

Return to

Medieval Europe

By Genevieve Northup

Once upon a time ...

you read bedtime stories of princesses and knights and dreamed of living 800 years ago. Then you awoke in Europe, where the legends began. Perhaps you were crestfallen after countless castle ruins and torture museums exposed the unpleasant truths of the old world.

Fear not! Europe's medieval-themed feasts, hotels and events will restore your visions of the past's grandeur, merriment and mystery – minus the beheadings, bubonic plague and privy pits.

Dining

During the Middle Ages, wealthy families had grand banquets. Buffet tables were decorated with banners, floral arrangements and elaborate displays, like stuffed birds and gilded pies arranged to form giant crowns. Attendees drank wine or mead and listened to musical stories sung by min-

strels. By night's end, the great hall was quite rowdy.

Today, you need not be royalty to have a feast. But you must book in advance, lest you "kiss the hare's foot" (a medieval saying that means you have missed a meal and are stuck eating scraps). Here are a few that will please even the fussiest lords and ladies:

Spider Tavern and Tavern Brabant in Prague, Czech Republic: Spider Tavern's package is five food courses, unlimited alcoholic and nonalcoholic drinks, and two hours of juggling, dueling and dancing. Join feudal society's lowest class in the Tavern Brabant dungeon for all you can eat and drink, plus a lively show Tuesday to Sunday evenings.

Olde Hansa in Tallinn, Estonia: Located in historic Tallinn, Olde Hansa's kitchen cooks forest game – bear, elk, wild boar and rabbit. Choose a Feasting Menu (minimum two people) for fare and theatrics. Purchase leather accessories, traditional pottery and metal home décor

as mementos of your time travel.

Schloss Auerbach in Bensheim-Auerbach, Germany: The restored 13th century Auerbach Palace has entertainment programs throughout the year. The popular castle in flames extravaganza is celebrated with fire breathers, fire jugglers and fireworks.

Medieval Banquet in London, England: Borrow jester, maiden or knight attire to impress the peasants and curry favor with the queen. Discounted family tickets are available select nights.

Bunratty, Dunguaire and Knappogue castles near Shannon and Limerick, Ireland: For more than 50 years, Bunratty has hosted guests as it did in the 1500s. Irish tunes are played on bagpipes, harps and fiddles following a retelling of the local history. Productions of works by Irish playwrights and authors accompany Dunguaire's dinner. At Knappogue, a villain stands trial in the earl's court.

Accommodations

Red-carpet hospitality awaits his majesty at these family-friendly destinations.

Burghotel Castillo Alcazar in Rust,

Germany: Hit the hay after exploring Grimm's Enchanted Forest, an area of Europa Park dedicated to the Grimm Brothers' fantastical fiction. The alcazar is a four-star lodge borrowing architecture from Spain's spectacular Moorish fortresses.

Dětenice Château Resort in Dětenice,

Czech Republic: The Dětenice Château returns visitors to a time when weary travelers stopped at rural inns to have hearty suppers and ales before stumbling to bed. Actors portray aggressive beggars and sword-wielding patrons in the tavern. Modern amenities of the Medieval Hotel are hidden behind primitive facades – the room's wooden "outhouse" is a cleverly disguised 21st century bathroom.

Kulturinsel Einsiedel's Baumhaus Hotel in Neisseaue, Germany: Enter a fairy-tale tree house with barrel bathtubs and quirky wooden furniture; only the elves, pixies and talking animals are missing. Dinner shows take place in Coronation Hall.

Leeds Castle in Kent, England: First a Norman citadel and later Henry VIII's home, Leeds Castle is a legacy of England's regal past. Daily from April 1 to Nov. 8, the Battle of Agincourt is re-enacted. The bustling grounds feature the Squire's Courtyard and Knight's Realm playgrounds, gardens, mazes, museum exhibits, and glamour camping (glamping) in furnished knights' tents.

Europæisk Middelalder Festival in

Horsens, Denmark: Entrance to this interactive exhibition is free. There's a market place, combat and jousting spectacles, music, games, skits, parades and activities for young ones. Children may learn how to be squires, archers, bakers or carpenters. *Dates: Aug. 26-27, 2016*

England's Medieval Festival in Herst-

monceaux, East Sussex, England: Herstmonceaux Castle is the backdrop for the U.K.'s largest Middle Ages event. Highlights include sieges, birds of prey demonstrations, archery competitions, and the Kids Kingdom. Bring your own gear to camp or upgrade to a king's tent. *Dates: Aug. 27-29, 2016*

Middle Ages Christmas markets in

Germany: During the holidays, many towns have *Mittelalter Weihnachtsmärkte*. Characters from beloved fables stroll through Berlin's Fairy Tale Market, and wenchies serve flaming cocktails in goblets at Munich's Medieval Christmas Fair. The remains of Burg Lichtenburg are restored to days of yore at the beginning of the Advent season, while facilities of the living museum, Histotainment Park Adventon, add authenticity to Osterburken's market. Esslingen has one of the biggest Middle Ages/Renaissance markets. *Dates vary.*

Find comprehensive fest listings at <http://frank66furt.de/burgen/termine.htm>, www.medievalfayre.com and www.renaissancefairefestival.com. ■

Fairs and Markets

Thou art invited to journey across Europe to partake in a world of long ago.

Grand Fauconnier in Cordes-sur-Ciel,

France: Since 1971, the fortified French village has held an annual fête commemorating the region's heritage. Come hither for cavalcades, bazaars and banquets.

Dates: July 13-14, 2016

Kaltenberger Ritterturnier in Gelten-

dorf, Germany: Processions, fireworks, craft sales and demos, "bellytimber" (an archaic term for food) stalls and concerts are part of the tournament fanfare. Cheer for gallant champions representing noble estates in armed matches. *Dates: July 15-17, 22-24, 29-31, 2016*

