

Harz Mountains



The Harz Mountains rise picturesquely from the North German Plain, covering an area 100km long and 30km wide at the junction of Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia and Lower Saxony. Although the scenery here is a far cry from the dramatic peaks and valleys of the Alps, the Harz region is a great year-round sports getaway, with plenty of opportunities for hiking, cycling and skiing (downhill and nordic) in and around the pretty Harz National Park.

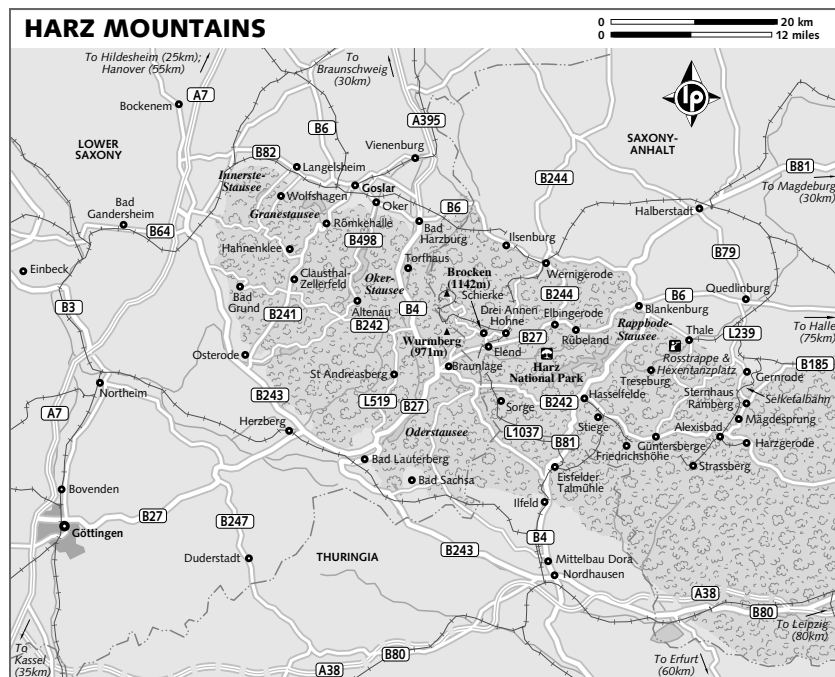
The regular influx of visitors in all seasons is testament to the enduring appeal of the Harz; historically, too, its status as a prime national holiday destination has never been questioned. From 1952 until reunification, the region was divided between West and East Germany, effectively becoming an uneasy political holiday camp straddling the Iron Curtain.

The Brocken (1142m) is the focal point, and has had more than its fair share of illustrious visitors: the great Goethe was frequently seen striding the local trails and set 'Walpurgisnacht', an early chapter of *Faust*, on the mountain, while satirical poet Heinrich Heine spent a well-oiled night here, as described in *Harzreise* (Harz Journey; 1824). Elsewhere the charming medieval towns of Wernigerode and Quedlinburg pull the crowds, while equally venerable steam trains pull them along between the mountain villages, spas and sports resorts that litter the region. Get out your knee socks or your ski mask and treat yourself to a taste of the active life.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Pagan Rituals** Trek to the Brocken or party on Hexentanzplatz, Thale, for Walpurgisnacht festival (p249)
- **Venues** Sleep in a Renaissance mansion, eat in a Gothic cellar and walk among 1400 half-timbered houses from over six centuries in Quedlinburg (p243)
- **Free Wheeling** Get on a mountain bike and pedal the forest trails (p240) behind Wernigerode in the Harz National Park
- **Mother Lode** Descend rocky shafts into the mining past in Clausthal-Zellerfeld (p238) and explore 1000 years of mining history in Goslar (p231)
- **Night Walks** Explore the Wernigerode Altstadt (p239) at night and marvel at the floodlit ducal castle
- **Mountain Steaming** Wind through the spectacular wilds of the Selketal from Quedlinburg or Gernrode on a steam train (p241)





Information

The main information centre for the Harz Mountains is the **Harzer Verkehrsverband** (☎ 05321-340 40) in Goslar, but information on the eastern Harz is best picked up in towns there, particularly in Wernigerode.

For information on camping, ask at any tourist office for the free *Der Harz Camping* brochure (in German), which lists major camping grounds and facilities that are open all year.

The kind of map that you choose will depend on the type of activity you have planned. *Der Harz und Kyffhäuser* map (€5.80) provides a good overview of trails and major sites in the entire Harz.

A local *Kurtaxe* (resort tax; ranging from €0.75 to €2.50 per night) is charged in most towns. Your resort card will give various discounts on sights and activities. Discount offers include the Harz Tour Card (three days, €14.50), which gives free travel and reduced admission to attractions, and the Harz-MobilCard (one month, €13), which entitles the user to concession-priced tickets on all public transport.

Activities

CYCLING

Anyone seeking a challenge will enjoy cycling or mountain biking in the Harz, especially in quieter eastern areas. Buses will transport your bike when space allows.

HIKING

The main attraction in summer is hiking the integrated trail network in the Harz National Park. Trail symbols are colour-coded in red, green, blue and yellow on a square or triangular plate. **Harzklub** (www.harzklub.de) hiking association maps also show trail numbers; the 1:50,000 editions are the best for hikers. Harzklub offices in mountain towns are also good sources of information, including hiking tips, itineraries and the availability of partners and guides. Tourist offices also stock the club's leaflets. Weather conditions can change quickly throughout the year; be prepared.

SKIING

The main centres for downhill skiing are Braunlage, Hahnenklee and St Andreasberg, with many other smaller runs dotted

throughout the mountains. The quality of the slopes might disappoint real enthusiasts; conditions for cross-country skiing, however, can be excellent, with lots of well-marked trails and equipment-hire shops. For weather reports and snow conditions, ring the **Harzer Verkehrsverband** (☎ 05321-340 40). There's also a German-language **information service** (☎ 05321-200 24).

SPAS

Often mocked by young Germans as a pensioners' paradise, the Harz is sprinkled with thermal spas and baths where the weary and/or infirm can take a cure. Most spa towns have a **Kurzentrum** (spa centre) or **Kurverwaltung** (spa administration), which often doubles as a tourist office.

Getting There & Away

The area's main towns of Goslar, Wernigerode and Quedlinburg are serviced by daily trains, with Hanover the nearest major hub for onward travel; contact **Deutsche Bahn** (☎ reservations 118 61, automated timetable information 0800-150 7090; www.bahn.de).

BerlinLinienBus (www.berlinlinienbus.de) runs to Goslar, and some smaller towns, from Berlin (€40), and there are plenty of regional bus services to take you further into the mountains.

If you're driving, the area's main arteries are the east-west B6 and the north-south B4, which are accessed via the A7 (skirting the western edge of the Harz on its way south from Hanover) and the A2 (running north of the Harz between Hanover and Berlin).

Getting Around

The Harz is one part of Germany where you'll rely on buses as much as trains, and the various local networks are fast and reliable. Narrow-gauge steam trains run to the Brocken and link major towns in the eastern Harz.

WESTERN HARZ

GOSLAR

☎ 05321 / pop 46,000

The hub of tourism in the Western Harz, Goslar has a charming medieval Altstadt, which, together with its historic Rammelsberg mine, is a Unesco World Heritage site.

Founded by Heinrich I in 922, the town's early importance centred on silver and the Kaiserpfalz, the seat of the Saxon kings from 1005 to 1219. It fell into decline after a second period of prosperity in the 14th and 15th centuries, reflecting the fortunes of the Harz as a whole, and relinquished its mine to Braunschweig in 1552 and then its soul to Prussia in 1802. The Altstadt, Rammelsberg mine and Kaiserpfalz attract visitors by the busload in summer, when it's always best to reserve ahead.

Orientation

Rosentorstrasse leads to the Markt, a 10-minute walk from the train and bus stations. The small Gose River flows through the centre south of the Markt. Streets in the old town are numbered up one side and down the other.

Information

Asklepios Harzkliniken (☎ 440; Kösliner Strasse 12) Medical services, about 6km north of town.

City-Textilpflege (☎ 242 77; Petersilienstrasse 9) Laundry.

Deutsche Bank (☎ 757 20; Fischemäckerstrasse 13) Bank services and ATM.

Harzer Verkehrsverband (☎ 340 40; www.harzinfo.de; Bäcker Gildehaus, Marktstrasse 45; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) Tourist information.

MuseumSpass (adult/child €9/4.50) This card gives admission to Goslar's major attractions (except the Rathaus).

Police (☎ 3390; Heinrich-Pieper-Strasse 1)

Post office (Klubgartenstrasse 10)

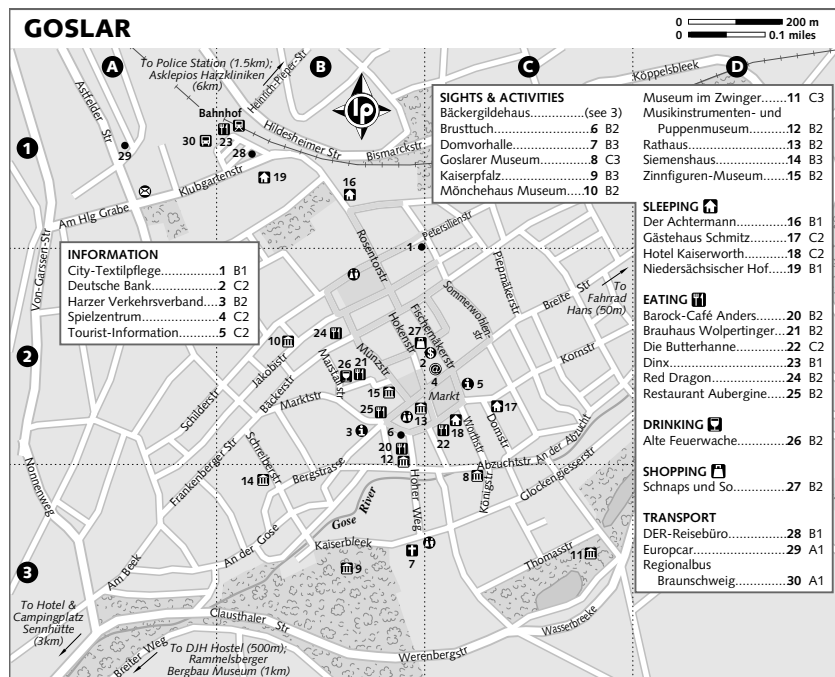
Spielzentrum (Breite Strasse; per hr €2.50) Internet access.

