

A warm welcome to the Schwalm-Nette recreation area

Dear guests,

We are delighted to welcome you to the recreation area in the Schwalm-Nette Nature Reserve. You might be wondering why you don't have to pass through a gate or even a fence to reach us. The simple reason is that the Schwalm-Nette Nature Reserve is a region that has evolved naturally, one which is equally well known for its beautiful countryside with numerous lakes and rivers as for its historic buildings and countless recreational activities. Whether you are visiting for just a few hours or planning to spend your holiday here, one thing is certain – there's no risk of you getting bored.

Are you a keen cyclist? Our region is criss-crossed by a dense network of good cycle paths and farm lanes that are well away from busy roads and traffic.

Or do you prefer to walk or hike through natural surroundings? Countless clearly marked routes run through the Schwalm-Nette recreation area – and since recently, their suitability for wheelchair users is indicated too.

Our towns and districts, many of which have historic centres, are ideal for a stroll and a spot of shopping. Leave all your cares behind and relax for a while, enjoying a delicious cappuccino or savouring regional gastronomic specialities at one of the many local cafes and restaurants.

If you would like to explore our region more fully, why not arrange to stay for a mini break – accommodation is available in all shapes and sizes, with something to suit everyone.

And once you've recharged your batteries, a wide variety of cultural activities and events await you.

Between the Schwalm and the Nette

The picture-postcard landscape of our recreation area in the midst of the Schwalm-Nette Nature Reserve has plenty to offer: large expanses of water, moors and heaths, dense forests and open fields that are characteristic of the Lower Rhine area – lined with poplar groves and pollarded willows. And let's not forget the Nette and Schwalm rivers, from which the region takes its name. They lend the area its unique rustic charm. These waterways pass through meadows, marshes and woods, and have shaped the appearance of local towns and districts throughout history. There are numerous picturesque watermills, village ponds and idyllic bridges waiting to be discovered. The attractive countryside stretches over a total of some 435 square kilometres along the German-Dutch border, from Kleve via Viersen to Heinsberg and Mönchengladbach. The town of Nettetal and its districts of Grefrath, Brüggen, Niederkrüchten and Schwalmtal lie at the heart of the nature reserve, which was formally established in 1965. This makes them the perfect base for exploring the region – whether by bike, on foot or on horseback. There's plenty of choice – prepare to be surprised!

With the nature conservation areas Lüsekamp and Boschbeeketal as well as the unspoilt Wacholderheide heath and being so close to the Venekotensee lake, Niederkrüchten offers an abundance of beauty and variety for a day out. The municipality of Schwalmtal is surrounded by woods, lakes and washlands, and guarantees visitors countless stunning views – whether on a walk through the

woodlands of Schomm and the traditional forest settlement of Lüttelforst, on a bike ride along the River Schwalm, or on a stroll through the historic town centre of Waldniel or along the banks of the tranquil Hariksee lake.

All in all, the area offers perfect conditions for cycling, walking and exploring, making it a regional and weekend recreational site of significance. Its catchment area extends into the Rhine and Ruhr conurbations and well over the border into The Netherlands too.

Another advantage is the area's excellent accessibility by road. It is easily reached from the A40 and A61 motorways via junctions in Nettetal and Grefrath as well as from the A52 in Schwalmthal, Niederkrüchten and Brüggen – yet the proximity to such busy motorways in no way detracts from the area's tranquillity or natural charm.

In addition to the beautiful countryside, numerous historic buildings such as manor houses, castles and cloisters form an impressive backdrop to walks, hikes or bike rides, and many of them are even open to visitors.

Discover the variety

Above all, the region stands out for its variety – and that's by no means limited to the varied scenery of the natural landscape, since a wealth of cultural and leisure activities ensure that any visit to our region is a well-rounded experience. The theatre in Nettetal, for instance, hosts a comprehensive range of performances, with something to suit every taste. What better way to end a day of walking through the splendid countryside than with an evening at the theatre? You will also find a varied programme on offer at the cultural meeting place in Niederkrüchten and the Achim-Besgen-Halle centre in Schwalmthal.

Getting close to nature...

...is possible thanks to the finely meshed network of lanes and maze of paths that criss-cross the region. You won't have to wait long to encounter unspoiled nature. Views of the Krickenbecker lakes alongside the castle of the same name conjure up the grandeur of bygone times, but that's not all: lakes, marshes, meadows and woodland are all key features. In total, this protected area for nature and birds covers approximately 1,300 hectares and is one of the oldest in North Rhine-Westphalia. Pause at one of the peaceful jetties to watch herons catching fish or perhaps you'll spot one of the rare kingfishers that live here – such colourful fellows!

And if it rains?

Then why not visit one of our many museums: the Burg Brüggen hunting and natural history museum, the open air museum Dorenburg in Grefrath or the textile museum in Nettetal, in its picturesque location close to the nature and bird conservation area around the Krickenbecker lakes. Families with children are particularly welcome, since there is plenty to do and see, even for the youngest members of the family.

Feeling sporty?

In the splendid natural surroundings of Haus Bey, a country manor and estate dating from the 17th century, in Nettetal, you will find an 18-hole golf course including a 6-hole training course that is open to the public.

During the winter season, the ice rink in Grefrath is well worth a visit. They are sure to have your size in the wide range of ice skates available for hire, so there's nothing standing in the way of you taking to the ice!

The Nordic Walking Park Elmpter Wald (De Meinweg) offers opportunities to improve your fitness against the backdrop of nature's wonderful scenery.

You can 'saddle up' for a very special equestrian ride through natural surroundings in the Grenzwald forest which is located at the heart of the Schwalm-

Nette Nature Reserve and runs along the German-Dutch border. The extensive and well-developed network of bridleways is one of the best in the whole of Germany.

Enjoy an unforgettable closeness to nature on horseback, either by joining one of the many guided rides or taking advantage of various accommodation packages for horses and their riders.

On both sides of the border

Since The Netherlands is directly across the border, just a stone's throw away from the Schwalm-Nette Nature Reserve, it is quite possible while out walking or canoeing that you will pass from one country into the other and back again, perhaps without even noticing it! It is for this reason that the Schwalm-Nette Nature Reserve – in a truly cross-border initiative – was added to the 789 sq km German-Dutch nature park called Maas-Schwalm-Nette in 1976.

The area offers something special on both sides of the border in terms of culinary delights too: asparagus, or the 'white gold'. Farmers in this border region have elevated cultivating the 'Queen of Vegetables', as asparagus is known to connoisseurs, to an art form. Locally grown Nette asparagus and Burgi asparagus attract gourmet fans from far and wide to the area every spring. Why not come along and join them!

Experience nature

Four unique areas of biodiversity await you in our region, allowing you to experience nature's flora and fauna to an extent that is hard to find anywhere else. Our expansive moorlands and rustling reed fringes are so captivating, they are likely to tempt you to hire a canoe to paddle through meandering river landscapes or simply enjoy a relaxing stroll along the riverbank. Nature lovers will find a myriad of ways for spending time on or by the water. This region allows you to see first-hand how the marshy valley of the River Schwalm, which has its source at Tüschenbroich and flows into the River Meuse, used to look many centuries ago. The previous straightening of the waterways has been reversed at Dilborner Benden and Elmpter Bruch, restoring the stretches to their original beauty.