

Trace 'Great Reformer's' steps in 'Lutherland'



Rick Steves

Martin Luther, a pious monk and fiery orator who became "The Great Reformer," came from a humble, pastoral corner of Germany's heartland.

It's a land of half-timbered villages, rolling hills and fanciful castles ... and where Luther's bold attempts to reform the Catholic Church launched the Protestant Reformation over 500 years ago. Along with the Renaissance — and as part of the rise of humanism — the Reformation contributed greatly to the birth of our modern world.

On Oct. 31, 1517, Luther challenged Roman Catholic doctrine by posting his 95 Theses (discussion topics) on a church door. This started a chain of events that would split Western Christian faith, plunge Europe into a century of warfare, cause empires to rise and fall, and inspire new schools of art and thought. In eastern Germany near Leipzig, three "Lutherland" destinations — Erfurt, Wartburg Castle and Wittenberg — are the top spots for a Luther pilgrimage.

OK, I'll admit it — I'm a Lutheran. For me, coming to "Lutherland" is a bit like a Catholic going to Rome. But anyone who appreciates history will find the sights here interesting (as Luther was impactful in both secular and religious ways).

Start in Erfurt, a charming many-steepled medieval town that Luther himself would still recognize. Young Martin enrolled at the university here, and, after a lightning storm epiphany in 1505, became a monk. Today, visitors can tour the Augustinian Monastery and Church, including the austere cell where Luther spent his formative years, and the church where he



A top sight at Wartburg Castle is the Luther Room, where Martin Luther hunkered down to translate the New Testament. CAMERON HEWITT

struggled with theological demons.

Just west of Erfurt is another important Luther landmark: Wartburg Castle, perched over the town of Eisenach. When Luther spoke out against Church corruption, he made enemies of the pope and emperor. Luther was declared a heretic — "outside the protection of the law" — and could be captured and killed by anyone. While traveling nearby, he was "kidnapped" and dropped out of sight.

Days later, a man named Junker Jörg ("Squire George") appeared at Wartburg Castle — a disguised Martin Luther, who had been taken by agents of his benefactor, Prince Frederick the Wise. Now safely hidden behind Wartburg's stout walls, Luther spent nearly a year making his next stand against the Vati-

can, diligently translating the New Testament from original Greek sources into a very readable-for-the-locals German edition. Luther's text helped shape standard written German — making Wartburg, in a sense, the birthplace of the modern German language.

At Wartburg Castle, stop at the museum. A few opulent rooms were lavishly redecorated during a surge of German pride in the late 1880s, and Romantic paintings show how it looked before reconstruction. A highlight here is the humble Luther Room, where Luther hunkered down to translate the New Testament.

Little Wittenberg is Luther's adopted hometown. With a straightforward townscape, it feels unassuming ... but this is where one of the biggest shakeups in Western civilization started. A top

sight here is the Church of All Saints (a.k.a. Castle Church), with Luther's modest tombstone inside, and where he posted his 95 Theses. The act wasn't quite as defiant as it sounds, since the church door served as sort of a community bulletin board — but the strong arguments Luther made about Church corruption were revolutionary.

Nearby is the Town Church of St. Mary, where Luther was married, where his children were baptized, and where he preached more than 2,000 times. This is where what many consider to be the first-ever Protestant church service took place, on Christmas Day in 1521.

A few blocks further you'll find Luther House, his former home. It's now an excellent museum displaying original paintings, manuscripts and

other Luther-era items — including his pulpit, famous portraits of Luther and the other reformers by Lucas Cranach, and Luther's original German Bible translations.

After he broke with Rome, the 42-year-old Martin Luther married 26-year-old Katherine von Bora, a former nun. It was here that she gave birth to six children (the couple also adopted four orphans). It was a happy marriage. Luther wrote, "Marriage is a better school for the character than any monastery, for it's here that your sharp corners are rubbed off."

Luther House's centerpiece is the "Lutherstube" — the room with benches, a stove and the table where Luther engaged in spirited conversations with his colleagues. Names are scratched into the ceiling, left behind by visiting

VIPs — and on the door, protected by glass, is the John Hancock of Russian Czar Peter the Great.

After Luther's death in 1546, until the dawn of the 20th century, the Reformation helped open the way for fundamental changes in Western society. With a less controlling role of the Church in everyday life, secular forces were free to flourish. Lutherland's sights are physical reminders of courageous accomplishments of the Reformation — and the enduring example Martin Luther set for those who dare to speak truth to power.

Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European travel guidebooks and hosts travel shows on public television and public radio. Email him at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.

CELEBRITY TRAVEL

Montana, Tokyo on Kinsley's to-see list

By Jae-Ha Kim
TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY

Singer-songwriter Sarah Kinsley has shared the stage with Mitski and gotten a shoutout from Chappell Roan, but what she vividly remembers is the line around the block for her first professional gig in 2021 at the Mercury Lounge in New York.

"It was my first time playing any of my music in a venue with tickets and people actually choosing to come listen to me for an hour and a bit," said Kinsley, 25.

