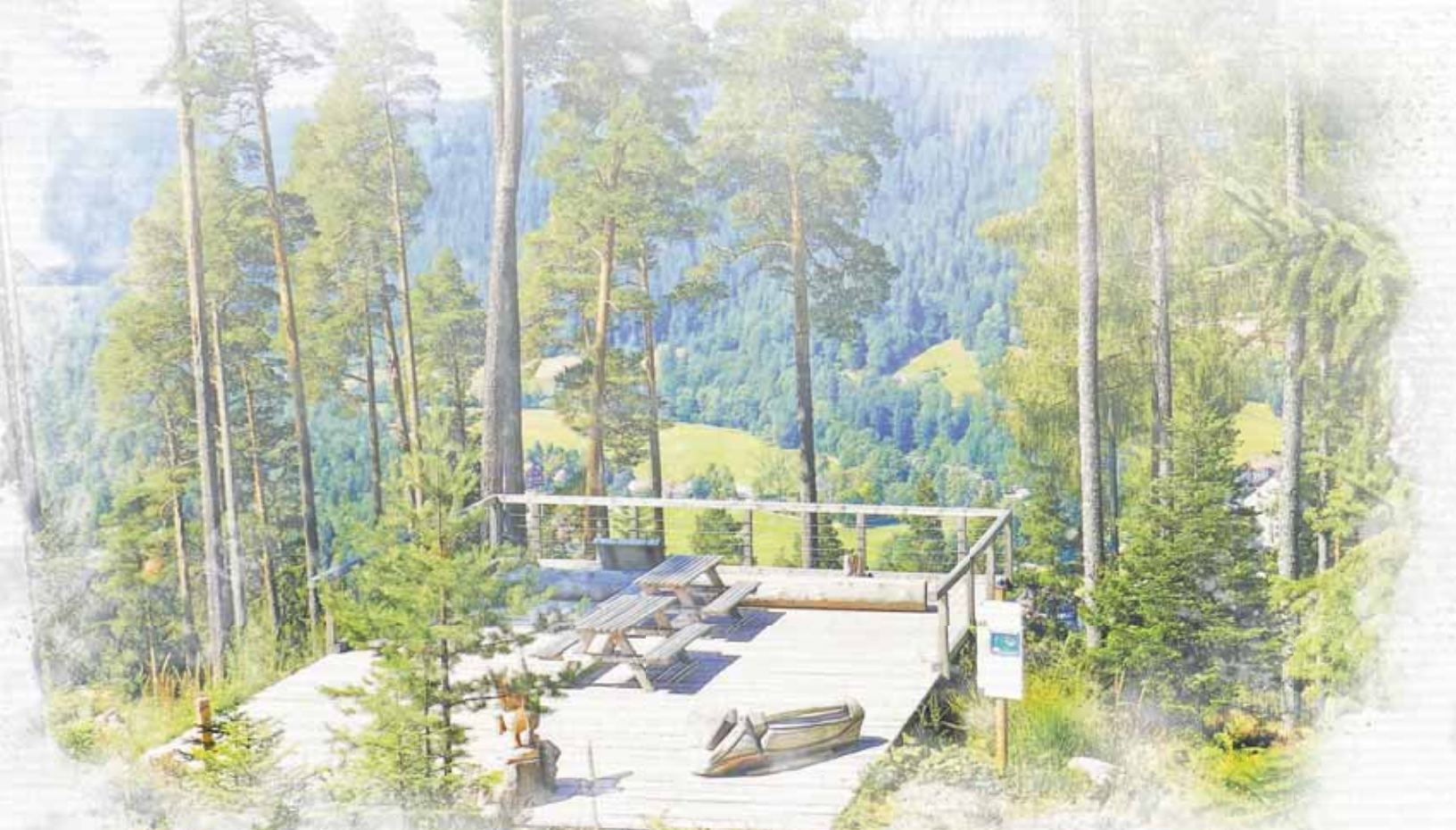
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Sylvia Holzapfel





Themed Forest Hikes

NEAR BAVARIA AND STUTTGART

By Katie Wells

Across Germany, forests are cherished. Whether it's a beautiful sunny day or pouring down rain, Germans will stroll, bike and explore in nature. In Bavaria and surrounding Stuttgart, forests become even more interesting with themed hikes.



