

Dow Jones Reprints: This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit www.djreprints.com

[See a sample reprint in PDF format.](#)

[Order a reprint of this article now](#)

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WSJ.com

EUROPE NEWS | JUNE 25, 2010

On Germany's Fairy-Tale Trail

Some 600 kilometers and 60 towns link to the Brothers Grimm

By [RHEA WESSEL](#)

A stone's throw from Frankfurt, Germany's financial hub, lies a lesser-known center of influence: Hanau, the birthplace of the Brothers Grimm, and an original stage for fairy tales repeated countless times in children's bedrooms around the world.

From Hansel and Gretel to Rumpelstiltskin, the Brothers Grimm are known for preserving more than 200 fairy tales and legends that were maintained in the oral tradition.



Anna Lisa Marten

Marburg's Landgrave Castle

The brothers, linguists and philologists, were the first to assemble a comprehensive written collection of the often dark and dangerous German tales. The original versions, first published in 1812, had yet to be sanitized of their carnal gore: In the debut Grimm edition, one of Cinderella's stepsisters cut off her toes and the other her heel to make the slipper fit, and instead of kissing the frog in the Frog King tale, the princess angrily threw it against a wall.

Bloodstained or not, along Germany's so-called Fairy Tale Route -- which is dedicated to the

Brothers Grimm and spans some 600 kilometers north to south from Bremen to Hanau -- visitors can surrender their hearts to the primeval tug of lore, legend and tales.

Children can climb the tower where Rapunzel may have let down her hair, spend the night in Sleeping Beauty's castle and dress like a mouse to follow the Pied Piper through Hamelin. All the while, adults can reminisce to younger days, viewing the world once again through the magical lens of childhood.

Some 60 cities are pinned to the Fairy Tale Route (www.german-fairytalesroute.com), a loose affiliation of villages and cities that claim a connection to a Grimm story or to the brothers.

We decided to focus on the trail within 100 kilometers of Frankfurt during a weekend trip in early June. With my husband and our 5-year-old daughter in tow, our tour began in Hanau, where the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were born in 1785 and 1786, respectively.

The city is home to a wide variety of fairy-tale productions during the Brothers Grimm Festival, the second-largest theater festival in the state of Hesse, which takes place each summer and draws some 75,000 attendees annually. This year, the festival features 90 plays, plus readings and speeches from historians about the lives and work of the Brothers Grimm. Children can choose from a variety of productions such as musicals, ballet renditions of Hansel and Gretel and a sing-along rock concert.



Bruder Grimm-Haus and Museum Steinau

1956 edition of Red Riding Hood illustrated by Otto Schubert

On a balmy Friday evening, we admired the expansive gardens at the Philippsruhe castle before making our way to the amphitheater on the grounds, where we viewed Cendrillon, the French version of Cinderella, originally penned by Charles Perrault, and scripted and produced for the event by festival director Dieter Gring. Mr. Gring, who has run the festival for four years, recently expanded the repertoire of the festival beyond the Brothers Grimm into international fairy tales.

As if we needed evidence that fairy tales aren't just for children, the prince in Cendrillon, Louis, suddenly appeared on stage in his boxer shorts. (Louis shed his courtly garb for a swim after his head was spinning with the news that his father wanted him to marry.) Our daughter wasn't the youngest in the audience, but the prince's attire did make me realize the play was billed properly as one for adults.

Whether presented for children or adults, Mr. Gring says he has always been fascinated by fairy tales as the basis of classic dramaturgy.

"Fairy tales provide an exciting framework for unfolding a story and a character," he said. A local woman echoed Mr. Gring's sentiments during the intermission. A regular at the festival, Christiane Megerle says she loves the symbolic character of fairy tales and returns each year to maintain the link to her inner, story-hungry child.

The next day, 50 kilometers up the road in the village of Steinau an der Strasse, we watched a puppet-show rendition of Mother Holle in the old-town theater. It formerly served as a stable for the village's moat-encircled Renaissance castle, where roughly 100 marionettes collected from the puppet theater are on display. (Long before my daughter was born, I sat on the edge of my seat in the same darkened theater with a group of children, worried that the new queen might not guess Rumpelstiltskin's name.) On this day, I savored the sound of children's laughter -- my daughter's included. It lightened the air around the brutal story of a stepmother and stepsister who make a young girl's life miserable. The puppeteers demonstrated impressive control of the marionettes and their voices, causing a variety of emotions -- frustration, fear, pity and joy -- to emanate from the wooden creatures.