Tourist-Information (☎ 780 60; www.goslar.de; Markt 7; ☎ 9.15am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-4pm Sat, 9.30am-2pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9.15am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat Nov-Mar)

Sights

AROUND THE MARKT

One of the nicest things to do in Goslar is to wander through the historic streets around the Markt. **Hotel Kaiserworth** (p233) was erected in 1494 to house the textile guild, and sports almost life-size figures on its orange façade. The impressive late-Gothic **Rathaus** comes into its own at night, when light shining through stained-glass windows illuminates the stone-patterned town square. The highlight inside is a beautiful cycle of 16th-century religious



paintings in the **Huldigungssaal** (Hall of Homage; adult/child €3.50/1.50; ☎ 11am-3pm Apr-Oct).

The **market fountain**, crowned by an ungainly eagle symbolising Goslar's status as a free imperial city, dates from the 13th century; the eagle itself is a copy – the original is on show in the Goslarer Museum (opposite). Opposite the Rathaus is the **Glockenspiel**, a chiming clock depicting four scenes of mining in the area. It plays at 9am, noon, 3pm and 6pm.

The baroque **Siemenshaus** (☎ 780 620; Schreiberstrasse 12) is the 17th-century ancestral home of the Siemens industrial family, but the interior can only be viewed on tourist office tours or with advance notice. Like the **Brusttuch** (opposite), at Hoher Weg 1, and the **Bäckergildehaus**, on the corner of Marktstrasse and Bergstrasse, are two fine early 16th-century houses.

KAISERPfalz

Goslar's pride and joy is the reconstructed 11th-century Romanesque palace, **Kaiserpfalz** (☎ 311 9693; Kaiserbleek 6; adult/concession €4.50/2.50; ☎ 10am-5pm). After centuries of decline and neglect, the palace was resurrected in the 19th century and adorned with interior frescoes of

idealised historical scenes. On the southern side is **St Ulrich Chapel**, housing a sarcophagus containing the heart of Heinrich III. Below the Kaiserpfalz is the recently restored **Domvorhalle**, displaying the 11th-century Kaiserstuhl, the throne used by Salian and Hohenstaufen emperors. Behind the palace, in pleasant gardens, is an excellent sculpture by Henry Moore called the *Goslarer Krieger* (Goslar Warrior).

RAMMELSBERGER BERGBAU MUSEUM

About 1km south of the town centre, the shafts and buildings of this 1000-year-old **mine** (☎ 7500; www.rammelsberg.de; Bergtal 19; adult/concession €10/8; ☎ 9am-6pm, last admission 4.30pm) are now a museum and Unesco World Heritage site. Admission to the mine includes a German-language tour and a pamphlet with English explanations of the 18th- and 19th-century Roeder Shafts, the mine railway and the ore processing section. Bus 808 stops here.

OTHER MUSEUMS

The five-floor private **Musikinstrumenten- und Puppenmuseum** (☎ 269 45; Hoher Weg 5; adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 11am-5pm) will delight both kids and

fans of musical instruments and/or dolls. The owner began collecting instruments about 50 years ago; the doll collection is his daughter's addition.

The **Zinnfiguren-Museum** (☎ 258 89; Münzstrasse 11; adult/concession €3.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm) exhibits a colourful collection of painted pewter figures in a courtyard.

For a good overview of the natural and cultural history of Goslar and the Harz, visit the **Goslarer Museum** (☎ 433 94; Königstrasse 1; adult/concession €3/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar). One room contains the treasures from the former Goslar Dom (cathedral), and there's also a cabinet with coins dating from the 10th century. The original golden eagle from the fountain is also here.

The **Mönchehaus Museum** (☎ 295 70; Mönchestrasse 3; adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, to 1pm Sun), in a 16th-century half-timbered house, has changing exhibits of modern art, including works by the most recent winner of the prestigious Kaiserring art prize – past winners include Henry Moore, Joseph Beuys and Rebecca Horn. Look for the interesting sculptures in the peaceful garden.

For a real 'scream', take a look inside the **Museum im Zwinger** (☎ 431 40; www.zwinger.de; Thomasstrasse 2; adult/child €2/1.20; ☎ 10am-5pm, closed mid-Nov–Feb), a 16th-century tower that was once part of the ramparts, which has a collection of such late-medieval delights as torture implements, coats of armour and weapons used during the Peasant Wars.

Sleeping

DJH hostel (☎ 222 40; jh-goslar@djh-hannover.de; Rammelsberger Strasse 25; under/over 26yr €16.50/19.50; ☎) Take bus 808 to Theresienhof to reach this pretty hostel out near the mining museum. Facilities are excellent, with conference rooms, two- to eight-bed dorms, and barbecue and sports areas.

Hotel & Campingplatz Sennhütte (☎ 225 02; Clausthaler Strasse 28; s €21, d €42, adult/child €3.50/2, car/tent €2/2.50) This camping ground is 3km south of Goslar via the B241 (bus 830 to Sennhütte). The rooms are simple but clean, and it's advisable to reserve through the tourist office before setting out.

Gästehaus Schmitz (☎ 234 45; Kornstrasse 1; s/d €35/45) This slightly eccentric guesthouse is an excellent choice in the heart of town for those on low budgets or wanting an apartment. Book ahead.

Das Brusttuch (☎ 346 00; brusttuch.goslar@treff-hotels.de; Hoher Weg 1; s €63-71, d €81-112; ☎ ☎) The soft colours and smart rooms in this historic hotel make it a comfortable snooze-zone. It's very central and some rooms have double doors to the hallway.

Hotel Kaiserworth (☎ 7090; www.kaiserworth.de; Markt 3; s €66-96, d €117-177; ☎ ☎) This magnificent 500-year-old former merchant guild building has tasteful rooms and a good restaurant open daily from 6am to 11pm. For insomniacs and barflies there's the dungeon-like Dukaten Bar, which is open till 6am.

Niedersächsischer Hof (☎ 3160; www.niedersae-chsischer-hof-goslar.de; Rosentorstrasse 20; s €91, d €124; ☎ ☎) Opposite the train station, the 'Hof toys' with the idea of being an art hotel (the kids will love the piece near the foyer with the cindered toy cars) and has light rooms well insulated against the bustle outside. When you look closely, the art is thin on the ground, but there's still flair to be found in the rooms.

Der Achtermann (☎ 700 00; www.der-achtermann.de; Rosentorstrasse 20; s €99-119, d €145-165; ☎ ☎) The only drawbacks with this otherwise very good hotel are its sprawling size and the number of business conference guests buzzing in swarms between its ample amenities.

Eating & Drinking

Barock-Café Anders (☎ 238 14; Hoher Weg 4; cake from €2.30; ☎ 10am-6pm) The first thing that strikes you here is the wonderful smell of cakes and confectionery, the delicious specialities.

Dinx (☎ 383 488; Bahnhof; mains €5.50-12.50; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Thu, 8am-3am Fri & Sat, 10am-midnight Sun) Food ranges from the finger variety through to potatoes, vegetarian food and hearty steaks in this large restaurant and bar.

Red Dragon (☎ 709 659; Bäckerstrasse 18; mains €6.50-15; ☎ 10.30am-10.30pm Mon-Sat) The name and fittings at this restaurant point to China, it's Vietnamese-run, and the menu promises a *scharf* (hot) Thai-style beef stir-fry with chilli. It tastes great, even if it's not always clear where you stand on the culinary map.

Die Butterhanne (☎ 228 86; Marktkirchhof 3; mains €7-14; ☎ from 11am) The fare is traditional and regular here, the outdoor seating is nice and each Saturday the whole place becomes a throbbing nightspot from 10pm. The name refers to a famous local frieze showing a milkmaid churning butter while clutching her buttock to insult her employer – don't try it on disco night.

Brauhaus Wolpertinger (☎ 221 55; Marstallstrasse 1; mains €8.50-15; ☎ noon-2pm & 5pm-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-1am Sat, 10am-midnight Sun) This pub is a popular former brewery with lots of wood fittings inside. There's also outdoor seating in the forecourt and next door is the Alte Feuerwache (open 9pm till late Friday and Saturday), an affiliated bar for late-night drinking.

Restaurant Aubergine (☎ 421 36; www.aubergine-goslar.de; Marktstrasse 4; mains €13-19.50; ☎ noon-3pm & 5.30-11.30pm) The classiest act on the non-traditional side of town, this Mediterranean restaurant has earned a lot of kudos in the region and beyond.

Shopping

Hoher Weg has shops selling souvenirs, especially puppets and marionettes, many of them portraying witches.

Schnaps und So (☎ 396 636; Hokenstrasse 3) This is a great local booze store, but approach the Harz fruit wines and herbal schnapps with caution – some of them may leave you the worse for wear.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The office of **Regionalbus Braunschweig** (RBB; ☎ 194 49; www.rbb-bus.de; Bahnhof), from where buses depart, has free timetables for services throughout the Harz region. Buses 861 and 831 run between Goslar and Altenau in the south; 861 continues to St Andreasberg. Bus 830 runs to Clausthal-Zellerfeld via Hahnenklee. Trains are easier to get to Bad Harzburg, where you can take bus 810 to Torfhaus. The BEX BerlinLinienBus runs daily to Berlin (€40) via Magdeburg. For timetables and bookings, refer to **DER-Reisebüro** (☎ 757 90; Bahnhof).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The B6 runs north to Hildesheim and east to Bad Harzburg, Wernigerode and Quedlinburg. The north-south A7 is reached via the B82. For Hahnenklee, take the B241. Car rental is available at **Eurocar** (☎ 251 38; Lindenplan 3).

TRAIN

Bad Harzburg-Hanover trains stop here often, as do trains on the Braunschweig-Göttingen line. There are direct trains to Wernigerode (€7.60, 50 minutes, every two hours); for more frequent services change at Vienenburg.

Getting Around

Local bus tickets cost €1.90. To book a taxi, ring ☎ 1313. **Fahrrad Hans** (☎ 685 734; hans-speed@freenet.de; Breite Strasse 30-31) rents mountain and city bikes for €13 per day.

OKER VALLEY

The Oker Valley, which begins at Oker, a small industrial town now part of Goslar, is one of the prettiest in the western Harz. An 11km hike (marked with a red triangle) follows the course of the Oker River and leads to a 47-million-cu-metre **dam**, constructed in the 1950s to regulate water levels and generate power. Along the way you'll pass the 60m-high **Römkerhalle** waterfall, created in 1863. The B498 leads to the dam. If travelling by bus, take bus 806 or 810 to the Okertalsperre stop. **Okersee-Schiffahrt** (☎ 05329-811; www.okersee.de; ☎ Apr-Oct) runs boat trips and tours on the Oker lake.