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The Philosopher's Trail

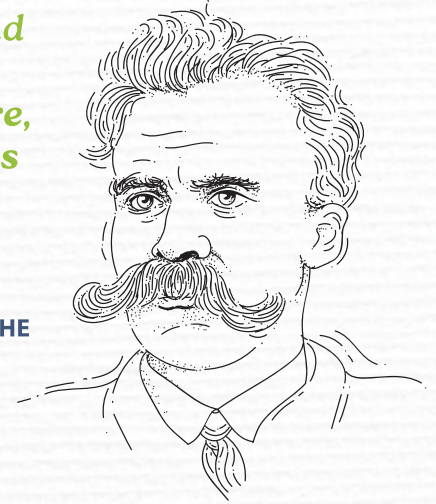
GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN

Distance: 4.6 km | Walking time: 1.5–2 hours

Throughout history it is often found that philosophers spent much time promenading in places of natural beauty, perhaps to help them think and conceptualize their theories on the meaning of life. The Philosopher's Trail is a tranquil path from **St. Anton** to **Farchant** leading through meadows and forest that offers views of the **Zugspitze**, the highest peak in Germany, and the city of **Garmisch-Partenkirchen**. There are water features along the way like waterfalls and streams. You can take a break to reflect as you dip your feet in a clear canal while sitting on cooling stones. To honor some of the world's past greatest thinkers, benches along the trail are inscribed with famous quotes from philosophers like Nietzsche, Plato and Schopenhauer. This path is lovingly maintained during all seasons and is accessible by wheelchair.

“We are so fond of being out among nature, because it has no opinions about us.”

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE



Der Sagenhafte Bergwald

GRAINAU, BAVARIA

Distance: 3 km | Walking time: 2 hours

Step into the legendary mountain forest and indulge in stories and tales about the **Höllental**, or “valley of hell,” whose scary name doesn't match this light-hearted and enchanting family-friendly hiking trail. As you traverse along, keep your eye out for the entrance to the dwarven kingdom hidden within gnarling tree branches, stick your head through a hole in a wood-carved bear, search for guarded treasure, or perhaps you will meet a fairy who grants wishes.

The trail starts with an interactive climbing path, then there are plenty of stations to take a rest or snack break. A great resting spot is in a bark-covered **Holzerkobel**, or woodcutters hut, where lumberjacks used to live. Next, part of the trail leads through what used to be the **Royal Bavarian Mountain Forest**, belonging to kings Maximilian II and Ludwig II for hunting. The forest is full of lush trees, streams and interesting sculptures.

For those still learning German, use a translator app and pick up a free brochure from the tourist office to read about the lore and fairytales at each stop along the path. For children, the little bear from **Waxenstein**, Waxl, has come up with a puzzle to solve along the way. You can also download a copy at grainau.de/themenwege-genusswandern. ■



The Blueberry Trail Enzklösterle

BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG

Distance: 12.7 km | Walking time: 3.5–4 hours

The **Black Forest** is famous because of Grimms' fairy tales. I like to think a trail such as this one, speckled with tasty blueberries, inspired the story of Hansel and Gretel. Much like candy, a hike where one can nibble on sweet, bright berries may result in traveling far into a forest before realizing it. When the blueberries ripen in July, **Enzklösterle**, also referred to as “The Blueberry Village,” celebrates for an entire week with a Blueberry Festival.

The loop trail is declared to be a Black Forest gourmet trail, where hikers can enjoy snacking on and collecting the delicious fruit along the way. Paired with the berries, the hike offers panoramic views of the **Enz Valley** and a pleasant walk through the pine forest. The blue forest fruit, or “blue gold” secures the livelihood of families of the village in the summer. If you can't get enough of the fruit, the **Blueberry House** on Wildbader Straße sells delicacies and items made from blueberries. Visit enzkloesterle.de to find out more about the festival.



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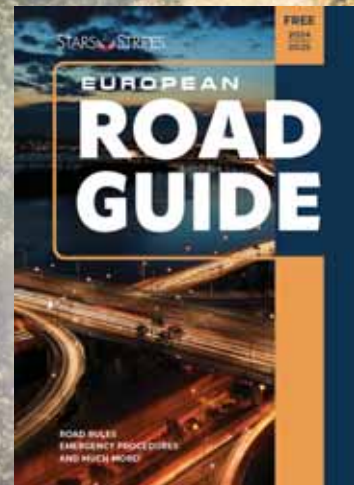


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GERMANY'S LOVE *f* FORESTS

By Kat Nickola

Like most groups, any gathering of German citizens will find people who disagree on everything from politics to diet, however what they will find consensus on is the value of German forests. More than just locations for recreation or an environmental green lung (though they very much are revered as such), forests hold a deeper, nearly mythological, space within the German psyche. The woods seem to represent a cultural homeland, a place where all people can go to be in touch with their origins and nature.

