

Traditional glassblowing handicraft in Lauscha, Thuringia: The glassblower's town Lauscha is the birthplace of the glass Christmas tree decoration and of the glassblowing handicraft. Lauscha is located in the middle of one of Germany's most beautiful hiking areas, the Thuringian Forest – home of the famous Brothers Grimm fairytales. In 1597, the glassmakers Hans Greiner and Christoph Mueller were granted the permit to build this glassworks by the Duke Johann Casimir of Saxony-Coburg. In 1707, Ludwig Mueller-Uri created the very first artificial human eye made out of glass. That revolutionized the plastical medical treatment. The history is closely linked to the typical green "Thuringian Forest Glass" with little trapped air bubbles. The greenish color is originated in the high level of iron in Thuringian sand, the natural resource of glass making. In the olden days, the glassblowers used log fire with lower temperatures. The air bubbles can only escape at higher temperatures as created by later used gas fire. Up to the present many local glassworks are still active and produce glass handicraft with the experience of centuries. At some of the workshops you can watch the making. Sometimes you can even try yourself to blow a glass ball... Glass Christmas tree ornaments are of special importance to Lauscha, where the classic Christmas glitter ball was invented in 1847 – originally as a cheap substitute for expensive apples and nuts. These days in addition to traditional ornaments, Lauscha is famous for modern glass art and the handicraft of delicate jewelry, vases, tableware, garden balls and sculptures made out of glass. A specialty: artful glass animals and flowers. For foreigners, most glassworks offer an international shipping service for your precious delicate purchases – for yourself or as unique gifts for family and friends back home. TGAC's escorted Advent Tours take you on a fascinating journey to Germany during the pre-Christmas season. Discover the magic spirit of the Advent time, explore traditional German handicraft and listen to the magnificent sounds of church music, choirs and organs. Glass and porcelain manufacturers in the rural Thuringian Forest and woodcraft in the Saxon Ore Mountain region Erzgebirge are only two examples of lively German traditional handicraft we'll discover and enjoy.

http://www.thegermanamericanconnection.com/Christmas_Markets.html

The historic Passion Play 2010 festival in Oberammergau: The Oberammergau Passion Play is the oldest festival in Germany and the most famous passion play that is still performed today. Especially popular in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, passion plays reenact the suffering and Crucifixion of Christ as a form of devotion. The Passion Play depicts the last five days in the life of Jesus Christ, from Palm Sunday to Easter. Oberammergau, a picturesque village in the Bavarian Alps, has faithfully performed its passion play every ten years since 1634 in fulfillment of a vow. The Oberammergau Passion Play was first performed in 1634. According to tradition, a traveling villager unknowingly brought the Black Death home with him, causing a local epidemic that killed nearly 100 people of Oberammergau. The terrified survivors begged God to spare their town from further deaths, vowing to perform a passion play in their village every 10 years. The plague disappeared with no further deaths and the villagers of Oberammergau have faithfully kept their vow to the present day. The Oberammergau Passion Play has been performed virtually every decade since 1634, with the only known exceptions being in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War and during World War II, when religious plays were banned. The performances were shifted to every year ending in zero in 1700, so performance dates in the early 21st century include the years 2000, 2010, and 2020. Now, more than 2,000 citizens make up the actors, singers, instrumentalists and stage technicians that bring the play to life in approx. six hours of playing time. In keeping with this centuries-old tradition, Oberammergau's passion play is an authentic local production. It is performed entirely by amateur actors who have been residents of Oberammergau for at least 20 years and are of good moral standing in the community. The actors begin growing their long hair and beards (no wigs allowed!) beginning on Ash Wednesday the previous year. The Passion Play takes place outdoors where the sky and mountains are the backdrop. A wonderful spectacle of pageantry. The world-famous costumes are made locally by residents and the production includes live animals. The next performances take place from May-September, 2010.

http://www.thegermanamericanconnection.com/Passion_Play_2010.html

<http://www.passionplay-oberammergau.com>

Local public events – a special tip for independent travelers: Germany's calendar is loaded with annual fairs, festivals, concerts and parties and most of them don't cost a penny. In early spring Carnival is celebrated with great enthusiasm. It is a time of elaborate street parades, masks, balls and official madness, and generally takes place seven weeks before Easter. Towns famous for their Carnival celebrations include Aachen, Cologne, Düsseldorf, Mainz, Munich and Münster. Germany's summer brings with it a whole host of fun events. Fall is when Germany's most famous event and the world's largest beer festivals take place. Every year, the Theresienwiese fairground in Munich is transformed into a city of beer tents, amusements, rides and kiosks selling snacks and sweets for the world-famous Oktoberfest. Around the same time in the second half of October, the „Day of the Regions“ takes place with countless food and harvest related festivities focusing on local handcrafts and seasonal local culinary specialties. Beer and Wine Festivals are only two examples. These events culminate at the first weekend of October – the official harvest festival date for the German equivalent of Thanksgiving. Late in November or early in December, hundreds of Christmas Markets open their doors throughout Germany. Every year people from all over the world come to visit colorful stalls which sell mulled wine, arts and crafts, grilled sausages, gingerbread and much more. There are no entrance fees and you'll be able to enjoy free Christmas concerts and find very reasonable priced handmade items and traditional Christmas decorations to take home. Germany is also famous for its colorful local town and theme festivals where local and international artisans and craftsmen show the making of their artistic and traditional products at a market setting. You can find „Onion Market“ (Zwiebelmarkt), “Pottery Market” (Toepfermarkt) and “Wickerwork Market” (Korbflechter Markt) as well as festivities celebrating famous inhabitants such as Martin Luther, Johann Sebastian Bach as examples. Another insider's tip are the countless open air summer concerts for little or no money in churches, abbeys, palaces, garden and parks. A special highlight are the numerous romantic “Castle Nights” with live classical music, performing arts, fireworks and culinary delights. Take the time to search the websites of local tourism information for event calendars – or take advantage of TGAC's Individual Trip Planning Service for your unique tour. With our small group tours we always search for local public events and implement them in our flexible itineraries.

