

ASPECTS OF FRANCONIA

The Erlangen Botanical Gardens

When I was still at work in Erlangen, I would often grab a sandwich and make for the city's relaxing botanical gardens. Such places are hugely efficient at forcing you to unwind while you marvel at the splendour and diversity of nature. To wander through the tropical and sub-tropical greenhouses with their huge palm trees, fig-trees and lianas, then past the cacti and succulents from the world's driest areas, then the ponds with strikingly colourful water-lilies, then the Alpine landscape, and, afterwards perhaps, the huge orchid collection, is an extraordinary experience.

The gardens in Erlangen have a very long history. It was only a short time after the founding of the Friedrich-Alexander-University (1743) that botanical gardens were established (1747). They moved to their present location on the northern side of the Schlossgarten in 1828. Not as magnificent as Kew Gardens perhaps, and admittedly without a Chinese Pagoda, they are, however, considerably older. Kew goes back to 1772, however Erlangen's botanical history can, in a sense, be traced back to Altdorf's hortus medicus of 1626, which a little later would inspire scholars to set up something similar in Erlangen.

During its long life the botanical gardens have witnessed many changes and additions. One of these, of a regional nature, is the grotto created in 1906 for the Bavarian Landesausstellung in Nuremberg by the geologist Major Adalbert Neischl. He had written his doctoral thesis on caves in the Fränkische Schweiz and he gave his Jurassic grotto to the botanical gardens a year later.

Nowadays some 5,000 different plant species can be found in the gardens from very diverse climates and ecosystems, from the Arctic tundra to tropical rainforests, from the Alps to our own familiar Franconian meadows and riverbanks. There are few places in our city which are so uplifting and relaxing!

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