HAHNENKLEE

☎ 05325 / pop 1300

Surrounded by forest some 12km southwest of Goslar, this small spa town is one of the more tasteful ski resorts in the Harz Mountains and makes a good base for summer hikes in the western Harz.

The **tourist office** (☎ 510 40; www.hahnenklee.de; Kurhausweg 7; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat & Sun May-Oct, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat Nov-Apr) is in the Kurverwaltung building off Rathausstrasse.

Sights & Activities

Apart from hiking and skiing, the main attraction in Hahnenklee is the unusual **Gustav-Adolf-Kirche** (Gustav-Adolf Church; 1907), a Norwegian-style wooden stave church with an interior of Byzantine and Scandinavian features.

In winter, most visitors come for the downhill and cross-country skiing on the Bocksberg. Day tickets for the **Seilbahn** (cable car) and lifts cost €17. **Snow-Fun** (☎ 2172) is the main equipment-hire place in town – head to Hindenburgstrasse 4 for nordic skis, and Rathausstrasse 6 for snowboards and alpine skis. The **Berghotel** (☎ 2505; An der Buchwiese 1) is another ski-hire option. **Hahnenklee Skischule** (☎ 0175-507 9138; Rathausstrasse 6), alongside the cable-car station, runs various ski courses.

Hahnenklee is also popular for its hiking, with trails leading to the Bocksberg from the

car park near the stave church, and longer trails to Goslar (trail 2G, blue dot, 11km) via Windsattel and Glockenberg. Remember to take the Harzclub 1:50,000 walking map and be prepared for changing weather conditions.

Sleeping & Eating

The tourist office has a free reservation service and can book apartments for longer stays.

DJH hostel (☎ 2256; jh-hahnenklee@djh-hannover.de; Hahnenklee Strasse 13; under/over 26yr €14.80/17.50; ☎) The 120-bed DJH hostel is about 2.5km south of town in Bockswiese. The rural flavour and outdoor summer seating area make it attractive.

Hotel Hahnenklee Hof (☎ 511 10; www.hahnenklee-leerhof.de; Parkstrasse 24a; s €57-77, d €114-124; ☎ ☎) This large hotel built in Swiss-chalet style caters for conference guests and tourists. It's a good option for those in wheelchairs, and it has one of the best eating options in town, with an informal café lounge and a panorama restaurant where German and international dishes can be enjoyed with a view over woodland.

Getting There & Away

Hahnenklee is just west of the B241, between Goslar and Clausthal-Zellerfeld. Bus 830 serves Hahnenklee from Goslar on the way to Clausthal-Zellerfeld. The BEX BerlinLinien-Bus stops here daily.

BAD HARZBURG

☎ 05322 / pop 258,000

This pretty spa town just 9km from Goslar is a magnet for visitors seeking health and curative spas. Unless you're one of the many cure-seekers, the main attraction will be the nearby Harz National Park and trails, which offer excellent access to some typically gorgeous Harz landscapes.

Information

Haus der Natur (☎ 784 337; Berliner Platz; adult/concession €2/1; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) Harz National Park information centre, with a small interactive exhibition that kids will enjoy most.

Spielpunkt (Herzog-Wilhelm-Strasse 42; per hr €2.50) Internet access.

Tourist-Information (☎ 753 30; www.bad-harzburg.de; Kurzentrum, Herzog-Wilhelm-Strasse 86; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun May-Oct, 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat Nov-Apr)

Activities

A pleasant thing to do is to hike or ride to **Grosser Burgberg**, a hill that sits above Bad Harzburg and has the ruins of an 11th-century fortress built by Heinrich IV. There's a 481m-long **cable car** (☎ 753 71; adult/child return €3/1.60; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Apr) that goes up to the fortress, and it can be reached by walking up Bummelallee to the Kurpark.

Marked hiking trails lead into the national park from Berliner Platz and Grosser Burgberg, the latter just over 3km from Berliner Platz on foot. Among the many walks are those from Berliner Platz to Sennhütte (1.3km), Mollkenhaus (3km) and scenic Rabenklippe (7km), overlooking the Ecker Valley. All destinations have restaurants; a board inside the cable-car station indicates which ones are open.

From Grosser Burgberg you can take the Kaiserweg trail, which leads to Torfhaus and connects to the Brocken. A marked trail also leads to the 23m-high **Radau Waterfall**, some 7km from Grosser Burgberg. If snow conditions are good, it's possible to ski cross-country to/from Torfhaus (p243), which has equipment-hire facilities.

Sleeping & Eating

Several good hotels are situated west of the tourist office on Am Stadtpark.

Villa Märchen (☎ 2672; www.villa-maerchen.de; Am Stadtpark 43; s €33.50-37, d €52-58; ☎) Rooms in this *pension* with friendly young management are spotless and have furnishings in light tones; some have a balcony.

Villa Feise (☎ 967 00; www.villa-feise.de; Rudolf-Huch-Strasse 20; s €40, d €65-70; ☎ ☎) Given its proximity to the promenade, this place is great value, offering much more comfort and style than some places that charge double the rate. If you don't have a room with a balcony, there's a nice garden down below.

Ringhotel Braunschweiger Hof (☎ 7880; www.hotel-braunschweiger-hof.de; Herzog-Wilhelm-Strasse 54; s €86-116, d €132-168; ☎ ☎ ☎) You can relax in the lap of luxury here, where you'll find fine rooms, lots of wellness deals, a lovely garden and a top-class restaurant downstairs (mains €11.50-48).

Hexenklause (☎ 2982; Berliner Platz 3; mains €8-16; ☎ 11am-10pm) This longtime local favourite serves traditional fare that's a notch above the pack along the promenade.

Getting There & Around

The Hauptbahnhof and bus station are on the northern side of town, a 10-minute walk from the pedestrian mall. Bus 810 leaves regularly for Goslar, and bus 877 heads for Wernigerode (€3.40, 50 minutes). Bus 820 shuttles almost hourly to Braunlage via Radau Waterfall and Torfhaus. Frequent train services link Bad Harzburg with Goslar, Hanover, Braunschweig and Wernigerode.

Bad Harzburg is on the A395 to Braun-schweig; the B4 and B6 lead to Torfhaus and Wernigerode, respectively.

BRAUNLAGE

☎ 05520 / pop 6000

Braunlage, though not the prettiest of Harz towns, is the area's largest winter-sports centre and is very popular with hikers in summer. The skiing here is the best in the region, although it can get crowded on the slopes when the snow is good.

Orientation

Braunlage's heart is the junction of Elbin-geröder Strasse and the main thoroughfare, Herzog-Wilhelm-Strasse. The latter changes names several times.

Information

Post office (Herzog-Wilhelm-Strasse 14) Post agency inside the souvenir shop.

Spielhalle (Elbingeröder Strasse 5; per 30 min €1.50; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 11am-11pm Sun) Internet access.

Tourist-Info (☎ 930 70; www.braunlage.de; Kurver-waltung, Elbingeröder Strasse 17; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat)

Volksbank (☎ 8030; Herzog-Wilhelm-Strasse 19) ATM.

Activities

HIKING

The tourist office has two good free leaflets: *Wandervorschläge Rund Um Braunlage* (Hiking Suggestions Around Braunlage), covering trails in the area and restaurant stops; and *Wanderwege Braunlage* (Braunlage Hiking Trails). If you are heading east, a trail follows the B27 to Elend (red triangle, 7km), where you can pick up the narrow-gauge railway to Wernigerode.

SKIING

A cable car will take you up the 971m **Wur-mberg**, from where you can ski down or use the three lifts on the mountain itself. Return

tickets cost €10.50. Downhill ski equipment can be rented at **Café-Restaurant Zur Seilbahn** (☎ 600) from €21 a day, or at one of the many ski shops dotted around town. Braunlage has several smaller pistes, groomed cross-country trails and a ski jump where high fliers can land on the former East German border (see boxed text, p242). Plenty of places in town offer cross-country skis for hire.

Sleeping & Eating

DJH hostel (☎ 2238; jh-braunlage@djh-hannover.de; Von-Langen-Strasse 28; under/over 26yr €15.30/18.30; ☎) This DJH *Jugendherberge* is central to town and located on the edge of spruce forest about 300m south of Elbingeröder Strasse, near hiking and skiing trails. Facilities are good for those travelling with babies.

Pension Parkblick (☎ 1237; Elbingeröder Strasse 13; s/d €25/50; ☎) The interior of this *pension* is dowdy and furnished like grandma's living room, but it's good value and very central.

Romantik Hotel Zur Tanne (☎ 931 20; www.tanne-braunlage.de; Herzog-Wilhelm-Strasse 8; s €52-149, d €80-199; ☎) The three categories of rooms in this hotel make it a crossover from the midrange to the high end. It begins with the rustic stuff and climbs to the giddy heights of luxury.

relaxa Hotel Harz-Wald Braunlage (☎ 8070; braunlage@relaxa-hotel.de; Karl-Röhrig-Strasse 5a; s €75, d €80-199; ☎) Located on the northern edge of town, this modern hotel has lots of wellness extras and free use of city bikes. Nonguests can hire mountain and city bikes here (€8 to €15 per day). Rooms come with balcony.

Omas Kaffeestube und Weinstube (☎ 2390; Elbingeröder Strasse 2; fortified coffee €4.50; ☎ 11am-6pm) Coffee with shots of firewater or liqueur is the speciality in this café, which serves cakes and some light meals in a very olde-worlde atmosphere.

Puppe Brotzeitstube (☎ 487; Am Brunnen 2; gourmet snacks €5-11.90; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-8pm Sun) This unusual gourmet sandwich shop does German-style open sandwiches with local cuts of ham, sausage and other products for eat-in, takeaway or picnic.

Getting There & Away

Bus 850 runs to St Andreasberg from the Von-Langen-Strasse or Eissporthalle stops. For Torfhaus and Bad Harzburg, take bus 820 from the Eissporthalle stop, which is

near Elbingeröder Strasse. The B4 runs north to Torfhaus and Bad Harzburg. The B27 leads southwest to the St Andreasberg turn-off and northeast to the eastern Harz.

ST ANDREASBERG

☎ 05582 / pop 2500

Known for its mining museums, clean air and hiking and skiing options, this resort sits on a broad ridge surrounded by wistful mountains, 10km west of Braunlage. St Andreasberg is a pleasant town that offers a quiet base for trips into the national park; it's wonderful to visit during a warm snowless spring or a 'golden October'.

The **tourist office** (☎ 803 36; www.sankt-andreas-berg.de; Am Kurpark 9; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 9am-12.30pm Wed, 10am-noon Sat, 11am-noon Sun Jan-Oct, 10am-noon Mon-Fri & 2-4pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri Nov-Dec) is in the split-level, wheelchair-friendly Kurverwaltung building.

