

Background information on the German Fairy Tale Route as a holiday route, network and brand



Introduction

Since its **founding** in 1975, the German Fairy Tale Route has rapidly become one of the few German holiday routes that are actually known worldwide and attract guests from all over the world. This success is rooted in the well-known **Children's and Household Tales compiled by the Brothers Grimm**. For more than two hundred years, these stories have fascinated people all over the world and of all ages, creating in their minds a romantic image of Germany, characterized by castles and palaces, half-timbered houses and dense forests.

The **success** is not measurable in the strictest sense. But it is exemplarily visible in the "European Chinese Tourists Welcoming Award" presented in 2006, in the fact that it has been ranked among the "TOP 100 Sights of Germany" five times so far, in countless press publications with headlines such as "Germany's Dream Routes" (HÖRZU, May 26, 2017), or in the fact that at least 80 tour operators offer trips along the German Fairy Tale Route.

This also shows that the German Fairy Tale Route is not "just" a holiday route; it is also a network and brand of its own.

The German Fairy Tale Route is supported and designed in the three dimensions mentioned by the registered association of the same name; operational control and day-to-day business are the responsibility of the full-time office.

The route

The German Fairy Tale Route begins in the Brothers Grimm town of Hanau, the birthplace of the Brothers Grimm. Its official starting point is at the imposing monument dedicated to Jacob and Wilhelm on the Neustadt market square.

From there, the unique route leads through five more stations in the lives of the famous brothers and more than fifty fairy-tale and legendary places to Bremen. Here, the sculpture of the Bremen Town Musicians in front of the Ratskeller symbolizes the end of the journey.

Until there and on a final detour to Buxtehude, it leads through different natural and cultural landscapes, remote villages, cosy half-timbered towns, urban cultural centres, and through the GrimmHeimat NordHessen. Castles steeped in history and fairytale palaces, enchanted forests and the famous Weser River, mystical places of legend and countless fairytale fountains line the way.

The course of the route has changed over the decades due to various factors, such as new memberships and road construction. In 2019 it was reviewed in detail and redefined; since then the route is also available digitally with follow function: www.ferienstrassen.info/deutsche-märchenstraße/

There is currently no continuous signage along the route.

The Deutsche Märchenstraße e.V. (German Fairy Tale Route Association)

The association is the organisational and supporting part of the network German Fairy Tale Route. It was founded on January 1, 2007 as an independent legal entity in succession to the unregistered working group "Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutsche Märchenstraße".

At the same time, a good 30 years after the birth of the German Fairy Tale Route, a dedicated separate office was set up for the first time. Its equipment and ability to work is guaranteed to a considerable extent by the "sponsoring municipalities" of the city and district of Kassel and the city of Hofgeismar.

On the day of its foundation, the association had 41 **members**; now there are about 70 cities, municipalities and other municipal bodies that jointly support the association; more than 60 are also stations along the route that shape the project and its profile.

In terms of content and organisation, the range of members is supplemented by **partners** in the hotel and gastronomy sectors as well as leisure and cultural institutions. Bilateral "contracts for a marketing-oriented partnership" have been and continue to be concluded with selected companies and initiatives that are also committed in the spirit of the German Fairy Tale Route. Currently, eight high-class hotels are "premium partners" to market offers for discerning travellers - especially from overseas - in exclusive cooperation.

The General Meeting elects a six-**member Board** every two years; the chairman - currently Uwe Schmidt, District Administrator of Kassel - and the deputies are provided by the sponsoring municipalities. The Board and the office are advised by the **Marketing Committee** of up to ten members, which is also elected every two years by the General Meeting.

Idea and objectives

The **story** of the German Fairy Tale Route begins almost fifty years ago, strangely enough in Russia. Our then chairman, at that time the district administrator of Kassel, undertook a professional trip to Leningrad. There he visited an important large library, and noticed that the fairy tale books of the Brothers Grimm were exhibited in almost all languages of the world, a sure sign that the Brothers Grimm were globally known.

After his return, he thought about whether one could not use the Grimm fairy tales as tourist advertising for the state of Hesse. With the support of the Hessian State Centre for Tourism, the various cities important to the Brothers Grimm's stations in life were approached first, and then others as far up as Bremen. As a result, two years later the Fairy Tale Route was founded and established in 1975.