Where to Stay

Hanau

The Best Western Premier Hotel Villa Stokkum. One of the nicest hotels in Hanau, the Villa Stokkum complex of buildings is nestled at the base of the stone wall that once surrounded the village of Steinheim near Hanau. The hotel caters to groups but still offers flair and charm. Allow 15 minutes to drive from the hotel to the amphitheater at the Philippsruhe castle, where the Brothers Grimm Festival is held.

www.villastokkum.bestwestern.de

Telephone: +49 (0) 6181 - 6640

Near Alsfeld

Hôtel Schloss Romrod. Built in the 12th century as a castle for the House of Hohenstaufen, this hotel is situated in a park in the Vogelsberg region, near Alsfeld, which is "home" to Little Red Riding Hood. Illustrating the hotel's motto of "modern style within ancient walls," each room is equipped with an Apple iMac for watching TV or surfing the Web. Book early since the hotel is a favorite for wedding parties, particularly in summer.

www.schloss-romrod.com

+49 (0) 6636 - 91 81 700

Marburg

Vila Vita Hotel & Residence Rosenpark. This five-star hotel and residence stands at a fork in the Lahn River, one of Germany's most beautiful waterways. Live piano music fills the atrium most evenings. Guests can book a wine tasting in the hotel's wine cellar or enjoy international cuisine at Vila Vita's one-Michelin-starred restaurant. Don't miss the hotel's wellness center, complete with heated lounge chairs, aroma cubicles and an ice fountain that looks like a lion's head – a sure fascination for the little ones.

www.rosenpark.com

+ 49 (0) 64 21 - 60 05 0

What to Do

Wildpark "Alte Fasanerie"— Animal Preserve "Old Pheasant House"

An animal preserve set in the middle of the forest in Klein-Auheim, a village outside of Hanau, the Old Pheasant House is home to three tundra wolves.

www.erlebnis-wildpark.de

+496 1816 9191

Treetop Climbing Park

Test your balance, slide along a metal cable and overcome vertigo at a climbing park up to nine meters above ground in the trees. Children must be 1.40 meters tall. Kids under 12 with adults only.

A short walk from the theater is the Brothers Grimm House, where the duo lived from 1791 to 1796, when their father, a lawyer, worked for the city as a civil servant. We visited the home, which is now a museum dedicated to fairy tales. We were slightly disappointed to find much of the exhibit closed due to renovations. Still, we viewed early printed editions of the Grimm collection of tales and the dictionaries the brothers labored over. Meanwhile, my daughter wondered aloud why the door frames in the cross-timbered home were so short. We also admired the dangerous-looking, brown-faced and green-horned mythical creature that guarded the door to the brothers' home.

Burkhard Kling, the director of the Brothers Grimm House, designed the new exhibition, which will show how fairy tales are rendered in modern-day culture through animated cartoons and art. Early next year, visitors can view 10 additional rooms dedicated to the brothers and fairy tales, including an artist's installation of a crown that children can walk through. According to Mr. Kling, an art historian and a self-confessed fairy tale junkie, some 15,000 people visit the Brothers Grimm House a year on their quest to capture the spirit of the brothers, German cultural icons with standing similar to Goethe and Wagner.

On the way to Marburg for the night, our final destination, we stopped by the old town square in the village of Alsfeld in search of Little Red Riding Hood. The city is said to be part of Little Red Riding Hood territory, since young girls in the area often wore traditional costumes that included a red headpiece, thus inspiring the narrative.

Some cities stretch harder than others for an affiliation to the Brothers Grimm, and others gain access to the Fairy Tale Route based on their magical scenery, according to Brigitte Buchholz-Blödow, the marketing director for the route. Alsfeld probably qualifies on both counts: Dotted with outdoor cafes, Alsfeld's square is

www.waldseilpark-hanau.de
+49 615 2187 5813

Canoe Tour on the Lahn River

Tour operator: Lahntours Aktivreisen
Book a variety of individual or group tours along the waterway to view some of Germany's most interesting birdlife.
www.lahntours.de
+49 642 692 800

Brothers Grimm House Steinau an der Strasse

The home where the Brothers Grimm lived from 1791 to 1796 is now a museum dedicated to fairy tales. Under renovation until early 2011, the museum features early printed editions of the Grimm book of fairy tales.
www.brueder-grimm-haus.de
+49 6663 7605

Theater

Hanau: The Brothers Grimm Festival 2010
Feature productions: 'Snow White' (musical), 'The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs' and 'Cendrillon.' The festival takes place in the amphitheater on the grounds of Philippsruhe castle.
Until July 25. Tickets cost from €9 to €20.
www.hanau.de/kultur/grimm/plan/002344/index.html
+49 6181 24670