Most shops close for several hours around noon.

Sights & Activities

German-language tours of the interesting **Grube Samson Mining Museum** (☎ 1249; tours €4.50; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm, tours at 11am & 2.30pm) take you 20m down to view early forms of mine transportation. Follow the signs from Dr-Willi-Bergmann-Strasse.

The nearby Catharina Neufang **tunnel** (admission €2.75; ☎ 1.45pm Mon-Sat) includes a mining demonstration, and the **Harzer Roller Kanariemuseum** (Canary Museum; admission adult/child €2.75/2; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4pm Sun) is probably worthy of its claim of being the world's only museum dedicated to canaries (used in the mines). The display takes you back to the 15th century, and the first miners' 'friends' came to St Andreasberg in 1730 with workers from Tyrol.

The skiing in St Andreasberg can be excellent. The closest piste is on **Mathias-Schmidt-Berg** (☎ 265); day passes cost €16 or you pay €1.50 per ride. You'll also find pistes that have lifts out of town on **Sonnenberg** (☎ 513). A company that rents out ski and snowboard equipment is **Sport Plätschke** (☎ 260; www.skischule-harz.de; Dr-Willi-Bergmann-Strasse 10).

Cross-country skiers should pick up the *Wintersportkarte* map (€1) from the tourist office, because it shows both groomed and ungroomed trails as well as some good ski hikes.

The Rehberger Grabenweg is a unique hiking trail that leads into the Harz National Park and to the **Rehberger Grabenhaus** (☎ 789; ☎ closed Mon), a forest café 3km from St Andreasberg and only accessible on foot. In the evening from late December to early March you can sit in the darkened café and watch wild deer feeding outside. To avoid disturbing the animals, visitors have to arrive by 5pm and aren't let out until 7pm. Bring a torch (flashlight) to find your way back.

There are exhibits on the area's cultural history, plus park information and a multimedia show in the **Nationalparkhaus** (☎ 923 074; www.nationalpark-harz.de; Erzwäsche 1; ☎ 9am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar).

Sleeping & Eating

Hostel (☎ 809 948; www.harz-herbergen.de; Am Gesehr 37; under/over 26yr €25/28) This independent hostel is popular with school and other groups. Prices include full board.

Pension Haus am Kurpark (☎ 1010; www.haus.am.kurpark.harz.de; Am Kurpark 1; s €23-31, d €40-56) Bears on scooters and skis on walls adorn this quiet, friendly and very well-run *pension* just outside the park. There's a choice of shared and private bathrooms.

Pension Holloch (☎ 1005; www.pension-holloch.harz.de; Glückauf-Weg 21; s €25-32, d €50-64) Most rooms have a balcony overlooking the valley and ski piste, so you can see who's breaking a leg – or someone else's – from this very comfortable, well-managed and friendly *pension*. Best to book ahead.

La Piazza (☎ 999 987; Schützenstrasse 35; pizza & pasta €5-7, mains €8.50-14; ☎ noon-3pm & 5.30-11pm) On the main street, this restaurant will give you the carbohydrate boost you need to tackle or recover from the pistes. The outdoor seating is popular in summer. For delivery the minimum order is €9.

Getting There & Away

Bus 850 runs between St Andreasberg and Braunlage. Bus 861 is a direct service that runs several times daily to Goslar. The frequent bus 840 runs to Clausthal-Zellerfeld.

St Andreasberg can be reached via the B27, which winds along the scenic Oder Valley from Bad Lauterberg to Braunlage. The L519 (Sonnenberg) leads north to the B242 and Clausthal-Zellerfeld, to the B4 and Bad Harzburg, and to Goslar (B241 or the B498 along the Oker Valley).

CLAUSTHAL-ZELLERFELD

☎ 05323 / pop 15,300

Formerly two settlements, this small university town was once the region's most important mining centre. Its main attractions are mineral and spiritual: an excellent mining museum and a spectacular wooden church. There are over 60 lakes in the vicinity, mostly created for the mines, and almost all are now suitable for swimming.

Orientation & Information

As in many similar linear towns in the Harz, Clausthal-Zellerfeld's main street changes names several times, with Kronenplatz as the hub. Clausthal lies to the south, while Zellerfeld begins just beyond Bahnhofstrasse, roughly 1km to the north.

The **tourist office** (☎ 810 24; www.harztourismus.com; Bergstrasse 31; ☹ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat) is near the Oberharzer Bergwerksmuseum, and **Harzklub HQ** (☎ 817 58; www.harzklub.de; ☹ 9am-noon Mon-Fri) is in the former train station, 10 and 15 minutes on foot respectively north of Kronenplatz.

Sights

The **Oberharzer Bergwerksmuseum** (☎ 989 50; www.oberharzerbergwerksmuseum.de; Bornhardtstrasse 16; adult/concession €4/2; ☹ 9am-5pm) has an interesting open-air exhibition of mine buildings and mining methods, including a horse-driven carousel that was used to power a lift into the mine. The museum has a good English-language brochure with background information and explanations on the different buildings, and there are tours in German (translators are available) that take you into the depths. A 26km underground viaduct used to drain one of the other mines in the region, and part of this was used to transport ore below ground in vessels to the Ottilia-Schacht shaft in Clausthal. Today an original miniature **train** (adult/child €4.50/2.25; ☹ at 11am Sat, 11am & 2pm Sun May-Oct), which was used to transport miners overland to the Ottilia-Schacht shaft, leaves from the former train station.

South of Kronenplatz and in the technical university is the **Geosammlung** (☎ 722 737; Adolph-Roemer-Strasse 2a; adult/concession €1.50/1; ☹ 9.30am-12.30pm Tue, Wed & Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Thu, 10am-1pm Sun), Germany's largest collection of mineral samples. It also has a section on evolution and fossils.

Very close by is the baroque **Marktkirche Zum Heiligen Geist** (☎ 7005; Hindenburgplatz 1; ☹ 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun), which was consecrated in 1642 and – another local record – is the country's largest wooden church. It is situated just off Adolph-Roemer-Strasse, opposite the imposing yellow Oberbergamt.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Zellerfelder Hof (☎ 3745; Marktstrasse 13; s/d €35/50; ☐) The singles are small, but otherwise this hotel in Zellerfeld, near the Oberharzer Bergwerksmuseum and tourist office, offers very good value and all the essential comforts. Steaks in the steakhouse downstairs start from €9.80.

Goldene Krone (☎ 9300; goldene.krone@t-online.de; Am Kronenplatz 3; s €50-65, d €75-120; ☐) Though moderately priced, this hotel is not only the best address in town, it's right in the middle of it. Rooms are bright, a very decent size and decorated in tasteful shades of blue. The Italian restaurant downstairs is one of the best around, too, with pasta, pizza and meat dishes (pasta €5.50, mains €9 to €14).

Restaurant Glück Auf (☎ 1616; An der Marktkirche 7; mains €9-15; ☹ 11.30am-2.30pm & 5.30-9.30pm Thu-Tue) This outstanding traditional restaurant established in 1720 is almost an attraction in itself: the historic banquet hall holds about 280 people and has galleries and even a stage at one end. The menu has a good choice of game. Downstairs is a surprise for the kids on the theme of Harz folk tales.

Getting There & Around

Regular bus services leave 'Bahnhof', the former train station, and Kronenplatz for Goslar (bus 830). Catch bus 840 for St Andreasberg and bus 831 for Altenau. The B241 leads north to Goslar and south to Osterode, while the B242 goes east to Braunlage and St Andreasberg. To reach the A7, take the B242 west.

EASTERN HARZ

WERNIGERODE

☎ 03943 / pop 35,000

A bustling, attractive town on the northern edge of the Harz, Wernigerode is a good starting point for exploring the eastern regions of the Harz National Park. The winding

streets of the Altstadt are flanked by pretty half-timbered houses, and high above the Altstadt hovers a romantic ducal castle from the 12th century.

History is carved deeply into the features of this town. During the early Middle Ages it was hampered by centuries of royal squabbles. Fires followed in the 15th and 16th centuries, changing the face of Wernigerode forever, and later the Thirty Years' War took its population to the brink and back.

Today it is the northern terminus of the steam-powered narrow-gauge Harzquerbahn (see boxed text, p241), which has chugged along the breadth of the Harz for almost a century; the line to the summit of the Brocken (1142m), northern Germany's highest mountain, also starts here.

Orientation

The bus and train stations are on the northern side of town at the end of Rudolf-Breitscheid-Strasse. The ducal castle is southeast of Markt.

Information

Harz-Klinikum Wernigerode (☎ 610; Ilsenburger Strasse 15) Medical services.

Police (☎ 6530; Nicolaiplatz 4)

Post office (nr Marktstrasse & Kanzleistrasse)

Spielcenter Jackpot (Johann-Sebastian-Bach-Strasse 5; per hr €3; ☹ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun) Internet access.

Volksbank (Breite Strasse 4) Banking services and ATM.

Wernigerode Tourismus (☎ 633 035; www.wernigerode-tourismus.de; Nicolaiplatz 1; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun May-Oct, 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Nov-Apr) Tourist information and room-booking service.

Zimmervermittlung und Information am Krummelschen Haus (☎ 606 000; Krummelschen Haus, Breite Strasse 72; ☹ 10am-6pm May-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Apr) Private tourist information and room-booking service.

Sights

ALTSTADT

The colourful and spectacular towered **Rathaus** on Markt began life as a theatre around 1277, but what you see today is mostly late-Gothic from the 16th century. The artisan who carved the town hall's 33 wooden figures was said to have fallen foul of the authorities and added a few mocking touches. The neo-Gothic **fountain** (1848) was

dedicated to charitable nobles, whose names and coats of arms are immortalised on it.

One of the prettiest half-timbered houses in town is in the cosy Oberpfarrkirchhof, which surrounds the **Sylvestrikirche**; here you'll find **Gadenstedtsches Haus** (1582), with its Renaissance oriel. The **Harz Museum** (☎ 654 454; Klint 10; adult/concession €2/1.30; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), a short walk away, has some interesting exhibits on local geology, history and half-timbered houses.

Crossing Markt to Breite Strasse, the pretty **Café Wien** building (1583) at No 4 is a worthwhile stopover for both architectural and gastronomic reasons. The carved façade of the **Krummelsches Haus** depicts various countries symbolically; America is portrayed, reasonably enough, as a naked woman riding an armadillo.