BROTHERS GRIMM

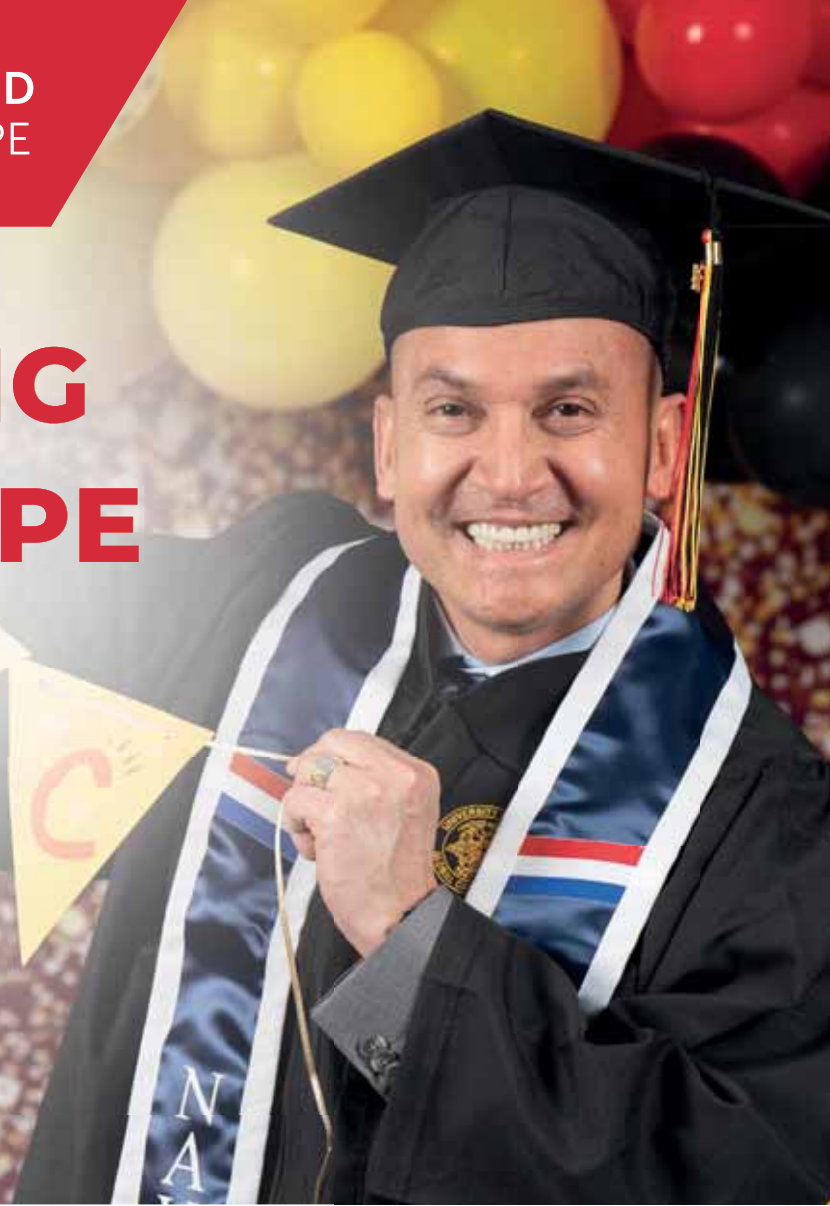
Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm are best known today for their publication of folk tales, though they were also astute historians of language and mythology. Over half of the stories in their collections took place in forests.

Visit the “fairytale forest” of Reinhardswald in north-central Germany to explore the region where the Grimm brothers collected many of their stories. Stop in at Rapunzel’s tower in Trendelburg, or visit Sleeping Beauty’s castle in Sababurg. (naturpark-reinhardswald.de)



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The romanticism of walking in the woods, appreciating a sacred grove, experiencing nature at its purest and touching the roots of mythology is as near to German patriotism as you can get.”



Trees essentially grew everywhere in Germany until the Middle Ages when land ownership shifted toward the elite members of society, including wealthy nobility, feudal lords and large church-held estates. Forests suffered as more land was cleared for farming and lumber became a commodity. Nonetheless, even by the mid-1200s, many towns had limits on forest usage that could be considered sustainable management. Forest income and hunting privileges were only a benefit for the elite. However, in some places like the Stadtwald of Kaiserslautern, certain grazing and gathering rights were given even to the lowliest of peasants and are still in place for citizens today.

