



ELBE SANDSTONE MOUNTAINS, GERMANY.

CO-LEAD BY WILLI ROLFES

17 - 24 October 2023

Seven nights, £2750

FOOD AND
PHOTOGRAPHY
RETREATS

with the Besses

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THE RETREAT

FOOD AND PHOTOGRAPHY RETREATS are for people who enjoy a house-party style of holiday in a lovely setting where they can immerse themselves totally in photography, mix with like-minded guests, and eat very well too. We're free of the restrictions of hotels and work mealtimes around photography, rather than vice-versa. If you're weary of being herded from one "photo-opportunity" to another and want the time and space to make your own work, then our Retreats are for you.

The Elbe Sandstone Mountains, straddling the border of Germany and Czechia (part of which is confusingly known as Saxon Switzerland) lie close to Dresden in what was once East Germany. There is no-where else in central Europe that matches the variety of landforms in so compact an area, from table mountains, to deep, wooded ravines, curiously eroded rock pillars to wild outcrops and crags. No wonder it was a favourite region of the celebrated German Romantic Period painter, Caspar David Friedrich. In its strangeness he found the perfect setting in which to create his haunting work. In more recent times, the makers of the *Chronicles of Narnia* also succumbed to its other-worldly charms to film some scenes.

We will visit during the peak week for autumn colours when the night time temperatures drop and we can expect some misty conditions too. Respected German photographer, Willi Rolfes, will co-lead this Retreat, and knows this area well.



WHAT'S ON OFFER

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED in learning one of the [particular skills](#) Niall is known for, take an eLearning class before the Retreat and have a chance to practise what you've learned in the field with Willi and him. During the Retreat, we will suggest and demonstrate edits on some of your photographs and allow time for proper reviews and critiques. This Retreat presents fabulous opportunities for landscape photography but of course, you're free to pursue whatever catches your eye. Some of the locations we plan to visit include:

- Bastei. One of the region's most famous viewpoints both towards and from the bridge.
- Bären Garten. A wooded gorge with an ancient bridge crossing the small river
- Little Goose rock (cover)
- The deep wooded gorge beneath Bastei bridge
- Papststein
- Lilienstein. A table mountain overlooking the Elbe
- Hohnstein. A picturesque old village with hill-top castle
- Pfaffenstein. Some of the most impressive rock towers, popular with climbers.
- Dresden. We may make a dusk visit to photograph this former seat of the kings of Saxony.



ACCOMMODATION

This area is popular with visitors, especially in the summer, but somewhat quieter in the autumn. We have been fortunate to secure a large property on the outskirts of the little village of Gohrisch, a couple of km to the south of the Elbe and within easy reach of most of our locations.

We have taken a combination of single, double and twin rooms in [Guesthouse Schmidt](#) to accommodate up to nine guests. Each bedroom has its own bathroom.

There are spacious grounds around the house to sit out, if the weather allows it.





Charlotte is adept at creating menus that are diverse, full of colour and flavour and, when possible, incorporate local ingredients. Each meal has an interesting vegetarian option (and one to two during the week are wholly vegetarian) and she is experienced at catering sensitively for people with food allergies and intolerances. At breakfast we offer porridge, museli, fruit juice, croissants, "cruffins" or scones, yoghurt, seeds, compot or fresh berries, toast, jams, and hot drinks. Coffee is available from the moment you enter the kitchen in the morning! Sometimes we pack lunch to take out with us, sometimes we eat in. And in between, there will be homemade cake. No one has ever left one of our Retreats feeling hungry!

THE ELBE SANDSTONE MOUNTAINS - SAXON SWITZERLAND, GERMANY

Some places bear the scars of their geological history for all to see, other try to conceal them, as best they can, under woodland or till. Sometimes, the peculiarity of that history, its discontinuity with the regions around, mean that even the densest forests, the deepest till, fail to disguise the trauma of a place's history and its essential incongruity.

So it is with Saxon Switzerland, an oddity amongst the Central European Uplands on account of the diversity of its landscapes in a small

area. It is transected by the Elbe river valley and lies a short drive to the south east of Dresden, extending over the border into Czechia. Between pockets of rolling agricultural land are tepui-like table mountains, abysmal gorges and lofty rock pillars. These features trace their origins back to the Cretaceous period when the area was submerged and the sediments from which these features emerged were laid down. Eons of erosion have produced the remarkable landscape we see today, a landscape that has been an irresistible draw to visitors for 200 years.

The dense forests that cloak the area can't mask its strange beauty and indeed, it is that strangeness that appeals to us.

The term "Saxon Switzerland" traces its origins to two painters from the Swiss Jura who taught at the Dresden Academy of Art in the late 18th Century and were put in mind of home. Casper David Friedrich's most famous work, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, is set here and we will provide a "character" if you also want to feature a person in your work.

While the greater landscape here undoubtedly inspires awe, the region's many dense woodlands - cheery with the colours of autumn - mossy cascades and gloomy ravines will keep us absorbed, no matter the weather or time of day.



GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE RETREAT

Price: GBP 2750

What's included:

- 7 nights' accommodation at [Gästehaus Schmidt](#), Bauerngasse 91, 01824 Gohrisch OT, Germany
- All meals
- Transfer to and from Dresden International Airport or Königstein Bahnhof (railway station)
- Transportation during the Retreat.