Nearby is the **Krell'sche Schmiede** (☎ 601 772; www.schmiedemuseum-wernigerode.de; Breite Strasse 95; adult/concession €2.50/1.50; ☹ 10am-2pm Sat), a historic smithy built in 1678 in the south German baroque style.

Just off Breite Strasse you'll find the **Feuerwehrmuseum** (Fire Brigade Museum; ☎ 654 450; Steingrube 3; ☹ 2.30-4.30pm Thu, 2.30-5pm Sat), a collection of fire-fighting machines from 1890 onwards staffed by volunteers of almost the same vintage!

SCHLOSS

Originally built in the 12th century to protect German Kaisers on hunting expeditions in the Harz, **Schloss Wernigerode** (☎ 553 030; www.schloss-wernigerode.de; adult/concession/child €4.50/4/2.50; ☹ 10am-6pm May-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, to 6pm Sat & Sun Nov-Apr) was enlarged over the years to reflect late-Gothic and Renaissance tastes. Its fairy-tale façade came courtesy of Count Otto of Stolberg-Wernigerode in the 19th century. The museum inside includes portraits of Kaisers, beautiful panelled rooms with original furnishings and the opulent **Festsaal** (Banquet Hall).

The stunning **Schlosskirche** (1880) has an altar and pulpit made of French marble. You can climb the castle **tower** (admission €1), but the views from the castle or restaurant terrace (best appreciated late in the day) are free and just as spectacular.

You can walk (1.5km) or take a Bimmelbahn wagon ride (adult/child €4.50/2 return) from Marktstrasse. In summer, horse-drawn carts make the trek from Markt.

Activities

The beautiful deciduous **forest** behind the castle is crisscrossed with lovely trails and *Forstwege* (forestry tracks). Wernigerode is also a good starting point for hikes and bike rides into the Harz National Park. **Bad-Bikes** (☎ 626 868; www.badbikes-online.de; Grosse Bergstrasse 3) rents mountain and city bikes for €7.50 per day.

Festivals & Events

The **Harz-Gebirgslauf** (☎ 633 329; www.harz-gebirgslauf.de) is an annual charity hiking and running event held on the second Saturday in October, including a Brocken marathon. An annual festival of music and theatre is held in the castle from early July to mid-August.

Sleeping

DJH hostel (☎ 606 176; jh-wernigerode@djh-sachsen-anhalt.de; Am Eichberg 5; dm under/over 26yr €15.50/18.20, s €28.50; ☒) On the edge of the forest about 2.5km west of town in Hasserode, the renovated DJH hostel has three- and four-bed dorms with bathrooms. Take bus 1 or 4 towards Hasserode.

Hotel und Restaurant zur Post (☎ 690 40; www.hotelzurpost.de; Marktstrasse 17; s/d €49/86; ☐) This is a very decent choice and great value, with bright rooms, a tiled floor and elegant furnishings in a half-timbered house.

AltWernigeroder Apparthotel (☎ 949 260; www.appart-hotel.de; Marktstrasse 14; s/d €51/75; ☐ ☒) This large hotel has bright and modern rooms in a former postal administrative building. There's a good sauna area and a potato restaurant downstairs.

Hotel am Anger (☎ 923 20; www.hotel-am-anger.de; Breite Strasse 92; s €50, d €90-112; ☐ ☒) Labyrinthine it may be, and there's an awful lot of pine forest in the 40 rooms, but this place is pleasant and some rooms have views of the castle.

Parkhotel Fischer (☎ 691 350; Mauergasse 1; s €55-65, d €90-105; ☐ ☒) The rooms are good, but it's the deliciously tranquil indoor swimming pool (plus sauna) with Roman-style pillars and a worrying rubber crocodile that are the magnet here.

Hotel Gothisches Haus (☎ 6750; gothisches-haus@travelcharme.com; Am Markt 1; s €94-114, d €136-196, ste €250-270; ☐ ☒) The warm Tuscan colours and thoughtful design of this luxury hotel make it very attractive. There's a log fire downstairs in the Kaminbar, and evening

restaurants and a wine cellar to explore. Note that suites have waterbeds.

Eating

Brauhaus (☎ 695 727; www.brauhaus-wernigerode.de; Breite Strasse 24; mains €7-14; ☒ 11.30am-late) This is an enormous, multilevel pub and bistro with meat and vegetarian dishes, and – on Saturday from 9pm – a dance floor upstairs. It's probably the best all-round option for a meal and drink, or to get down into Sunday morning.

Café am Markt & Lounge (☎ 604 030; Marktplatz 6-8; mains €7.50-12; ☒ 8am-late Mon-Sat, from 9am Sun) This interesting all-rounder started life as a café, but seems to have bred with an Italian restaurant next door (Baldinis; similar menu) to beget a small lounge area and occasional late-night venue (upstairs).

Altes Amtshaus (☎ 501 200; Burgberg 15; mains €7-18; ☒ 5-11pm Mon, 11.30am-11pm Tue-Sun) Game and traditional dishes for everyman are served in this former ducal courthouse with a lovely ambience.

Krummsches Haus (☎ 602 626; Breite Strasse 72; mains €8-13; ☒ 11am-11pm) Game, if you're game, beef and other meats, and Bohemian favourites are served at this traditional bistro in a building with a spectacular façade.

Weisser Hirsch (☎ 602 020; www.hotel-weisser-hirsch.de; Marktplatz 5; mains €10-27) The crisp white tablecloths and glistening cutlery offer a foretaste of what's to follow at this restaurant, which is the finest eating establishment in town. Expect tradition with a creative edge. Three- to five-course menus are also available (€23.50 to €43).

Drinking

Tommi's Pub (☎ 632 162; www.tommis-pub.de; Marktstrasse 5) You can enjoy a Guinness and watch a football match, or even catch a spot of Irish folk music, in this rustic pub about the size of a large living-room.

Humphrey (☎ 905 445; Grosse Bergstrasse 2a) Bog-art is the theme here: he does Cajun/Tex-Mex food, popular drinks and even has a personal dance space upstairs on Friday and Saturday nights where Sam spins it again.

Ars Vivendi (☎ 626 606; Bahnhofstrasse 33; ☒ from 8pm Fri & Sat) Beyond the muscle-clad bouncers you'll find a cocktail bar where the hopeful young, the restless old and the wistful in-betweens tug on straws while hanging onto the bar in décor that might jar.

NARROW-GAUGE RAILWAYS

Fans of old-time trains or unusual journeys will be in their element on any of the three narrow-gauge railways crossing the Harz. This 140km integrated network – the largest in Europe – is served by 25 steam and 10 diesel locomotives, which tackle gradients of up to 1:25 (40%) and curves as tight as 60m in radius. Most locomotives date from the 1950s, but eight historic models, some from as early as 1897, are proudly rolled out for special occasions.

The network, a legacy of the GDR, consists of three lines. The *Harzquerbahn* runs 60km on a north-south route between Wernigerode and Nordhausen. The serpentine 14km between Wernigerode and Drei Annen Hohne includes 72 bends; you'll get dropped off on the edge of Harz National Park.

From the junction at Drei Annen Hohne, the *Brockenbahn* begins the steep climb to Schierke and the Brocken. Direct services to the Brocken can also be picked up from Wernigerode and Nordhausen, or at stations en route; tickets cost €16/24 single/return from all stations.

The third service is the *Selketalbahn*, which begins in Quedlinburg and runs to Eisfelder Talmühle or Hasselfelde. At Eisfelder Tal, you can change trains for other lines. The picturesque *Selketalbahn* crosses the plain to Gerndorf and follows Wellbach, a creek with a couple of good swimming holes, through deciduous forest to Mägdesprung, before joining the Selke Valley and climbing past Alexisbad to high plains around Friedrichshöhe, Stiege and beyond.

Passes for three/five days cost €40/45 for adults (children half-price). Timetables and information can be picked up from **Harzer Schmalspurbahnen** (☎ 03943-5580; www.hsb-wr.de; Friedrichstrasse 151, Wernigerode).

Brauhaus (opposite) is an all-purpose bar and dance club.

Getting There & Away

Direct buses run to most major towns in this region; the timetable (€2) available from the **WVB bus office** (☎ 5640; www.wvb-gmbh.de; Hauptbahnhof) includes a train schedule. Bus 253 runs to Blankenburg and Thale, while bus 257 serves Drei Annen Hohne and Schierke.

There are frequent trains to Goslar (€7.60, 50 minutes) and Halle (€17, 1½ hours). Change at Halberstadt for Quedlinburg (€7.60, 50 minutes) and Thale (€9.10, one hour).

Getting Around

Buses 1 and 2 run from the bus station to the Rendezvous bus stop just north of the Markt, connecting with bus 3. Tickets cost €0.90. For a taxi, call ☎ 633 053.

RÜBELAND CAVES

Rübeland, a small town just 13km south of Wernigerode, has a couple of interesting **caves** (☎ 039454-491 32; www.harzer-hoehlen.de; adult/child €5/3.50; ☒ 9am-5.30pm Jul & Aug, 9am-4.30pm Feb-Jun & Sep-Oct, 9am-3.30pm Nov-Jan). Admission gets you a guided tour, in German, of either cave (note that only one is open from November to April).

Baumannshöhle was formed about 500,000 years ago, and the first tourists visited in 1646, just over a century after its 'rediscovery'. Human presence in the caves dates back 40,000 years. The Goethesaal, which has a pond, is sometimes used for concerts and plays.

Hermannshöhle was formed 350,000 years ago and was rediscovered in the 19th century. Its stalactites and stalagmites are spectacular, especially in the transparent Kristallkammer. Salamanders, introduced from southern Europe by researchers, inhabit one pond.

WVB bus 265 leaves Wernigerode for Rübeland hourly. You can join the magnificent Bodetal trail (blue triangle, 16km) to Thale at Rübeland, crossing the Rappbodetalsperre, a 106m-high dam wall across the Harz's largest reservoir, on foot.

If driving from Wernigerode, take the B244 south to Elbingerode, then the B27 east.

SCHIERKE

☎ 039455 / pop 1000

Situated at 650m in the hills at the foot of the Brocken and just 16km west of Wernigerode, Schierke is a lovely village and the last stop for the *Brockenbahn* before it climbs the summit. Schierke has an upper town on the main road to the Brocken and a lower town

BREAKFAST WITH A VIEW

Uncomfortably close to the Iron Curtain during the Cold War, Schierke was once sealed off from the outside world by a 5km restricted zone. Its inhabitants had to pass through strict control points to enter and leave. How strange it was, therefore, that Schierke was also a vantage point to watch ski jumpers zipping through capitalist air space from the ski jump in Braunlage. Jumpers used to land right on the border in those days. One or two tables in the breakfast room at the Waldschlösschen hotel (right) offer a distant view of the jump today.

down in the valley of the Kalte Bode River. It is also a popular starting point for exploring the Harz National Park and the home of the ubiquitous 'Schierker Feuerstein' *digestif*.