For a medieval forest experience, you cannot beat a visit to the Black Forest National Park. Named by the local tribes for its dark and formidable density, the area is still only dotted with small villages tucked into the woods. You cannot go wrong staying in Gengenbach or Schiltach, with a day trip to Freiburg to feel like a peasant of the Middle Ages visiting the big walled city. (national-park-schwarzwald.de)

Industrialization of the 1700s saw an utter collapse of German forests. Mining was the biggest culprit as wood was needed to burn in smelting factories. The effects were so dramatic that in 1713 Hans Carl von Carlowitz of Leipzig created the first forest sustainability plan (he even coined the term “sustainable use”) in an effort to counteract the long-term negative environmental effects. This environmental consciousness, especially when it comes to woodlands, is still an ingrained ideology throughout Germany. Elementary schools visit forest classrooms and kids grow up spending school time building structures from fallen branches out in the nearest woods.

To backpack into the forests of Germany for wild camping, you must reserve a Trekking Campsite at one of 15 national or regional parks. Try the Hunsrück National Park (nlphh.de) west of Wiesbaden, the Franconian Forest (trekking-bayern.de) north of Grafenwöhr, the Pfälzerwald (trekking-pfalz.de) south of the KMC, or the Upper Danube Nature Park (trekking-obere-donau.de) south of Stuttgart.

Forests define Germany. While there are many patriotic themes that Germans seem to steer clear of for fear of leaning too far into former nationalist ideas, there isn't a faux pas in taking pride in the Germanness of forest veneration. The Nazi party used forest-based propaganda with trees planted in the shape of swastikas and Olympic Oaks, or “Hitler Oaks,” were given to gold medal winners of the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin. Despite that, devotion to woodlands seems to have shed any long-lasting negative correlation and has risen above any particular political association. The romanticism of walking in the woods, appreciating a sacred grove, experiencing nature at its purest and touching the roots of mythology is as near to German patriotism as you can get. ■

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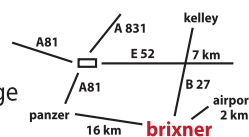


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What is the flavor of **WALDMEISTER?**

..... By Karen Bradbury

Have you ever looked up an unfamiliar German word in a dictionary, only to find its English translation leaving you every bit as baffled as you were to begin with?

That might well be the case if you were to look up the word “Waldmeister.” It turns out this stuff is called “woodruff” in English.

Waldmeister = Woodruff

Great. But what on earth is it?

It turns out, this flowering plant is native to much of Europe, from Ireland to Spain and as far east as Siberia. Although it grows in the wild, it is also widely cultivated for its flowers and sweet-smelling leaves. The plant owes its unique and pleasing smell to an aromatic organic chemical compound known as coumarin, an odor that’s also associated with vanilla beans and cinnamon.



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Waldmeister looks back upon a rich history of use in medicine and religious ceremony, and even today, it finds its way into a variety of German drinks and foodstuffs. As it can be toxic in large doses, it's always best to exercise moderation when using the natural plant.

Here are just a handful of places to be on the lookout for this flavor largely unfamiliar to American taste buds:

ICE CREAM: Waldmeister is one of the more intriguing flavors you'll find as an option for your next scoop of gelato. It has a citrusy pine taste that reminds you of the woods.



BEER: In the beer gardens of Berlin, a common treat is a weisse, a sourish wheat beer. To sweeten it up, bright green Waldmeister syrup is often added. This beer is served with a straw, enabling the drinker to swirl the syrup around. To try this at home, reach for the beer known as a Berliner Kindl Weisse Waldmeister.

CANDY: Waldmeister is a flavor option in many types of hard candies and the ever-popular gummy bear. Stands selling hard candies at markets will offer this among their more adventurous options.

TEA: Waldmeister tea is used a remedy for headaches and migraine, as well as insomnia.



MAIBOWLE COCKTAILS: On April 30, Germans across the land stay up late to celebrate **Walpurgisnacht**, an evening to celebrate the arrival of spring with fire, witchy pranks and traditions, maypoles and dancing into the month of May. The Maibowle is the beverage of choice on this wild night. To concoct a hefty portion, add two or three spoonfuls of Waldmeister syrup to one bottle of dry white wine mixed with half a bottle of sparkling white wine (Sekt). Add a spoonful of brown sugar and one stem each of fresh mint and lemon balm, plus a couple slices of lemon. Enjoy chilled, secure in the knowledge that spring has sprung, and the best months of the year lie ahead.

So, now you know! Waldmeister is a delicious taste of the forest. ■



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INTERLAKEN, SWITZERLAND

Photo by Cindy Toukan



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