



Youngsters enjoy various amusements at the Steinau Erlebnispark. Although not massive, the amusement park features a wide range of recreational and entertaining activities for the entire family.

Exploring the fairy tale road Scenic Steinau

Town served as fertile ground for the budding imaginations of famed German storytellers

Story and photos by Karl Weisel
104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

What do fairy tales, a bat cave and amusement park rides have in common?

Not much, unless of course, you're talking about the various attractions available in the medieval town of Steinau an der Strasse. The historic village, east of Hanau in the Spessart Mountains about halfway between Gelnhausen and Fulda, offers the perfect day trip for young and old.

As the home of famed fairy tale collectors Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, better known as the Brothers Grimm, from 1791-1796, Steinau, like Hanau (their birthplace) is a stopping point on the German Fairy Tale Road. The young yarn spinners spent five years of their formative years in Steinau while their father served as a public servant in the town.

Various sights in town reference these notable luminaries including museums in the Brüder Grimm Haus and Steinau Castle, several whimsical statues, a fountain in the town square, gift shops and a Marionette Theater featuring presentations of well-known fairy tales.

Besides the charm of wandering through a town reeking of medieval history — colorfully painted half-timbered houses, churches and a spectacular castle — one is constantly aware of the presence of magical creatures in the form of sculptures such as the talking frog and his skeptical princess outside the Brüder Grimm Haus. Stop to cool your face in the fountain in the town square and you'll discover a collection of fairy tale depictions in the form of stone — Rapunzel letting down her hair from the tower, dragons, Cinderella and others.

The Brüder Grimm Haus is open from 2-5 p.m. daily from March 13 to Dec. 21. Entrance is Euro 2 for adults and Euro 1.50 for children. A family

ticket costs Euro 5.

Steinau's castle alone is worth a visit. Dating back to before 1200, the bulk of the still standing fortification was constructed from 1528-1555. Having served as the home for various local rulers, it was once the residence of the Counts of Hanau and was spared the fate of many local castles, being destroyed by French invaders, because it was occupied by French troops in the early 19th century. The state of Hessen assumed responsibility for the castle's upkeep in 1945 and it now serves as home to renters in addition to featuring a museum showcasing the town's history among other exhibits.

Visitors can climb up into the castle tower for a lofty view of Steinau and the surrounding countryside. Admission to the tower is Euro 1 for adults and 50 cents for children.

The castle museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., March 1 through Oct. 31. It's open from 10 a.m. to 4



Steinau's castle dominates the town center. Dating back to the 12th century, the fortification features a museum showcasing the town's history and highlights of the region.

p.m. Nov. 1 to Dec. 14. Entrance costs Euro 2 for adults, Euro 1.50 for children or Euro 5 for families. An Euro 8 family ticket is also available for both museums.

Situated just outside the castle in the former castle stable is a Marionette Theater featuring both youth and adult fables told with puppets.

But history and fairy tales are not the only attractions to Steinau an der Strasse.

Amusement park

Youngsters may get a kick out of the various amusements at the Erlebnispark Steinau. Situated in the hills above the town, the amusement park and grill area feature rides ranging from swings to a summer bobsled run, petting zoos and a large playground. Similar to the Lochmühle in the Taunus Mountains, the Steinau Erlebnispark is not among the giant parks in Europe, but it does offer an afternoon of fun. One recommendation: avoid long lines at the various amuse-

ments and visit on an American holiday — definitely not on weekends or German holidays.

Admission to the park is Euro 8 for adults, Euro 7 for children and free for anyone under 90 centimeters tall. It is open daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. April 5 to Nov. 2.

Visitors who would prefer spending more time in the outdoors both above and below ground will get a kick out of the nearby Teufels- or Tropfsteinhöhle in the forest just north of Steinau. Upon approaching the town after leaving the A-66 in the direction of Fulda, one can follow signs to the Tropfsteinhöhle a few kilometers away on the road. About a 15-minute walk up and into the woods from the parking area takes one to a small wooden door which opens to the stalactite cavern.

The cave got its first name some 400 years ago when a local farmer was convinced that the devil had reached out of a hole in the ground and snatched away one of his cows. Farmers, in solidarity with the griev-

ing cowherd, decided to fill the cave with rocks to prevent the devil from reappearing. Despite their best intentions they were unable to muster enough stone to fill the opening in the earth and thereafter stayed away from the cave in fear that the devil would reappear.

Visitors to the cave today can learn these facts and more from the cave guide who will describe how people began exploring the cave in the late 19th century. After descending into the cavern with ropes, it was decided to dig a new entrance and clear away the huge amount of rocks that had been dumped into the cave by the fearful farmers.

The cave guide will point out various critters who call the underground chambers home including large spiders and salamanders and describe the bat colony that descends into the "bat hotel" every winter to hibernate. For that reason the cave is closed to the public during the winter months.

The Tropfsteinhöhle is open from 1-7 p.m. on Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Sundays and German holidays and from 1-5 p.m. weekdays through Oct. 31. Admission is Euro 3 for adults, Euro 2 for children. Groups of 15 people pay Euro 2.50 for adults and Euro 1.50 for children. The guide said his English isn't great, but he will attempt to do the tour in English if requested.

The region in and around Steinau, including the nearby town of Wächtersbach, is also noted for its handicrafts — particularly pottery — a local speciality dating back to the Middle Ages. Several pottery stores and workshops are featured in Steinau.

Hiking and biking enthusiasts will discover a wealth of trails all around Steinau.

Other nearby sights include the source of the Kinzig River, the Kinzig-Stausee, a large lake with rowboats and peddleboats for rent near Bad Soden-Salmünster, and the spa town of Bad Orb.



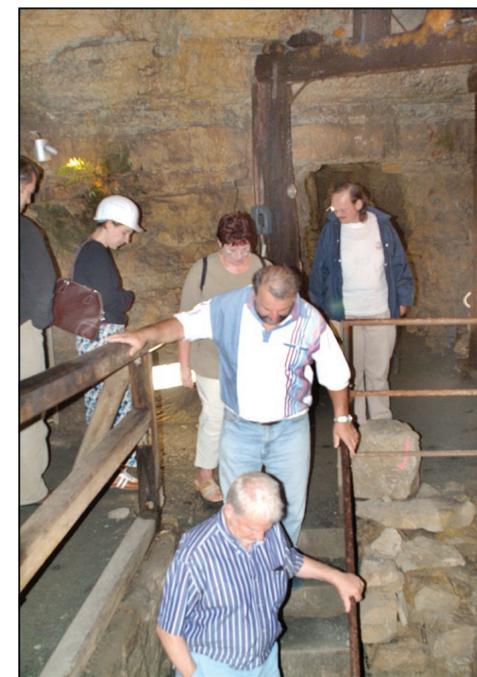
Visitors and townspeople enjoy a sunny afternoon at an outdoor cafe on the Rathaus square.



One of several statues and fountains throughout town depicting characters from the fairy tales collected by the Brothers Grimm.



Domestic animals await young visitors at one of the many petting zoos at the Steinau Erlebnispark.



Visitors make their way down stairs that descend into the lower chambers of the Tropfsteinhöhle caverns near Steinau.