"I remember I was so scared I wasn't going to be able to hear myself the minute before we went on stage, so I turned my in-ear mix all the way up and gave myself hearing damage from my stage mic picking up the loud screaming crowd. I was exhausted and sweaty, but it felt like I was at the beginning of something true and real bubbling in front of me. It was the culmination of a dream I'd held onto from when I was 12 years old."

This interview with Kinsley has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: What is the story behind your new record "Fleeting"?

A: It's an EP acknowledging and embracing the transience of life. I have always struggled with the passage of time, with understanding how to constantly find oneself in a present moment that is always changing, always moving. There is something equally painful and undeniably beautiful about knowing that something will end



Singer-songwriter Sarah Kinsley said her next tour will include cities she has never visited. FLORENCE SULLIVAN

"Fleeting" is my attempt to hold both sides equally and pay homage to both!

Q: Did you work on "Fleeting" while you were on the road?

A: We played "Lonely Touch" on a tour in April for two weeks and at festivals over the summer — almost a year before the song actually came out. It gave me a chance to really play with my vocal performance and the feeling of how the song should exist for me. I have good memories of showing one of my closest friends, Dea — who I tour with — my early demos while we were stranded in airports or slightly terrifying hotels on the road, too.

Q: Does the music you hear in a particular place inspire your own work?

A: I'm very intrigued by the music scene in Copenhagen (and) general Scandinavia right now. My friends have sent me a lot of very, very incredible work coming out of that scene. Astrid Sonne. Smerz. I also just historically love a lot of English and Scottish artists. My favorite band of all time is the Cocteau Twins and I've been on a wave of loving New Order and the Blue Nile recently. When I was younger, I was definitely inspired by French classical music and Debussy was absolutely coursing through me when I was writing.

Q: Will your upcoming tour take you to places you haven't been to yet?

A: We're going to a lot of places in the U.S. that I've both never been to or toured in. Orlando. Carrboro, North Carolina. Birmingham in England, too.

Q: Do you have any nonwork-related trips planned?

A: I am hoping to escape to a chateau in the south of France this summer. I've been so desperate to go to the Dolomites, the mountainside of northern Italy, at some point in my life. I don't know if that will happen this year or maybe next.

Q: Where would you like to go that you have never been to before?

A: Tokyo. Croatia. Brazil. Peru. Montana. Georgia, the country. Iceland. Nepal.

Q: When you go away, what are some of your must-have items?

A: Noise-canceling headphones. Camera of some kind. A journal that has space to hold dried flowers or receipts, any kind of relics of my time spent in this other place. A really fantastic book that isn't too heavy or boring. And the ultimate must-have item is space in my suitcase to fit new trinkets and keepsakes.

For more from the reporter, visit www.jaehakim.com.

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

National Car Rental persists with wrongful damage claim

By Christopher Elliott | KING FEATURES SYNDICATE

I recently rented a Hyundai Sonata from National at Raleigh-Durham International Airport. Within minutes of driving off the lot, I started hearing noises from under the car. I drove a couple of exits, then turned around and brought it back.

When I entered the National facility, one of the attendants said, "Well, there's another Sonata with the lower engine cover coming loose." I explained what happened; a representative said "no problem," and I got another car. I had the Sonata for maybe 30 to 60 minutes total.

About a month later, I got an email from National's damage recovery unit demanding my insurance information. I called and explained that I did nothing to the car; I just drove it out of the lot and onto the highway. A representative said that since I only had the car for such a short time, I should be good.

But three months later, I got another demand. I appealed, and they denied it with no explanation. I never got photos of the damage or explanations of what they're claiming I did. I've emailed three National executives who are listed on your site but haven't heard back.

I've been a loyal National customer for 20 years. National wants me to pay \$2,000 for the damage. This is ridiculous!

— Walter Gluzkin, Miami Beach, Florida

A: When you returned the defective Sonata within an hour, and an employee acknowledged that there was "another" car with the same problem, this should have been the end of it. National should have documented this as a mechanical failure, not as customer damage. That even their own employee recognized this as a recurring issue with the model should have protected you completely.

Instead, National's damage recovery unit decided to pursue you for money. I've lost count of the number of times that I've seen this. Usually, customers roll over and surrender their insurance information. But not you!

You could have strengthened your case by getting the employee's confession in writing. But honestly, you

shouldn't have needed to. National's own employee confirmed that this was a known defect.

National's actions are problematic on several levels. Under most states' consumer protection laws, businesses can't charge customers for preexisting defects. Also, National should have provided you with detailed documentation of the alleged damage, repair estimates and photographic evidence — not give vague demands for insurance information.

You did exactly what I would have recommended — escalating this to National's executives. I publish their contact information on my consumer advocacy site, elliott.org. The fact that they initially ignored your appeals is frankly embarrassing for

a company that claims to value customer service.

Most importantly, You were not a pushover, a key ingredient to a good resolution. When you're right, you have to stand up for your rights!

I contacted National on your behalf and it reviewed your rental record. "Customer satisfaction is our top priority," a company representative told me, "and maintaining a customer's long-term loyalty is important to us." National contacted you and agreed to drop the claim.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a non-profit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.