What's not included:

- Your travel to and from Dresden / Königstein, from home
- Alcoholic drinks
- Travel insurance
- Any entry admissions

Where we will go

Most of the locations we will visit are within a short walk of where we park. Much of the walking is on quite flat paths but there are some locations which require a little bit of climbing on well-made paths - this is especially the case in ravines. Places we will visit may include:

- Bastei bridge
- Bäregarten
- Little Goose rock
- The deep wooded gorge beneath Bastei bridge
- Papstein
- Lilienstein
- Hohnstein.
- Lichtenhainer waterfall
- Pfaffenstein.
- Locations around our accommodation
- Dresden.

The daily routine

Whatever we are shooting, it tends

to look better in the early morning or late afternoon when low-angled light shows relief and colours better. With dawn at around 07:42 and dusk around 17:55, the days outside aren't unduly long. We may visit Dresden at dusk one day, depending on interest, to photograph this beautiful city as night falls.

The plan for the next day is published at dinner, outlining the weather forecast, the locations and ideas for the next day, drive times, walking distances, where and when we'll eat and what gear you'll probably need. Experience has taught that it's more productive, and satisfactory for you, to have a plan to follow than make it up as we go along. The dinner menu is published at breakfast time so that you have a chance to flag up if there is something planned that you really can't manage to eat. We've learned over the years, too, just how much guests value being able to discuss the work they are creating, with Niall, Willi

and other guests and to this end, we'd urge you to bring a laptop. When we hold processing tutorials, bandwidth-permitting, we do so over Zoom, with everyone in the one room. This makes it much easier for Niall and Willi to help you as you share your screen with them—and for you to see the techniques they applies in their post-production work. Some evenings, conditions permitting, we can head back out after dinner to shoot the starry skies.

Safety

We take your safety seriously during our Retreats. At locations with known risks—such as drop-offs, tree-roots, muddy shores, busy roads etc. —we will draw your attention to them before we leave the vehicle. Thereafter, you are responsible for your own safety. We provide guests with a hi-vis. vest to attach to their camera pack—it makes you, and it, easier to locate. We also issue guests with a two-way radio in order that we all may keep in touch in

areas where the group scatters. This also makes it easier to access help or guidance from Niall or Willi. We do not recommend leaving any equipment in our vehicle overnight. There is only a moderate amount of walking involved so even if you are only moderately fit, you won't find this Retreat too taxing.

COVID

As of early 2023, many parts of the world (including Europe, North America and Australasia) are judged to be in a "post-pandemic" phase and we reflect the more relaxed attitudes towards the virus of this phase. Nevertheless, should any problematic new variants emerge, we will ask guests to respect new measures introduced to limit its spread and may ask for evidence of fresh vaccinations.

Travel

Our pick up and return points for guests *not* driving to the Retreat is Dresden International Airport or Königstein Bahnhof, whichever suits you better. We will collect you from,

and return you to, your point of arrival.

Spending money

It's wise to have some Euros€ handy if you want any extras (although cards are almost universally accepted) and there are cash machines in the towns in the area.

Insurance

It is a requirement of booking that guests provide evidence of personal travel insurance to cover cancellation and curtailment, medical and emergency expenses (including repatriation), personal accident, injury and death in addition to loss of/damage to luggage and possessions, personal possessions and flight cancellations/ delays.

Passport and visa requirements

A passport valid for at least six months beyond the length of the stay is required for non-UK visitors. UK citizens should check on the latest requirements for travelling to

the EU, including the possibility of an international driving permit.

Language

German is spoken, although since the area is popular with visitors, many people also speak English.

Climate

This part of Germany enjoys a Continental climate which means at the end of October we can expect some chilly nights and cool days - but also the reasonable prospect of some sunshine. It's all good for the autumn colours

Clothing

It's best to plan for the worst and bring your waterproof gear (including trousers) and warm clothes. In addition:

- Walking boots (if you want to photograph in a stream, though, bring Wellington boots)
- A warm hat

- Mitts and liner gloves
- Slippers for the house
- You might like to pack something a little smarter to wear in the evenings.

Photographic equipment

Bring as much of your photographic equipment as practical. You could end up using any of it, although realistically, a wide-angle, a macro lens and mid-range zoom will receive most use.

In addition, you will need:

- A laptop with Lightroom/PS or CaptureOne or Exposure X or Affinity Photo
- A tripod: there's no avoiding it!
- A remote release
- A means of backing up your images, such as a large capacity memory stick
- A head torch for night work.

About us

After many years leading tours and workshops for other companies at home and abroad, Niall and Charlotte Benvie established Food and Photography Retreats in 2018. Our offer combines cultivating your photography in attractive locations with great hospitality, conversation and food. On a number of Retreats, we cooperate with other, renowned, photographers - such as Willi - to offer our guests an even fuller experience.

Lower Saxony-based, Willi Rolfes, is Director of the Catholic Academy of Stapelfeld, Clopenburg but also a highly accomplished and widely published photographer with 22 books to his credit. He has worked with Niall and Charlotte on a number of Retreats and provided the images for this brochure.

Niall has been a professional photographer, writer designer and guide for 30 years with a massive publication record including seven books and hundreds of articles. He has

been involved in founding and running several of the biggest outdoor photographic initiatives of the last decade, including Meet Your Neighbours, Wild Wonders of Europe and 2020VISION and is widely recognised for the innovative nature of his work—and capacity for re-invention.

For 28 years, Charlotte combined a career in the Civil Service with freelance catering and hosting roles before coming to work with husband, Niall. Guests value not only her expertise in the kitchen and dining room but her attention to detail and her warmth. She has a keen eye for a picture too and can also assist with Lightroom processing. She is a trained chocolatiere.

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