http://www.thegermanamericanconnection.com/Individual_Traveler_Info.html

http://www.thegermanamericanconnection.com/Independent_Travelers.html

The magnificent Church of Our Lady in Dresden, Saxony: The reconstruction of the Baroque Church of Our Lady (Frauenkirche) was one of the most impressive redevelopment projects in Germany. The Frauenkirche had been totally destroyed during the Second World War. But it took 45 years before the reconstruction became a feasible possibility. And, in total, 60 years went by before the Frauenkirche in all its baroque beauty could reopen its doors to the world. Initial endeavours to start rebuilding were already undertaken in the last months of the Second World War. As the reconstruction of a church was not, however, a priority issue in the GDR (former East Germany), conditions favourable to this didn't exist until after the political changes that led to the reunification of Germany in 1990. Thanks to the impressive efforts made by the citizen's action group, the reconstruction concept was spread throughout the entire world. Over a period of 11 years and more, the church was rebuilt piece by piece – in keeping with the design specifications set out by George Baehr in the 18th century for the old baroque church and using original materials to the largest extent possible. On October 30th 2005, the celebratory consecration took place. The Frauenkirche Dresden can look back on a 1000–year history. Already its predecessor churches were dedicated to the Mother of God. The Frauenkirche was built as a Protestant cathedral even though Saxony's Prince–elector, Frederick August I., was Catholic. The architect Baehr's distinctive design for the church captured the new spirit of the Protestant liturgy by placing the altar, pulpit, and baptismal font directly centered in view of the entire congregation. In 1736, famed organ maker Gottfried Silbermann built a three–manual instrument for the church. The organ was dedicated on 25 November and Johann Sebastian Bach gave a recital on the instrument on 1 December. To visit the Frauenkirche today, you can join one of our exclusive small groups tours with TGAC (Christmas Markets, Passion Play and others) or with CULTOURINARIA (Classy Cultural & Culinary Tours) we offer throughout the year. For existing groups and independent travelers we also organize tailor–made trips to Germany according to your special interest, your budget and your wishes.

http://www.thegermanamericanconnection.com/Christmas_Markets.html

http://www.thegermanamericanconnection.com/Passion_Play_2010.html

<http://www.cultourinaria.com>

<http://www.frauenkirche-dresden.de>

Berlin's world-famous Currywurst – the “steak for the regular people”: At the end of the Second World War, Germany – and Berlin – was occupied by the victorious power which also brought their eating habits and preferences such as steaks with ketchup for US-Americans. A man named Herr Heuwer had the idea to serve this national dish. But in these times of food shortage, steak meat was not available. Therefore the steak was simply replaced by the typical Berlin “steam sausage” and the ketchup was replaced by an own sauce creation made from tomato paste and spices from a Hamburg spice mill – the “steak for the regular people at the streets” was born. Mr. Heuwer's clever wife Herta named her snack booth in Berlin “World's first Currywurst grille”. In 1958, she created her own sauce recipe and took out a patent for the now “original Berlin Currywurst sauce”. After more than 50 years, the Berlin Currywurst Museum opens on August 15th, 2009 with an unique exhibition about this delicious invention which became a landmark for the Berliner's legendary inventive talent. Good Currywurst grille-bars now have a cult status in Berlin. Most of the small snack grille owners created their own sauces – and no surprise – it's always the best in the city... You can even find the Currywurst at the menu of one of Berlin's most elegant hotel restaurants, the “Hotel Adlon Restaurant Quarre”. Of course, nowadays Berlin offers the entire spectrum of national and international cuisines. It's the perfect location to savor all kind of culinary specialties and food products. There are also many professional cooking schools for both, culinary students and leisure chefs. CULTOURINARIA offers “German cuisine & Cooking” Tours to Berlin and East Germany with cooking classes and excursions to markets, farms, pastries...

http://www.thegermanamericanconnection.com/culinary_tours.html

<http://www.cultourinaria.com>

<http://www.currywurst-berlin.com/9501.html> (only in German available)

More news & travel tips:

<http://www.tgac-us.com>