



## THE AUSTRIAN ALPS IN THE SUMMER

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## INTRODUCTION

The life-affirming majesty of the Austrian Alps provides a soul-cleansing backdrop for any walking holiday. From cloud-piercing, snow-capped mountains to lush, green meadows and quaint chocolate box cottages, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the entire region had been conjured into existence.

A heavenly mix of dramatic mountain ranges, crystal lakes and waterfalls, this belief-defying alpine paradise invites walkers of all capabilities to explore its picturesque charms.

And just because it's downtime on the slopes, that doesn't mean you're left waiting for another snowfall. Thanks to the sheer diversity of the region's striking landscapes, including wild flowers and irresistible alpine meadows, there is a huge variety of activities on offer during the summer season.

Aside from the near infinite walks, rambles and hikes provided by the mountainous ranges, the region boasts a rich cultural heritage, including ancient churches, beautiful castles, fascinating museums, and an arts scene that thrives in the sunshine.

From the flora-rich pastures and glacial peaks of the Hohe Tauern National Park to the stunning panoramic vistas of the mountain paths of the Zugspitz Arena, the Austrian Alps will deliver a holiday that you'll cherish forever.

# DINING

Meats, sweets and delectable treats, Austrian cuisine consists of a fine, culturally diverse variety of dishes. Often reliant on the grazing farm stock of the mountains, the typical alpine diet includes deliciously simple food that's simply delicious. It's a smorgasbord of farmed meat dishes, pastries and angular savoury oddities, with something for everyone to tuck their taste buds into.

Here are the top five must-try regional delicacies.

## Speckknödel

Dumplings are big in the Alps. And specknöeddel is the sort of food we wish we thought of first – a winning combination of salty bacon and filling suet dumplings. Originally a method to mop-up stale bread and to preserve the life of meat across the sparse winter, the speckknödel has outgrown such humble beginnings to become a genuine favourite of the Tirolean region. Matri's lively and family-friendly Alta Muhle restaurant serves a variety of local classics. Grab a bite as you take in the beautiful surroundings.

## Spicy goulash

A savoury souvenir of the Hungaro-Austrian Empire using locally farmed produce, goulash has been a firm staple of the Alps for generations. Matri's mountain-high Krauterwirtshaus Strumerhof restaurant with breathtaking bird's eye views serves up astonishing scenery and a delicious herb-infused bowlful, so get trekking for your supper!

## Palatschinken

Simply, Austrian Pancakes. Which means all the sumptuous joy of a crepe, but made the Austrian way (coatings of icing sugar, chocolate sauce and anything else that takes the dessert to the absolute zenith of sweet eating). A cosy cove of snug, Anton's in Ehrwald, serves traditional Tirol fare, including the aforementioned tasty treats. Pop in for a time-honoured dish, or, if you're up for the challenge, try one of their much-lauded burgers, made with local meat.

## Käsespätzle

A tongue-loving soft egg noodle dish with plenty of pungent mouth-watering cheese, it's sparse on ingredients but huge on taste. The traditional Austrian plateful is popular among walkers and skiers across the alpiners, ready to recharge their batteries with a good dose of scrumptious carbs. If you're in Ehrwald, the Holzerstüb'n is a must-visit restaurant. A perennially busy eatery with all the traditional trimmings, book in advance to avoid disappointment!

## Apfelstrudel

Austria's rightly-famous national sweet dish simply has to be sampled whatever part of the country you're in, so grab yourself a sugary slice of thinly-layered apple pastry coated in a delicate sprinkling of icing, and forget your calorie count for the day.



# DRINKING

Whistle-wetting is practically a national pastime in Austria and even more so in the Alps. Famed for the high quality of its craft beers, generation-spanning breweries, world-famous vineyards and the rightly celebrated national liquor schnapps, you'll never be short of a glass with which you can raise a cheer. On the softer side of things, a cosy cream-topped hot chocolate offers warming comfort to a walk-weary soul - or try a refreshing Almdudler, a national soda that's a fusion of herbs and lemonade. And for a caffeine hit in the shape of a coffee, you'll never be short of a café or five in pretty much every village you come across.

Local drinks we recommend you give a slurp include the following (and don't forget to say, "Prost!" when you do!):

## Radler

A popular Austrian shandy, equal parts reinvigorating and relaxing thanks to its heady blend of locally-produced beer and fruit soda. A lighter, cheeky way to enjoy a brew and kid yourself that you're drinking fruit. Try the friendly Alpenpub in Matri for a cool glass.

## Aperol Spritz

A popular summer drink served with a slice of orange, often as an aperitif. Finish off a hard day's hiking by trying one at Ehrwald's vibrant BrentAlm restaurant.

## Schnapps

The post-meal national liquor that simply has to be sampled, Schnapps is synonymous with the Austrian après-ski scene, but is universal enough to be drunk without having traversed the slopes for the day. Indeed, a bright summer's evening can be capped off quite perfectly with a quick shot of a fruity stiff one. Lively bar Muller's Biershancke in Matri can serve up a swift slug of the stuff.

## Stiegl Beer

One of Austria's most popular beers, which is saying something given the country's standing as a world-renowned brewer of all things hops. Available in both a light version or the avowedly more continental foamy-headed white beer (weissbeer), it's a constant presence in bars and restaurants in the alpine region, either in bottle or on tap.



