

Erzgebirge Sightseeing Train – Special train trips on the Annaberg-Buchholz - Schwarzenberg route

The railway line from Annaberg-Buchholz South to Schwarzenberg was inaugurated in the year 1889. Today it is the only remaining route in the region that does not follow the course of the Erzgebirge rivers, instead running over vista-rich bridges and valleys spanned by stately bridges. However, following a period of more than 100 years during which the line was in extensive use, a decline in passenger and goods traffic led to the discontinuation of local passenger services by the Free State of Saxony in 1997.

The line was to enjoy a revival in 2002; initially it was just special trains returned to the tracks following the takeover by DB RegioNetz Infrastruktur GmbH Erzgebirgsbahn. However, excluding this small number of trips and some internal track maintenance and repair runs as part of the Erzgebirge network renovation programme, this truly delightful stretch of railway line with its idyllic scenery remained unused.

This situation was to change radically in 2008 when, spurred on by a shared interest in maintaining the only cross-link between the Chemnitz-Aue and Zwickau-Johanngeorgenstadt lines on the one hand, and the Chemnitz-Bärenstein line (continuing to Chomutov) on the other, committed partners joined forces to drive forward the Erzgebirgische Aussichtsbahn (EAB), or Erzgebirge Sightseeing Train project.

The partners involved are, firstly, the towns and municipalities of Schwarzenberg, Raschau-Markersbach, Scheibenberg, Schlettau, Crottendorf and Annaberg-Buchholz, and secondly, the Verein Sächsischer Eisenbahnfreunde e.V. (VSE), or Saxon Railway Friends Society. Beginning in 2009, and with the support of the Tourismusverband Erzgebirge e.V., the partners in this unique joint project have been organising special tourist trips between Schwarzenberg and Annaberg-Buchholz, currently with five or six weekend trips per year.

On trip weekends, historic VT 771/772 Series railcars power along the tracks several times a day, following a fixed timetable. The 26.7 km stretch is known and loved by locals and visitors in equal measure, especially because the route leads through the picturesque countryside of the upper Erzgebirge, and not least on account of the impressive works of structural engineering to be seen. The Markersbach Viaduct is the most distinctive of the twenty-three bridge structures. This structure, also known as the 'Matchstick Bridge', at 236.5 m in length and 36.5 m in height, also provides popular subject matter for photographers.

There are many places of interest and tourist attractions along the route, such as the station and castle at Schlettau; the Scheibenberg Mountain with its distinctive basalt formations ('Organ Pipes') and its popular observation tower; St. Barbara's Church in Markersbach - one of the oldest village churches in Saxony - and the impressive pumped storage power station operated by the Vattenfall Group; the station building in Walthersdorf (now developed into a museum); the Frohnau Hammer and St. Anne's Church in Annaberg-Buchholz; and not forgetting the railway museum and castle in Schwarzenberg. Those who wish to do so can combine a trip on the Erzgebirge Sightseeing Train with sports activities on the extensive cycling and hiking trails around the Pöhlberg and Scheibenberg mountains and explore the Erzgebirge within this idyllic natural setting.

More than 18,000 passengers over the last 4 years have justified the endeavours of the organisers, and have led to considerable progress in the efforts to extend what is on offer to visitors, both on and alongside the tracks.

The Erzgebirge Sightseeing Train - vehicles

- VT 771/772 Series light combustion railcars were developed in the GDR at the end of the nineteen-fifties, and manufactured between 1963 and 1970.
- Used primarily in rural areas at the time - popularly known as 'Ferkeltaxi' (piglet taxis) or 'Sandmännchenzug' (sandman trains) for their dark red livery
- No longer in regular use after 2003, with most of the vehicles being scrapped - sale of a good number of vehicles, for example to Romania and Cuba - where some are still in service today
- A small number still in service in Germany - the EAB vehicles are still in the possession of Mr Maik Pester of the 'Eisenbahnnostalgie Vogtland' (Vogtland Vintage Railway Enthusiasts Society) from Irfersgrün.

Facts and figures regarding the vehicles:

- Total capacity of 120 seats (40 seats per carriage)
- Not wheelchair-accessible (details on request)
- Limited capacity for bicycles (max. 10 bicycles, depending on train occupancy)
- Personal tour guide on board for all trips
- Small range of refreshments and souvenirs (drinks and small snacks)
- Toilets available on the train

Offers for groups:

- Reduced ticket prices and individual quotations for groups of 10 or more
- One free place for groups of 20+
- No charge for seat reservations

For information about Erzgebirge Sightseeing Train excursions visit:

www.aussichtsbahn.de

Update:

Timetables, prices and conditions of carriage for 2013 are currently being updated and will be published as soon as possible.

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