



**ERZGEBIRGE**

DIE ERLEBNISHEIMAT

## **The dream made from diesel and steam How the people of the Erzgebirge lovingly keep the good old days alive**

The black iron steed puffs its way powerfully and gracefully through a landscape like something from a picture book: to the left are the exquisite little houses with their red roofs, and to the right the deep coniferous forest. The steam locomotive engine, along with its passenger carriages, then approaches a viaduct. With a drawn out blast of the horn accompanied by a puffing cloud of steam, the engine greets those walking in the valley below - exactly as it did more than 150 years ago. This opens up a window to a long-forgotten time for anyone enjoying, or even just witnessing, one of the historical narrow-gauge railway trains in the Erzgebirge. This is like the good old days when time passed by more slowly and the charm of the leisurely puffing locomotive brought fresh excitement to the people on a daily basis.

Back in the day, the laying of tracks through the Erzgebirge posed a particularly difficult task for planners: there were rivers that had to be crossed, valleys that had to be bridged with viaducts and tunnels that had to be dug through the rock. It is precisely this that makes a journey through the region by rail so diverse today. Along a total of 56 kilometres of track, the four lines of the Fichtelberg, Preßnitztal and Weißeritztal railways and the Schönheide Heritage Railway make their way through the charming villages and idyllic landscapes. The steam locomotives run regularly. It is worth noting that this is supported by a great deal of voluntary work provided via associations, as the majority of the stokers, locomotive drivers, mechanics and ticket inspectors are Erzgebirge citizens who perform their work out of love for the old steel giants. There is also a great deal of enthusiasm to be found in the Rittersgrün Narrow-Gauge Railway Museum and the Schwarzenberg Railway Museum. There visitors can get a close look at the large locomotives in their engine sheds.

Somewhat smaller, but just as impressive, are the Erzgebirge's five model railway exhibitions. These provide a detailed representation of this larger-than-life world on a smaller scale, for example the 'Modellbahnland Erzgebirge' complex in Thermalbad Wiesenbad. This is the largest installation in Europe with a 45 millimetre track gauge. Over an area of 770 square metres and along 660 metres of track, 30 trains

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travel around about 450 buildings. If this isn't enough for you, you could go on an excursion on the Augustusburg cable railway or the Erzgebirge sightseeing train, the highlight of which is crossing the Markersbach Viaduct.

The Erzgebirge's dense network of railway lines is evidence of an industrial culture, which years ago the people of the Erzgebirge drove forward with passion and conviction. Thus, it is of little wonder that the father of Saxon automotive construction – August Horch – designed and built his first vehicles in Zwickau more than 100 years ago. Since then, German car and motorcycle manufacturing has been inextricably linked with names such as Audi, DKW, Wanderer, Auto Union, Barkas and Trabant and with the current BMW, Porsche and Volkswagen production facilities in Leipzig, Dresden and Zwickau-Mosel.

Numerous museums keep the memories of these early days alive. In the August Horch Museum, one of Germany's most modern technology museums, the 3,000 square metre exhibition space is home to road-worthy vintage cars, and features rare historical posters, largely unknown contemporary documentary films and video animations. The development of two-wheel technology is also perfectly documented, for example, in the motorcycle exhibition at the Augustusburg and Wildeck castles.

Thus, in the Erzgebirge the window to a long-forgotten era is always slightly ajar, with something to catch the eye of history, technology and engineering enthusiasts alike