Information

DAV Basislager Brocken (☎ 515 46; www.dav-basislager-brocken.de; Mühlenweg 1; ☞ 9am-1pm) Local HQ of the German Alpine Club; offers outdoor sports and equipment hire.

Kurverwaltung (☎ 8680; Brockenstrasse 10; ☞ 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 2-4pm Sat, 10am-noon Sun) Tourist information.

Nationalparkhaus Schierke (☎ 814 44; Brockenstrasse 10; ☞ 8.30am-4.30pm) Hiking brochures and national park information.

Activities

Schierke is a popular place for climbing, offering all levels of difficulty on nearby cliffs. **DAV Basislager Brocken** (☎ 515 46; www.dav-basislager-brocken.de; Mühlenweg 1; ☞ 9am-1pm) hires out climbing gear, mountain bikes and snow shoes, as well as ski equipment for the 70km of groomed trails. Courses are also offered, and there's a climbing wall and abseiling area.

You can hike to the Brocken via the bitumen Brockenstrasse (12km), closed to private cars and motorcycles. More interesting is the 7km hike via Eckerloch. Pick up the free *Wanderführer 2* hiking guide from the Nationalparkhaus. Marked trails also lead to the rugged rock formations of Feuersteinklippen (30 minutes from the tourist office) and Schnarckerklippen (1½ hours).

Horse-drawn wagons travel from Schierke to the Brocken and cost adult/child €20/10

return. **Dirk Klaus** (☎ 512 12) also operates horse-drawn sleigh services in winter.

On the night of 30 April, Walpurgisnacht (see boxed text, p249), Schierke attracts about 25,000 visitors, most of whom set off on walking tracks to the Brocken.

Sleeping & Eating

There is plenty of accommodation in town, particularly along Borckenstrasse, but you may need to book ahead.

Hotel König (☎ 383; www.harz-hotel-koenig.de; Kirchberg 15; s €33-50, d €50-70) This hotel has a remarkable carved foyer and offers clean and comfortable rooms, with or without bathrooms (some have a veranda), and a decent restaurant.

Waldschlösschen (☎ 8670; www.waldschloesschen-schierke.de; Hermann-Löns-Weg 1; s €59, d €85-115; ☞ ☒) The best in town for service, comfort and facilities, this excellent hotel tacked onto a *Jugendstil* (Art Nouveau) villa has an Italian panorama-style restaurant and ultra-modern rooms. See the boxed text, left.

Getting There & Around

WVB bus 876 runs six times daily to Braunlage via Elend. Bus 257 between Wernigerode and Braunlage is also quite frequent and connects with the 876. Narrow-gauge railway services between Wernigerode and Schierke cost €5/9 single/return. Driving from the west, take the B27 from Braunlage and turn off at Elend. From Wernigerode, take Friedrichstrasse.

MITTELBAU DORA

From late in 1943, thousands of slave labourers (mostly Russian, French and Polish prisoners of war) toiled under horrific conditions digging tunnels in the chalk hills north of Nordhausen. From a 20km labyrinth of tunnels, they produced the V1 and V2 rockets that rained destruction on London, Antwerp and other cities during the final stages of WWII, when Hitler's grand plan became to conduct war from production plants below the ground.

The camp, called Mittelbau Dora, was created as a satellite of the Buchenwald concentration camp after British bombers destroyed the missile plants in Peenemünde in far northeastern Germany. During the last two years of the war, at least 20,000 prisoners died at Dora, many having survived Auschwitz only to be worked to death here.

The US army reached the gates in April 1945, cared for survivors and removed all missile equipment before turning the area over to the Russians two months later. Much of the technology was later employed in the US space programme.

After years of mouldering away in the GDR period, the memorial has gradually been improved over the years to give a deeper insight into the horror of Hitler's undertaking. In late 2006 a new exhibition building was opened with a multilingual library, a café and various new exhibits.

The horrible truth of the place permeates the memorial, and a visit may be among the most unforgettable experiences you have in Germany.

Orientation & Information

Mittelbau Dora is 5km north of Nordhausen, a dull town of interest only as regards changing trains.

Visitors have independent access to the grounds, crematorium and **museum** (☎ 03631-495 820; www.dora.de; admission free; ☞ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar). The tunnels, which are the diameter of an aircraft hangar, are accessible by guided tour. Within the dank walls you can see partially assembled rockets that have lain untouched for over 50 years.

Free 90-minute tours operate at 11am and 2pm from Tuesday to Friday, and at 11am, 1pm and 3pm on weekends (also 4pm April to September).

Getting There & Away

The *Harzquerbahn* links Nordhausen with Wernigerode (€9, 2¼ hours). The nearest stop to Dora is Nordhausen-Krimderode, which is served by almost hourly trains from Nordhausen-Nord (11 minutes), next to the main station.

From the Krimderode stop, cross the tracks and walk south along Goetheweg, which curves and becomes Kohnsteinweg. Follow this for 1km towards the unassuming hill and you are at the camp.

Trains run to Halle (€15, 1¼ hours) and to Göttingen (€18, 1½ hours) from Nordhausen.

BROCKEN & TORFHAUS

There are prettier landscapes and hikes in the Harz, but the 1142m Brocken is what draws the crowds: about 50,000 on a summer's day.

When he wasn't exploring mines, Goethe also scaled the mountain – in stockings.

Goetheweg from Torfhaus

The 8km Goetheweg trail to the Brocken from the western Harz starts at Torfhaus. Easier than other approaches, it initially takes you through bog, follows an historic aqueduct once used to regulate water levels for the mines, then crosses the Kaiserweg, a sweaty 11km trail from Bad Harzburg. Unfortunately, your next stop will be a dead forest, though the trail becomes steep and more interesting as you walk along the former border. From 1945 to 1989 the Harz region was a frontline in the Cold War, and the Brocken was used by the Soviets as a military base. For 28 years the summit was off limits and was virtually the only mountain in the world that couldn't be climbed. Hike along the train line above soggy moorland to reach the open, windy summit, where you can enjoy the view, eat pea soup and *Bockwurst*, and think of Goethe and Heine.

On top is the **Brockenhaus** (☎ 039455-500 05; www.nationalpark-brockenhaus.de; adult €4, concession €3-3.50, child €2; ☞ 9.30am-5pm), with café, interactive displays and a viewing platform, plus an **alpine garden** and a 2.5km trail following what was once a wall around the summit.

Torfhaus itself is a good starting point for **cross-country skiing** or winter ski treks, with plenty of equipment available for hire. Downhill skiing is limited to 1200m (on two pistes); one recommended route is the Kaiserweg. Make sure you pack a good map and take all precautions. The **Nationalparkhaus** (☎ 05320-263; www.torfhaus.info; Torfhaus 21; ☞ 9am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) has information on the park.

Getting There & Away

Bus 820 stops at Torfhaus on the well-served Bad Harzburg-Braunlage route.

QUEDLINBURG

☎ 03946 / pop 23,600

With its intact Altstadt and over 1400 half-timbered houses dating from six centuries ago, Quedlinburg is a highlight of any trip to the Harz. In 1994 the city became a Unesco World Heritage site; since then, work to save the crumbling treasures lining its romantic cobblestone streets has gradually progressed.

In the 10th century the Reich was briefly ruled from here by two women, Theophano and Adelheid, successive guardians of the 10th-century child-king Otto III, and Quedlinburg itself is closely associated with the *Frauentift*, a medieval foundation for widows and daughters of the nobility that enjoyed the direct protection of the Kaiser.

Although the Altstadt can get crowded in summer and on weekends, any time of year is nice for a visit.

Orientation

The circular medieval centre of the old town is a 10-minute walk from the Hauptbahnhof (central train station) along Bahnhofstrasse. To reach the Markt, follow the road around

and turn left into Heiligegeiststrasse after the post office. Hohe Strasse, off the Markt, leads south to the castle.

Information

Dorothea Christiane Erxleben Clinic (☎ 9090; Dittfurter Weg 24) Medical services.

Harzerschmalspurbahnen (☎ 527 191; www.hsb-wr.de; Marktstrasse 1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun) Narrow-gauge railway information.

Play-Fun (☎ 4401; Breite Strasse 39; per hr €2; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 2-10pm Sun) Internet access.

Police (☎ 9770; Schillerstrasse 3)

Post office (Bahnhofstrasse)

Quedlinburg-Tourismus (☎ 905 625; www.quedlinburg.de; Markt 2; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-4pm Sat, 9.30am-3pm Sun May-Oct, 9.30am-6pm

Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat Nov-Apr) Visit here for tourist information.

Sparkasse (☎ 9050; Markt 15) ATM and banking services.

Sights

AROUND THE MARKT

Built in 1320, the **Rathaus** has been expanded over the years and was adorned with a Renaissance façade in 1616. Inside, the beautiful Festsaal is decorated with a cycle of frescoes focusing on Quedlinburg's colourful history. The **Roland statue** (1426) in front of the Rathaus dates from the year Quedlinburg joined the Hanseatic League.

Behind the Rathaus is the late-Gothic **Marktkirche St Benedikti**. On the tower you'll see a small house used by town watchmen until 1901. The **mausoleum** nearby survived the relocation of the church graveyard during the 19th century.

There are some fine half-timbered buildings near Marktkirche; arguably the most spectacular is the **Gildehaus zur Rose** (1612) at Breite Strasse 39, with a richly carved and panelled interior (see p247).

Return to the Markt and walk through Schuhhof, a shoemakers' courtyard which is on the east side, and has shutters and stable-like 'gossip doors'. **Alter Klopstock** (1580), which is found at Stieg 28, has scrolled beams typical of Quedlinburg's 16th-century half-timbered houses.

From Stieg it's a short walk north along Pölle to Zwischen den Städten, a historic bridge connecting the old town and **Neustadt**, which developed alongside the town wall around 1200 when peasants fled a feudal power struggle on the land. Behind the Renaissance façade, tower and stone gables of the **Hagensches Freihaus** (1558) is now the Hotel Quedlinburger Stadtschloss (p246). Many houses in this part of town have high archways and courtyards dotted with pigeon towers. Of special note are the **Hotel zur Goldenen Sonne** building (1671; see p246) at Steinweg 11 and **Zur Börse** (1683) at No 23.

For a spectacular view of town, climb the 119 steps of **Hoher Turm** (€1) in the grounds of the Schlosshotel Zum Markgrafen (see p246).

