

Fairytale FOREST

THIS SPREAD, FROM THE LEFT: A view over a valley in the Black Forest; A wolf; A sign warning against wolves.



Germany's Schwarzwald – or Black Forest – provides an enchanting landscape for a walking holiday.

WORDS: EMMA GIBBS

The scene is especially pastoral: gentle, sloping farmland where russet-coloured cows graze, backed by hills clad in the deep green of spruce and fir trees. So the sign, with a photo of a dismembered, almost unrecognisable animal, intestines sprawling out, is particularly shocking. We read the words below: *Am 13 September war ein Wolf hier auf der Weide und tötete dieses 10 Monate alte Rind.*

Neither my friend Anna nor I speak much German, but both of us pick up on one particular word. "There's wolves here?" I ask. Images of the animal that haunted my childhood nightmares flood into my mind – the Big Bad Wolf of fairytales, who I suspected was always lurking under my bed or in the cupboard at the foot of it – as we check the text on a translation app. *On 13 September, a wolf was here in the pasture and killed this ten-month-old calf.*

Yes, there are wolves in the Black Forest; the animals began returning here around ten years ago. Though they remain in small numbers, there is a clear struggle between their existence and that of local farmers. The next day, in another idyllic setting where a little red house with shuttered windows sits against the forested hill that we've just descended, we see another sign, even easier to understand: a clip-art picture of a cow with a thumbs up, and a thumbs down »



THERE IS A SLIGHTLY HEIGHTENED, STORY- LIKE FEEL TO OUR PATHS THROUGH AND OUT OF THE TREES

next to a wolf's head. "Grazing animals instead of predators," it reads.

If this seems like something out of a fairytale, then it is appropriately so: it was here, in the Black Forest, that the Brothers Grimm collected many of the folk stories that they became famous for. There is a slightly heightened, story-like feel to our paths through and out of the trees; red-hatted, white-spotted, fly agaric toadstools, often with bite-shaped chunks taken out of them, dot the forest floor; brown squirrels, rendered larger by the way the sun falls on them, scuttle across our paths; and the soft tinkle of cow bells echoes out across the valleys of meandering rivers.

We are here, in the south of the Schwarzwald, as it is called in German, on a six-day holiday with Inntavel. Armed with a folder of route instructions, our days are based around walking: across the

countryside to our next hotel (our luggage, thankfully, is transferred by taxi rather than on our backs) on alternate days, and circular walks exploring the immediate local area in between. We started at the Hotel Peterle, close to the pretty village of Altglashütten, arriving in the dark after a long day of travelling overland from London (made longer thanks to Deutsche Bahn trains being determined to prove to us that German efficiency is only a stereotype). The next morning, we wandered out onto the vast green space in front of our hotel, dew wetting the tips of our shoes, and marvelled at the cloud inversion that sat almost on the valley floor. The deep clang of a bell rang out from the village church, less than a mile away, its green spire rising above a tumble of chalets.

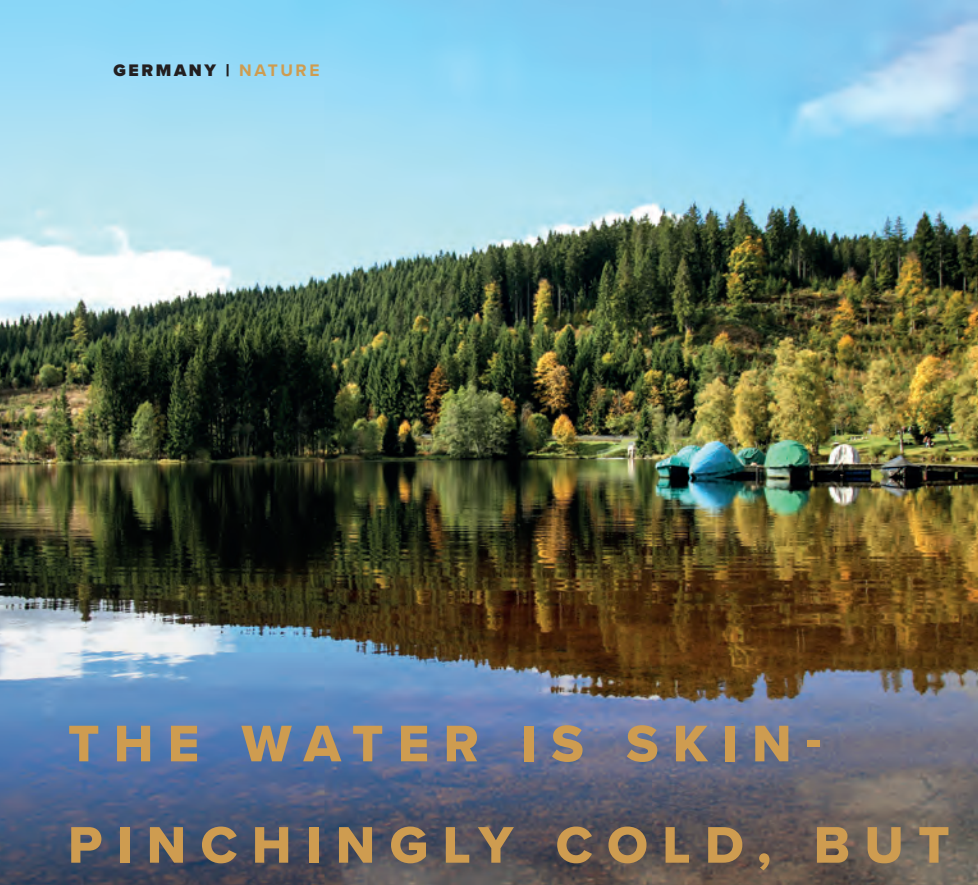
The name "Black Forest" conjures up images of somewhere dark and brooding, but in our days here we find it anything but. Our paths take us through a constantly shifting landscape; sometimes we are walking across tangled roots through fragrant pine forest, at others we emerge onto escarpments where the ground drops away to reveal scattered villages and flame-coloured trees among the spread of emerald-green conifers. At one point on our first day, we see Windgfällweiher glittering



OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM THE TOP: Looking out over the hills; Dappled shad along a forest path.

THIS PAGE, FROM THE TOP: Altglashütten; Hotel Peterle; A fly agaric growing in the forest.





THE WATER IS SKIN- PINCHINGLY COLD, BUT I SWIM FOR A WHILE IN THE EMPTY LAKE, THE TREES RISING UP ON ALL SIDES

below us; we veer off route down to the lakeshore, where I hurriedly change into my swimming costume. The water is skin-pinchingly cold, but I swim for a while in the empty lake, the trees rising up around me on all sides, watching silently.

"There's a German word – *gemütlichkeit* – that means comfortableness. It's genuine and heartfelt, and that's how I feel about the Black Forest," says Fiona Campbell, who is walking the same Inntravel routes with her husband. Every evening, we meet the two of them in the hotel bar – at first by coincidence and then, as the week progresses, by design – where we compare notes on the walks and discuss our plans for the next day.

Anna and I feel this *gemütlichkeit*, too: in the hotels that we arrive at every other day, with their much-appreciated glasses of frothy headed beer and hearty mountain food (*flädlesuppe*, a beef broth with slithers of soft pancake, is my favourite); in the pretty city of Freiburg, where we spend our last day sampling local wine and *currywurst* in the shadow of the red sandstone cathedral; in the wooden honesty boxes, always placed

at just the right moment, that open to reveal welcome bottles of beer and juice; and in the steady rhythm of our walking days. These always take longer than they should because there is too much to stop and look at: views that tell us just how high we've climbed; dragonflies zipping over mirror-like lakes; a jay that flitters between fence posts, as though he is leading the way; tiny wooden chapels, sitting quietly at roadsides.

During our time in the Black Forest, we walk around 50 miles, through sun-dappled forest where squirrels peer around trees, and along a damp gorge where mist swirls ahead of us; we negotiate skinny paths winding steeply downhill, and tramp beside fields with lowing cattle.

Yes, there are wolves in the Black Forest, though it strikes me that this is not the land of the Big Bad Wolf but instead of a low, gentle magic that utterly enchants us.

THIS PAGE: The still waters of Windgfallweiher.

Need to Know

GETTING THERE

The Black Forest can be reached overland via Eurostar (eurostar.com), connecting to trains to Germany in either Brussels or Paris. Inntravel have a dedicated rail department and can arrange rail itineraries between the UK and Germany.

GETTING AROUND

On this walking trip, you walk between each hotel (around nine miles) and your bags are taken ahead to your accommodation. Hotels provide guests with a handy KONUS Card, which allows you free transport on local buses and trains.

BEST TIME TO GO

This trip runs from April to October; there's no bad time to do it, but come in autumn for the resplendent colours and mild but very pleasant temperatures.

WHERE TO EAT

Dinners are included most nights as part of the trip; the meals at the Peterle are especially wonderful – and you'll build up a great appetite on your first day for their five-course gourmet menu. Don't miss out on trying German wines, particularly those that come from the eastern and western edges of the forest.

