

Martin Luther (der 10. November 1483—der 2. Februar 1546)

LUTHERSTADT WITTENBERG: In the footsteps of Martin Luther



WITTENBERG, Germany — For the world’s roughly 800 million Protestants, a small corner of eastern Germany is their spiritual home — a place that takes on added importance this year, the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.

Covering an area roughly 150 miles long, so-called Luther Country is the birthplace and longtime home of religious rebel Martin Luther. Here it was that young Luther was allegedly frightened by a thunderstorm, interpreting a lightning strike as a sign to drop out of law school in favor of seminary. And here it was that the disillusioned theologian famously assailed the Catholic powers that be when he tacked his 95 theses on a church door Oct. 31, 1517, setting off the Reformation.

While commemorative concerts and museum exhibitions have been taking place all year long, momentum is building as the clock ticks closer to Oct. 31, 500 years to the day since Luther posted his grievances on Wittenberg’s Castle Church door.

At the center of the celebrations — and in the center of Luther Country, spiritually if not geographically — sits the small university town of Wittenberg. With a population of just under 50,000, Lutherstadt Wittenberg, as the city is officially known, was home to Martin Luther longer than anywhere else.

Stretching nearly a mile between the Castle Church and the monastery that became Luther’s family home, Wittenberg’s Collegienstrasse spanned the gulf between the established church and a new religious ideology. The town’s de facto Main Street, cobbled Collegienstrasse charms visitors with overflowing flower boxes, a gurgling canal and sidewalk cafes. In between, mom and pop shops display Reformation-themed souvenirs from the pedagogic to the playful: biographies of Martin Luther and his cohorts; detailed analyses