## Wine

Thanks to the rugged mountain ranges, the Alps aren't the natural home to vineyards. But Austria is a huge wine producing country, thanks to the proliferation of wineries in the southeast provinces. Try a glass of legendary white Grüner Veltliner, the acidic tang of which will sharpen the senses, or if you're after a red, the famed Zweigelt is a good Austrian all-rounder.

# Mountains

The Austrian Alps has peaks a'plenty, in both spiritual and geological sense. We present the top five mountains in the region for your discovering pleasure!

## Grossglockner

At just under 4,000 ft, Grossglockner is Austria's highest peak with a breath-taking view. With its incredible size, it offers a multitude of hiking and rambling options to suit all abilities, from a gentle stroll around Fuscher Lake to water rafting or a Park Ranger-accompanied full summit ascent. Most walks are accessible via the country's uppermost Alpine highway, a 30-mile pass etched into the side of the range. So if you fancy a relaxed approach to exploration on one day, hit the road! Due to extreme winters, it's closed from late November through to the end of May.

## Grossvenediger

The second highest peak in Hohe Tauern National Park, the Grossvenediger is a pure glacial peak that towers above the skyline imposingly. You don't need experience to have a guided summit tour, but physical fitness is a must. There are several hazardous crevasses to navigate, so you'll be traversing some areas using via ferrata. That said there are lower stretches of more forgiving and equally captivating paths with easier access, so whatever your fitness level, you'll be able to take in the breathtaking sights.

## Keeskogel

Looking like it just tumbled out of a postcard, Keeskogel is a dramatic jutting angular peak of 3,291m in the Venediger Group of the High Tauern National Park. You can expect an endurance-testing glacial climb to a captivating summit, where a little skill will certainly be required. A stunning view of the meadows and valleys of the Hohe Tauern below rewards any hardy trekker who completes the journey. The glaciated landscape has an ethereal otherworldly feel to it. And keep an eye out for the sun rising and the chance to see mountain goats in their natural habitats! Pack a flask, a camera and a little bit of patience.

## Mieming Plateau

Naturally striking sloping landscapes, sparkling emerald lakes and serene beauty make this an inviting jaw-dropper of a mountain. The key here is its gentle incline, making traversing its 1,000 metres attainable for most walkers, regardless of ability. A lower mountain range with stunning vistas, the paths guide through the Alpine meadows, unique limestone mountains and the charming landscapes, all of which have attracted many a rambler seeking a less strenuous challenge. The more forgiving gradients of the slopes make it popular with wheelchair users and the more mature holidaymaker.

## Zugspitze

Germany's highest peak, the summit glacier of which straddles its international neighbour. The mightily impressive mountain has at its Austrian foot the area known as the Zugspitze Arena, a vast natural bowl host to a dazzling variety of delightful meadows and pastures, on which grow stunning seasonal picture-book-pretty flora. If you like your flowers, these are the mountain walks for you! A sun-kissed idyll in the summer months, the season yields a burst of colourful varieties, including such rarities as the lady's slipper orchid (early season) or wild orchids heading into August.

The Zugspitze's atmosphere-busting higher craggy spots offer demanding hikes to those seeking a challenge, who might well be rewarded with a glimpse of the delicate Edelweiss. However, a short leisurely walk is all you need to take to appreciate wide-ranging, natural vegetation such as Wintergreen, Iris and Marigolds, although venturing a little further will take you to wild flowerbeds of myriad colours and displays, such as Snowbells, Alpenrose and Bellflowers.



# Villages

The Alps is host to a variety of adorably picturesque villages, retaining a strong Austrian identity with stunning, ornate period detail. Here's our pick of the best.

## Berwang

The highest village of the Zugspitze Arena, Berwang is a snow-layered ski resort come winter, but a lush green floral bed of delight in the summer. Wherever you stand in the sparsely-populated municipality, you're looking at beauty no matter which way your head is turned. Alpine flora sprouts enthusiastically from every nook and the surrounding pathways are host to plants such as gentian, edelweiss and even rare orchids. There are plenty of local hiking routes so prepare your eyeballs for maximum pleasure.

## Namlos

A getaway from a getaway petite, Namlos is a tranquil and idyllic village that hangs like nature's own pastoral hammock between mountain valleys. You can enjoy its bloomy meadows and bike trails or just sit and admire the intoxicating view as the world goes by. There is a local 20-metre high suspension bridge across a 40-metre babbling brook next to various easy-going hiking paths into the village.

## Lermoos

A delightful traditional village at the foot of the huge Zugspitze mountain, Lermoos marries the dainty, ornate charm of Austria's historical architecture and postcard perfection to the practical demands of a modern holiday resort. With mountain bike trails and hiking especially popular in the summer months, the village also boasts an open-air swimming pool with panoramic views across the surrounding Alps. Perfect for an invigorating dip for both mind and soul.

## Virgen

As voted in 2006, "Europe's most beautiful flower village", Virgen is demonstrably one of Austria's prettiest and shiniest gems. With an altitude of 1200 ft, it's a gateway to more mountain paths than your feet will know what to do with. Sitting between conifers and a balletic jumble of mountainside, the traditional peak-roofed wooden chalets, and striking pilgrimage church, every direction is another potential space on your camera's memory card. A visit to Virgen wouldn't be complete without a trek to the astonishing 12th century ruins of Castle Rabenstein, peering out majestically above the village.

## Biberwier

Along the old Roman road, former mining settlement Biberwier is a snow-blanketed fairytale in the winter, and sun-kissed heavenly paradise during off-season. A glistening white church spire stands as a proud centrepiece among the village's many trees, lakes and the playfully tempting thrills of its toboggan run.

