Like Food, Like Drink – Like the Cultural Heart of Germany

Wednesday 24 June, 2015

Wine, beer, Germany's only fried sausage museum, the country's oldest chocolate factory or the famous *Stollen* - travellers to the Cultural Heart of Germany won't go starving and foodies will enjoy exploring the region's many culinary specialities. Here are a few things you shouldn't miss in Thuringia, Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt:

Fried sausages

No matter where you're from in Germany, you'd be hard pressed to find someone who doesn't like Thuringia's famous charcoal-grilled sausages, called 'Thüringer'. They are so delicious that they even have their own museum dedicated to them, Germany's first and only'Bratwurstmuseum'. Only 30 minutes from Erfurt in the small town of Holzhausen, visitors can learn everything about the history and production process of the Thuringian fried sausage plus get insights into the bratwurst as such. The recipe for Thuringian grilled sausages is more than 600 years old and the region's 3,000 butchers closely guard its secret: Apart from the ingredients pork, marjoram, caraway and garlic nothing else is known. Sample the goodies at the brilliantly named 'Bratwurstscheune' (bratwurst barn) next door to the museum.

Dumplings

Or learn how to make your very own Thuringian potato dumplings, another regional speciality that is much loved and unmistakable. Prepared using grated raw and cooked mashed potatoes, with a filling of crisp cubes of bread fried in butter, they are usually served with a variety of roast meats, and the 'Thüringer Kloßwelt' museum in Heichelheim not only features an exhibition all about dumplings but also a dumpling seminar. Participants will be taught how to make original Thuringian dumplings and, of course, also eat the finished products. And if you ever fancied becoming a 'Doctor of Dumplings', you can get the respective certificate there, too. Beer goes very well with dumplings, by the way, and Thuringia is also the proud holder of Germany's oldest certificate for brewing to the country's purity standards, with Germany's most popular dark beer coming from Bad Köstritz near Gera.

Chocolate

Moving on to sweeter treats, Saxony-Anhalt is home to Germany's oldest chocolate factory: 'Halloren' was founded in Halle in 1804 where the company is still headquartered today. Halloren Chocolate Factory is best known for the so-called 'Halloren Kugeln', globe-shaped chocolates that are available in many different flavours, including chocolate-caramel, chocolate-coconut and seasonal variations such as passion fruit-yoghurt or raspberry-yoghurt. Apart from this signature product, there are also liqueur-filled chocolates, such as brandy beans, or almond paste specialities as well as chocolate covered candies. Better stop now, all too tempting.

Wine

One thing that goes very well with chocolate is wine, and the Cultural Heart of Germany is not short of wine-growing regions, such as Saale-Unstrut where wine has been cultivated for more than 1,000 years. The area is regarded as the northernmost quality wine region in Europe and its lion share is to be found in the Cultural Heart of Germany, with distinctively delicate and elegant light wines being produced on 639 hectares in Saxony-Anhalt and 108 in Thuringia. The shell limestone and variegated sandstone soils plus an average 1,600 hours of sunshine and 500 millilitres of rainfall per year provide perfect conditions for the more than 60 grape varieties, specialities being Pinot Blanc and Gris, Silvaner, Rieslings and Müller-Thurgau but also reds such as Pinot Noir and Dornfelder. Explore the region with its old terraced vineyards and numerous wine estates and taverns on theSaale-Unstrut Wine Road.

Another wine road can be found in Saxony where one of Germany's smallest wine-growing regions stretches along the Elbe from Pirna to Diesbar-Seußlitz and past Dresden, Radebeul and Meissen. Travelling along the 55 km is a delight with lots of idyllic spots on the way and a special Open Day weekend in summer (29/30 Aug 2015) with vintners welcoming guests onto their estates. Wackerbarth Castle is one of the biggest wine producers here and also Saxony's oldest sparkling wine producers. The estate with its baroque gardens, vineyards and a modern factory, invites visitors to look behind the scenes, offering different guided tours including wine tastings.

Coffee & Cake

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Saxony is also the perfect place to explore the German tradition of 'Kaffee & Kuchen' - coffee and cake: Head to Leipzig to experience the city's famous coffee house culture which is exemplified by 'Zum Arabischen Coffe Baum', Europe's second oldest café where visitors can indulge in a wide choice of cakes and special Leipzig sweets plus lots of different types of coffee. The site also features a coffee museum with more than 500 exhibits from Leipzig's over 300 year-old history of coffee. Other famous names in town are 'Kaffeehaus Riquet', 'Café Corso' and 'Café Kandler'.

Last but not least, we can't leave without mentioning Dresden's finest: The famous 'Christstollen' cake that is part and parcel of the Christmas season and celebrated each year at the 'Dresdner Stollenfest' (5 Dec 2015) with a huge cake being ceremoniously cut. Local bakers still pass on the century-old recipe for the 'official' Stollen from one generation to the other and the moist, heavy cake filled with dried fruits and dusted with powdered sugar, called 'Striezel here', is only produced by 150 bakers in and around Dresden.

Travel information:

Easy access to the Cultural Heart of Germany with Cityjet from London City to Dresden, Germania from London Gatwick to Erfurt-Weimar andRyanair to Leipzig. All major airlines to Berlin.

The Cultural Heart of Germany online:

Website: www.culturalheart.info

Facebook:www.facebook.com/CulturalHeartofGermany

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