Forty-five-minute rides through the Altstadt and Neustadt on the **Bimmelbahn** (☎ 918 888; per person €5; ☎ 10am-4pm Apr-Oct) leave hourly from Marktstrasse.

FACHWERKMUSEUM STÄNDEBAU

Germany's earliest half-timbered houses were built using high perpendicular struts. The building from 1310 that now houses the **Fachwerkmuseum Ständebau** (☎ 3828; Wordgasse 3; adult/concession €2.50/1.50; ☎ 11am-4pm Fri-Wed) is one of the oldest, and inside there are exhibits on the style and construction technique. Nearby is **Finkenherd** and a cluster of more recent half-timbered houses, built where Heinrich der Vogler (Henry the Fowler, also Heinrich I; 919-36) was said to be trapping finches when told he had been elected king.

KLOPSTOCKHAUS

The early classicist poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724-1803) is one of Quedlinburg's most celebrated sons. He was born in this 16th-century house, which is now a **museum** (☎ 2610; Schlossberg 12; adult/concession €3/2; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Sun) containing some interesting exhibits on Klopstock himself and Dorothea Erxleben (1715-62), Germany's first female doctor.

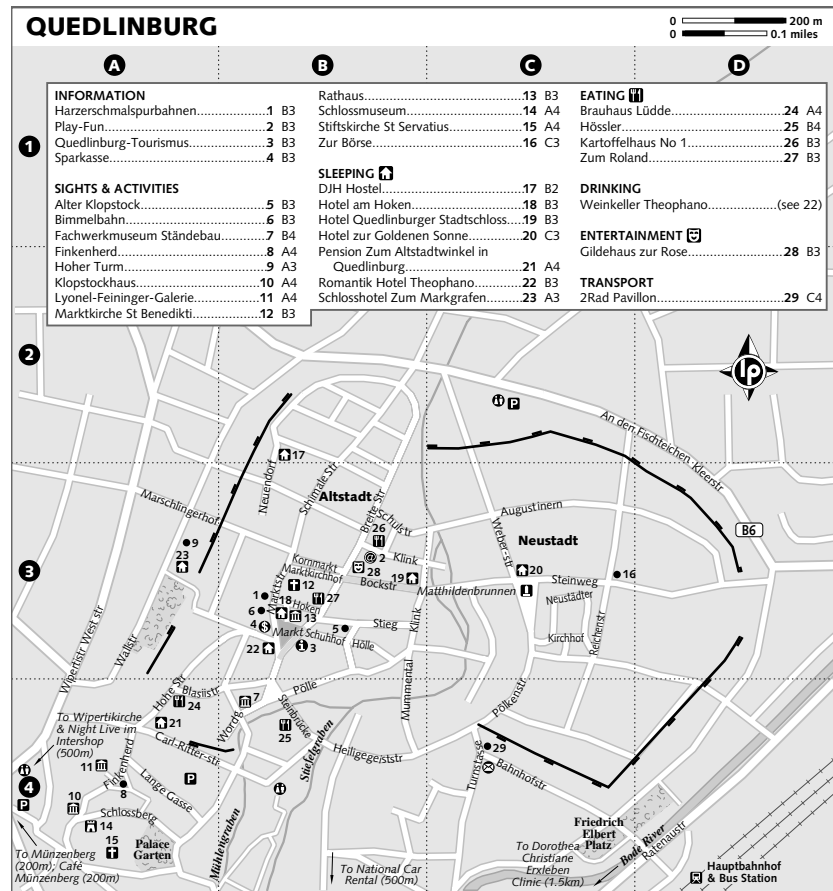
LYONEL-FEININGER-GALERIE

The **Lyonel-Feininger-Galerie** (☎ 2238; Finkenherd 5a; adult/concession €6/3; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar) houses the work of influential Bauhaus artist Lyonel Feininger (1871-1956). Feininger was born in Germany and became an American citizen. The original graphics, drawings, watercolours and sketches on display are from the period 1906 to 1936 and were hidden from the Nazis by a Quedlinburg citizen.

SCHLOSSBERG

The **Schlossberg** (☎ 6am-10pm), on a 25m-high plateau above Quedlinburg, was first graced with a church and residence under Henry the Fowler. The present-day Renaissance Schloss contains a revamped **Schlossmuseum** (☎ 2730; adult/concession €2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Sat-Thu), with some fascinating Ottonian period exhibits dating from 919 to 1056. A multimedia display explains how the Nazis used the site for propaganda by staging a series of events to celebrate Heinrich - whose life they reinterpreted to justify their own ideology and crimes.

The 12th-century **Stiftskirche St Servatius** (☎ 709 900; adult/concession €4/3; ☎ 10am-3.30pm Tue-Sat, noon-3.30pm Sun) is one of Germany's most significant of the Romanesque period. Its



treasury contains valuable reliquaries and early Bibles. The crypt has some early religious frescoes and contains the graves of Heinrich and his widow, Mathilde, along with those of the abbesses.

MÜNZENBERG & WIPERTIKIRCHE

Across Wipertistrasse, on the hill west of the castle, are the ruins of **Münzenberg**, a Romanesque convent. It was plundered during the Peasant Wars in 1525, and small houses were later built among the ruins. This fascinating hilltop settlement then became home to wandering minstrels, knife grinders and other itinerant tradespeople. At the time of research, a small museum was being created here behind the café (see right).

The **Wipertikirche** crypt was built around 1000, and the **church** (☎ 915 084; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun May-Oct) itself was used as a barn from 1812 until its restoration in the 1950s. The church is surrounded by a tranquil cemetery and grounds. The only way to see the crypt is by taking the tourist office's **Auf den Spuren der Ottonen tour** (per person €7; ☎ 10am Sat year-round, 10am Tue Apr-Oct).

Festivals & Events

A programme of classical music is held in the Stiftskirche every year from June to September. For tickets and information, contact the tourist office.

Sleeping

DJH hostel (☎ 811 703; jh-quedlinburg@djh-sachsen-anhalt.de; Neuendorf 28; under/over 26yr €14/16.70; ☒) This excellent DJH hostel has a quiet and very central location. It's relatively small and fills quickly in summer.

Pension Zimmer Altstadtwinkel in Quedlinburg (☎ 919 975; www.altstadtwinkel.de; Hohe Strasse 15; s/d €35/60; ☒ ☒) The 10 rooms in this renovated *pension* are simple but comfortable; some have exposed wooden floors.

Hotel zur Goldenen Sonne (☎ 962 50; www.hotel-zurgoldenensonne.de; Steinweg 11; s €49-53, d €69-88; ☒ ☒) Both the old and new buildings of this hotel have very decent rooms, but those in the old building are better furnished, have better windows and are mostly away from the restaurant's interior yard.

Hotel am Hoken (☎ 525 40; www.hotel-am-hoken.de; Hoken 3; s €54, d €69-84; ☒) This highly recommended hotel off Markt has elegance, lots of traditional style and some light decorative

touches. Floors and furnishings are in attractive timber.

Hotel Quedlinburger Stadtschloss (☎ 526 00; www.hotelstadtschloss.de; Bockstrasse 6/Klink 11; s €65-75, d €90-120; ☒ ☒) The modern rooms and tasteful features and design of this hotel in a recently restored Renaissance residence make it a great midrange choice in the town centre. Enter from Bockstrasse.

Romantik Hotel Theophano (☎ 963 00; www.hoteltheophano.de; Markt 13-14; s €67, d €98-135; ☒ ☒ ☒) Each room is decorated in an individual style at this rambling, rustic hotel. Most are spacious and very comfortable, but the many staircases (no lift) and low thresholds might be a problem for some. There's internet access for nonguests here as well.

Schlosshotel Zum Markgrafen (☎ 811 40; www.schlosshotel-zum-markgrafen.de; Weingarten 30; s €105, d €140-165; ☒ ☒) Some rooms have a whirlpool, most have leadlight windows, and all are comfortable in this neo-Gothic mansion from 1904. You can chill out on the café terrace or eat and drink in the hotel restaurant/cocktail bar. Its park is locked after dark and reserved for guests.

Eating & Drinking

Hössler (☎ 915 255; Steinbrücke 21; meals €2.50-10; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Thu, to 10pm Fri & Sat) This is an excellent fish cafeteria with a restaurant through the passage.

Kartoffelhaus No 1 (☎ 708 334; Breite Strasse 37; mains €2.50-12; ☎ 11am-midnight) Tasty potato and grill dishes – nothing more, nothing less – are served here in large quantities. Enter from Klink.

Café Münzenberg (☎ 907 134; Münzenberg 1/17; snacks €3-10; ☎ 11am-6pm Fri-Wed) Perched upon the cliff of Münzenberg, this sleek little café has outdoor seating, a few snacks and a wonderful view of town.

Zum Roland (☎ 4532; Breite Strasse 2-6; mains €6-15; ☎ 10am-10pm) Sprawling through seven houses and seating over 700 people, this café does quite good international nosh and a delicious apple strudel.

Brauhaus Lüdde (☎ 705 206; Blasiistrasse 14; mains €10-14; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Sat, to 10pm Sun; ☒) After the arrival of a coach group, the average age can soar to 70 years, decreasing slowly as the night grinds on in this lively microbrewery. Decent food and good boutique beer (despite some rather unappetizing names for the local drop) are the order of the day in Lüdde.

Weinkeller Theophano (☎ 963 00; Markt 13-14; mains €10-20, menu €28; ☎ 6pm-midnight Mon-Sat) Everything is seasonal in this wonderful otherworldly Gothic wine cellar with some of the best food in town.

Entertainment

Unfortunately, Quedlinburg is pretty close to being an entertainment-free zone.

Gildehaus zur Rose (Breite Strasse 39; ☎ from 9pm Fri & Sat) This is an occasional venue, but the panelled interior alone justifies a visit.

Night Live im Intershop (www.intershop-qlb.de; Wipertistrasse 9; ☎ Fri & Sat) This club in the wasteland along Wipertistrasse has DJs, local bands and various parties for a (mostly) young crowd. It occasionally opens on Wednesday.

Getting There & Away

For trains to Wernigerode (€7.60, 25 minutes), change at Halberstadt. The narrow-gauge *Selketalbahn* runs to Gernrode (€3, 15 minutes) and beyond; other frequent trains go to Thale (€1.80, 11 minutes). The station hall closes at 6pm; you can buy tickets on the train, but use the luggage lockers wisely, as there's no access after closing.

The **QBus** (☎ 2236; www.qbus-ballenstedt.de; Hauptbahnhof) office has timetables and information on its frequent regional services. Buses to Thale alternate half-hourly with trains and leave from the bridge in front of the train station (stop 9).