WHERE TO STAY

Accommodation in the Black Forest is comfortable and rustic; our favourite was the lovely Hotel Peterle (hotel-peterle.de) in Feldberg at the start of our trip, where rooms looked out onto the valley. In Hinterzarten, Hotel Imbery (hotel-imbery.de) is conveniently located in the heart of the town, while Hotel Sonne (sonne-kirchzarten.de) has recently celebrated its 300th anniversary and has a welcoming, family feel.

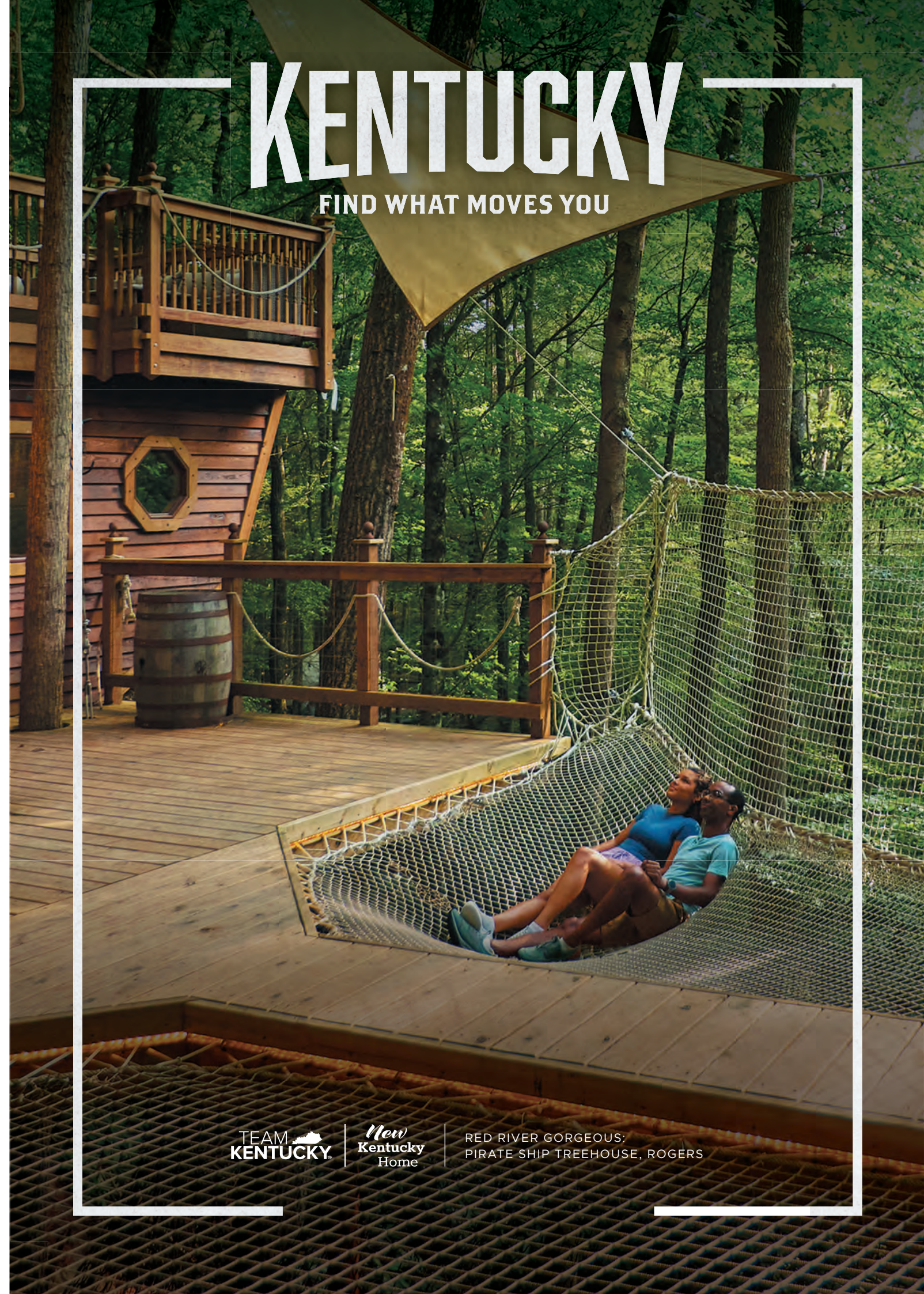
FURTHER INFORMATION

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Photos: Anna Moores, Emma Gibbs, Dreamstime

KENTUCKY

FIND WHAT MOVES YOU



TEAM
KENTUCKY

New
Kentucky
Home

RED RIVER GORGEOUS:
PIRATE SHIP TREEHOUSE, ROGERS