Kassel: Brothers Grimm Festival 2010
Featured Production: King Thrushbeard
Until Aug. 17. Tickets range from €13 to €24.
www.brueder-grimm-festival.com
+49 561 18383

Marionette Theater Steinau an der Straße
Season: Plays are performed almost every day from June through December. Tickets cost roughly 6 euros for children's productions and 6 to 12 euros for adults.
www.die-holzkoeppe.de
+49 (0) 6663 - 245

Where to eat

Chicken Farm Restaurant
An experience of its own, trek or drive into the forest near Steinau an der Straße to have a server use a spear to drop half a chicken on your plate or hang a shish kebab above your table.
www.brathaehnchenfarm.de
+49 (0) 6663 -228

wall).

One weekend wasn't nearly enough to relive our childhoods along the Fairy Tale Route. That's why, as we put our daughter to bed talking of Cinderella and Mother Holle, we vowed to see more of the route. Perhaps we'll tackle a northern section in 2012, the year that the Grimm book of fairy tales will be 200 years old and dozens of events will mark the anniversary. The book was

flanked by a cross-timbered, late-Gothic city hall atop a stone arcade. The landmark gives the sleepy settlement a touch of class and foreshadowed the elegance of Marburg, the city where the brothers studied at the university and met some of their first intellectual mentors.

Elsewhere, four towns in the state of Hesse claim a connection to the tale Mother Holle -- Lichtenau, Bad Sooden-Allendorf, Grossalmerode and Meissner. Lichtenau has put up a Mother Holle Park, Bad Sooden-Allendorf runs a theater festival, Grossalmerode claims a connection to the apple tree that the girl picked when Mother Holle put her to the test, and Meissner is the city where Mother Holle supposedly lived.

With or without the Grimm connection, many towns near or along the lower leg of the Fairy Tale Route offer storybook architecture or outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling or boating. We combined both on Sunday in Marburg: We admired the Gothic, Landgrave castle that hovers over the city before canoeing down the Lahn river, one of Germany's most beautiful waterways and a natural sanctuary at some points along its course. We headed down an eight-kilometer stretch of the river on which birds outnumbered the fishermen and picknickers visible at the water's edge. Mute swans and mallards with shimmery blue-green heads took care of their young and foraged for food. To my delight, I witnessed a muskrat come up for air and then swim along the bank, most likely after emerging from the tunnel that led from its lodge. I also enjoyed the sword lilies that thrived in the water directly near the bank. All that seemed to be missing was a little fairy-tale frog sitting atop the lily's leaf waiting to be kissed by a princess (or be thrown against a

recently declared a world heritage document by UNESCO. The original is on display in Kassel, the city where the brothers went to school and another cultural highlight, just 90 kilometers from Marburg up the Fairy Tale Route.

—Rhea Wessel is a writer based in Kronberg, Germany.

Highlights from Our Brothers Grimm Tour

Event	Mom	Dad	Five-year old princess
A late evening show of Cinderella at the Brothers Grimm Festival in Hanau	 for the colorful costumes and an emancipated Cinderella	 for the director's creative twists on Cinderella	 for getting to stay up late
Watching a wolf sunbathe in a small clearing in the woods at an animal preserve near Hanau	 for a reprieve from the crowds at child-friendly places on Saturday mornings	 for seeing animals in a natural setting	 for making me think of Peter and the Wolf (even if it's not a Brothers Grimm tale)
An afternoon puppet show of Mother Holle in Steinau an der Strasse	 for the charming marionettes and a theater full of children's laughter	 for the great snooze on a hot summer day	 for the puppet that I got to take home
A meal at the Chicken Farm restaurant, which is tucked as far into the woods as the home of Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother. (Steinau an der Strasse)	 for the chicken liver seasoned with thyme and garnished with baked apple	 for the chicken liver (coming from someone who is NOT a fan of chicken liver)	 for even suggesting that I should try the chicken liver! It smells bad!
The ancient town square of Alsfeld	 for the medieval cross-timbered city hall	 + for the medieval cross-timbered city hall. The half point extra is for agreeing with my wife on something.	 for making me wait even longer to get to the swimming pool at the hotel. Where was Little Red Riding hood, anyway?
Capsizing in a canoe in knee-deep water in the Lahn river near Marburg	 for reminding me that even gentle currents can be stubborn	 for the pleasure of replacing our camera	 for giving me something exciting to tell my friends back at kindergarten

Printed in The Wall Street Journal, page W6

Copyright 2009 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com