The **Strasse der Romanik** (Romanesque Road; not to be confused with the Romantic Road in Bavaria) leads south to Gernrode. This theme road follows the L239 south to Gernrode and connects towns that have significant Romanesque architecture. The B6 runs west to Wernigerode, Goslars, the A395 (for Braunschweig) and the A7 between Kassel and Hanover. For Halle take the B6 east, and for Halberstadt the B79 north.

Getting Around

Cars can be hired from **National Car Rental** (☎ 770 70; Gemröder Weg 5b). There's a **taxi service** (☎ 707 070) in town. **2Rad Pavillon** (☎ 709 507; Bahnhofstrasse 16) hires out bicycles from €6 per day.

GERNRODE

☎ 039485 / pop 4000

Only 8km south of Quedlinburg, Gernrode makes an ideal day trip. Its Stiftskirche St Cyriakus is one of Germany's finest churches, while

hikers, picnickers and steam-train enthusiasts will also enjoy this pretty town, which boasts the largest thermometer and *Skat* (a card game) table in the world.

The **tourist office** (☎ 354; www.gernrode.de; Suderode Strasse; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri) is a 10-minute walk from the Hauptbahnhof and another 10 minutes from the town centre.

Sights & Activities

Stiftskirche St Cyriakus (☎ 275; guided tour €3; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, tours 3pm daily year-round) is one of the purest examples of Romanesque architecture from the Ottonian period. Construction of the basilica, which is based on the form of a cross, was begun in 959. Especially noteworthy is the early use of alternating columns and pillars, later a common Romanesque feature. The octagonal **Taufstein** (Christening stone), whose religious motifs culminate in the Ascension, dates from 1150. In the south aisle you will find **Das Heilige Grab**, an 11th-century replica of Christ's tomb in Jerusalem. The tourist office has information on summer organ concerts and tours.

The **narrow-gauge railway** (€3, 30 minutes) from Gernrode to Mägdesprung is especially picturesque; you can break the trip at Sternhues Ramberg, where a short trail leads through the forest to **Bremer Teich**, a pretty swimming hole with a camp site and hostel. You can also walk to Mägdesprung and beyond from Gernrode along paths beside the train track.

From the corner of Bahnhofstrasse and Marktstrasse, marked hiking trails lead east to **Burg Falkenstein** (11km), the historic castle in the Selke Valley, and west to Thale (about 13km).

Getting There & Away

Regular QBus services for Thale and Quedlinburg stop at the Hauptbahnhof and in front of the tourist office. Night buses also stop here, including the Nacht3 between Quedlinburg and Thale. The recently extended *Selketalbahn* passes through Gernrode from Quedlinburg (see boxed text, p241); buy tickets at the Hauptbahnhof.

THALE

☎ 03947 / pop 15,000

Situated below the northern slopes of the Harz Mountains, Thale is a small industrial and tourist centre. The first steelworks was

established here in 1686. During the GDR era 8000 employees worked at the town's steelworks, the Eisen-und Hüttenwerk Thale. Although only 500 people work in the successor companies today, Thale retains its identity as a workers' town.

The main focus for visitors, however, is the sensational landscape of rugged cliffs and a lush river valley that makes for ideal hiking. On the two cliffs at the head of the valley are Hexentanzplatz and Rosstrappe, both magnets for postmodern pagans, who gather in grand style and numbers each year on 30 April to celebrate Walpurgisnacht (see boxed text, opposite).

Orientation & Information

Thale's two main streets are Poststrasse, which runs diagonally off Bahnhofstrasse (left from the Hauptbahnhof), and Karl-Marx-Strasse, which runs northeast to the Bode River.

The **tourist office** (☎ 2597; www.thale.de; Bahnhofstrasse 3; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat & Sun) is in Friedenspark opposite the Hauptbahnhof. Pick up the English-language brochure *Thale Fabulous* or book a themed tour with a witch (€4).

There's a Sparkasse bank at the top of Karl-Marx-Strasse; the post office is in the Kaufhaus department store at No 16.

Sights

Hexentanzplatz and **Rosstrappe** are two rugged outcrops flanking the Bode Valley that once had Celtic fortresses and were used by Germanic tribes for occult rituals and sacrifices (see boxed text, opposite). The landscape also inspired the myth of Brunhilde, who escaped a loveless marriage to Bohemian prince Bodo by leaping the gorge on horseback; her pursuing fiancé couldn't make the jump and plunged into the valley that now bears his name, turning into a hell-hound on the way. The impact of Brunhilde's landing supposedly left the famous hoof imprint in the stone on Rosstrappe. It is worth climbing up here for the magnificent views alone.

A **cable car** (return €4.50; ☎ 9.30am-6pm May-Sep, 10am-4.30pm Oct-Apr) runs to Hexentanzplatz, or you can take a **chairlift** (return €3.50; ☎ 9.30am-6pm May-Sep, 10am-4.30pm Oct-Apr) to Rosstrappe. Go early or late in the day to avoid crowds. Signs direct you from the Hauptbahnhof.

The wooden museum **Walpurgishalle** (Hexentanzplatz; adult/child €1.50/1; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Oct) has

exhibitions and paintings on matters heathen (German only), including the *Opferstein*, a stone once used in Germanic sacrificial rituals. Nearby is a 10-hectare **Tierpark** (☎ 2880; www.tierpark-thale.de; adult/concession/child €4/3.50/2; ☎ 10am-7pm Jun-Aug, 9am-6pm May, Sep & Oct, 9am-5pm Feb-Apr, 10am-4pm Nov-Jan) with lynxes, wild cats and other furry friends. The Hexentanzplatz itself is now basically a coach park full of souvenir shops.

Activities

The **hiking** brochures *Wanderführer* (€1) and *Führer durch das Bodetal* (€1.50) are excellent if your German is up to it. Highly recommended is the Bode Valley 'Hexenstieg' walk between Thale and Treseburg (blue triangle, 10km). If you take the bus from Thale to Treseburg, you can walk downstream and enjoy the most spectacular scenery at the end. WVB bus 264 does the trip from April to early November, and QBus 18 does it all year via Hexentanzplatz. Another 10km trail (red dot) goes from Hexentanzplatz to Treseburg; combine with the valley walk to make a round trip.

Festivals & Events

The open-air **Harzer Bergtheater** (☎ 2324; www.harzer-bergtheater.de; Hexentanzplatz) has a summer programme of music and plays, plus a performance on Walpurgisnacht. Tickets are sold at the venue and the tourist office.

Sleeping & Eating

Book extremely early for Walpurgisnacht. The number of cheap private rooms is limited, but the tourist office can help, especially in finding holiday flats.

DJH hostel (☎ 2881; jh-thale@djh-sachsen-anhalt.de; Bodetal-Waldkater; under/over 26yr €14.50/17.20; ☎ ☒) This DJH hostel is central to the train and bus stations and nestled in lush surroundings where the trail begins for the Bode Valley.

Kleiner Waldkater (☎ 2826; www.kleiner-waldkater.de; Bodetal-Waldkater; s/d €35/54; ☎ ☒) Pine paneling and a cat theme dominate this cute half-timbered *pension* alongside the hostel. You can also get a filling goulash with dumplings and other elementary cuisine in the hotel restaurant.

Hotel Haus Sonneneck (☎ 496 10; www.haus-sonneneck-thale.de; Heimbürgstrasse 1a; s €35-49, d €55-80; ☎ ☒) Situated between Friedenspark and the forest, this recently renovated hotel is an

WITCHES & WARLOCKS

The Bodetal once contained Celtic fortresses built to fend off northern tribes; by 500 BC Germanic tribes had driven out the Celts and appropriated the sites for meetings and ritual sacrifices. These played an important role in the 8th-century Saxon Wars, when Charlemagne embarked upon campaigns to subjugate and Christianise the local population. Harz mythology blends these pagan and Christian elements.

One popular – but misleading – explanation for the Walpurgisnacht festival is that it was an invention of the tribes who, pursued by Christian missionaries, held secret gatherings to carry out their rituals. They are said to have darkened their faces one night and, armed with broomsticks and pitchforks, scared off Charlemagne's guards, who mistook them for witches and devils. In fact the name 'Walpurgisnacht' itself probably derives from St Walpurga, but the festival tradition may also refer to the wedding of the gods Wodan and Freya.

According to local mythology, witches and warlocks gather on Walpurgisnacht at locations throughout the Harz before flying off to the Brocken on broomsticks or goats. There they recount the year's evil deeds and top off the stories with a bacchanalian frenzy, said to represent copulation with the devil. Frightened peasants used to hang crosses and herbs on stable doors to protect their livestock; ringing church bells or cracking whips were other ways to prevent stray witches from dropping by.

One of the best places to celebrate Walpurgisnacht is Thale, where not-so-pagan hordes of 35,000 or more arrive for colourful variety events and the Walpurgishalle tells you all you need to know about sacrifices, rituals and local myths. Schierke, also popular, is a starting point for Walpurgisnacht treks to the Brocken. Wherever you are, expect to see the dawn in with some very strange characters!

excellent choice – central, quiet and close to the walks and lifts.

Ferienpark Bodetal Thale (☎ 776 60; www.ferienpark-bodetal.de; Hubertusstrasse 9-11; s €65-90, d €80-110; ☎ ☒ ☒) Directly across Friedenspark, this new hotel and holiday apartment complex has very smart rooms with balconies, a children's playground, a restaurant and various health and fitness extras. It also rents mountain bikes for €10 per day.

La Romantica (☎ 630 99; Musestieg 28; pizza €5-8, pasta €7.50-10, mains €11-15) Though it's a 20-minute hike northeast from the station along Bahnhofstrasse and Sputnikweg, this Italian restaurant gets good recommendations from locals. It also has a delivery service.

Both Hexentanzplatz and Rosstrappe have restaurants. The **Berghotel Hexentanzplatz**

(☎ 4730; Hexentanzplatz; mains €9-14) is the best option for a sit-down meal.

Getting There & Around

Frequent trains travel to Halberstadt (€4.60, 45 minutes), Quedlinburg (€1.80, 11 minutes), Wernigerode (€9.10, 1¼ hours) and Magdeburg (€12.40, 1½ hours). Karl-Marx-Strasse leads to the main junction for roads to Quedlinburg and Wernigerode.

The bus station is located alongside the train station. For Wernigerode, take bus WVB 253; to get to Treseburg, take QBus 18. Bus WVB 264 goes to Treseburg and Blankenburg via Rosstrappe. The night buses N3 and N4 go to Harzgerode and Quedlinburg respectively, via Hexentanzplatz. For a taxi, call ☎ 2505 or ☎ 2244.

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