Much has changed since then. But one thing has always been and remains the purpose and concern of the German Fairy Tale Route: a hearty **invitation to people from all over the world** to follow in the footsteps of the Brothers Grimm from Hanau to Bremen, and immerse themselves in the dazzling worlds of German fairy tales, sagas and legends.

The statutes of the association differentiate this fundamental concern under two aspects, simultaneously making it clear that by no means the least objective is to achieve added value in the tourism trade.

*The Deutsche Märchenstraße e. V. association **serves to***

- *contribute to the preservation as well as exploit the rich cultural heritage of German fairy tales, sagas and legends and the cultural heritage of the Brothers Grimm for tourism purposes, and*
- *to sustainably position the German Fairy Tale Route as a cultural tourism quality brand and one of the most important holiday routes. (Statutes § 2,1)*

As part of a comprehensive process to further concentrate the German Fairy Tale Route brand, objectives and self-image have recently been updated and specified in the following **vision**:

"The German Fairy Tale Route is a dynamic and professionally coordinated network of places and players that enrich, help shape and benefit from the German Fairy Tale Route.

In the preparation of the Grimm fairy tales and legends for tourism, the German Fairy Tale Route assumes the leading position and is permanently among the top 3 holiday routes in Germany. For its guests, the German Fairy Tale Road offers a year-round experience of fairy tale themes through value-conforming, unique offerings for individual travellers and groups."

Interim balance and perspectives

The significant increase in the number of members since the new foundation in 2007 is also proof that many cities and communities perceive the German Fairy Tale Route as successful in its own right and as a partner and positive brand in tourism.

In order not to overburden the organisation and not to blur the offer profile and brand and thus jeopardize success, the Board decided on a far-reaching admission freeze in 2019.

This is combined with the agreement to focus activities in the coming years primarily on consolidation in the sense of sustainable **quality assurance and development**.

What has been achieved is also visible in reports about the German Fairy Tale Route under headings such as "The most beautiful roads in the world" (uptrend Magazine, Oct. 2019) or "On Germany's most beautiful vacation roads" (tz.de, May 2020). They exemplify that the German Fairy Tale Route fulfils the statutory purpose (see above) of positioning itself as one of the most important holiday routes.

This positive finding is underpinned by the annual business reports, which – apart from the "Corona year" 2020 – show growth in virtually all measurable areas to date.

However, it has recently become clear that growth that can be described in figures is neither a matter of course nor a guarantee for the future of the German Fairy Tale Route.

For example, the analysis of general trends in tourism as well as the development of specific access figures has made it clear that the German Fairy Tale Route also needs to establish a presence on Instagram in addition to its Facebook and YouTube activities, and more importantly, that a completely new website is necessary in order not to lose further visitors after years of growth. The new German site has been online since September 2020 and is available in a user-friendly way on all current devices; the new English version will go online in April 2021. "Welcome Pages" in other languages will follow a few months later.

Following the adoption of the marketing plan for the years 2020 to 2025 as a result of an intensive discussion process, the "Corona crisis" raises numerous new questions regarding short- and medium-term work planning as well as long-term strategic orientation.

For the time being, it remains unclear when and how the prioritized foreign markets - especially overseas - can be successfully appealed to again.

It is similarly uncertain when events, such as the numerous summer fairytale festivals or the Christmas markets, will again be able to take place and thus become the focus of the German Fairy Tale Route's marketing activities.

On the other hand, current developments are providing impetus for projects, some of which have been under discussion for some time and can now be systematically worked on:

- Expansion and marketing of the German Fairy Tale Route as an "e-mobile travel route";
- Development and marketing of a "German Fairy Tale Route" cycle route;
- Conception and realization of an app as an informative and animating travel companion, also as part of a comprehensive digitization strategy.

The feasibility of further projects that seem sensible and promising right now will be systematically clarified in the near future. For example, the systematic processing of the cultural mission intended by the first section of the statutory purpose (see above) and the development of a stringent merchandising strategy.

Invitation

If you would like to learn more or contribute your ideas, please feel free to contact us:

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