

The Alpenwelt Karwendel in southern Bavaria: an insider tip for nature and culture lovers

Roughly 100 km south of Munich, in the middle of the Bavarian Alps, lies the Alpenwelt Karwendel tourist region. This was the setting for the 2015 G7 summit held at Schloss Elmau. With its three holiday resorts Mittenwald, Krün and Wallgau, this part of the Alps is appreciated by mountaineers and families alike as an unspoiled natural environment with powerful mountain peaks, babbling brooks, ravines and sparkling lakes. The region not only scores points for the outdoor activities that are enjoyed here but also for its Alpine architecture and traditions. In other words, it's picture-book Bavaria.

Was it David Cameron? The word got around anyway that one of the government heads jumped into a bathing lake in our Alpenwelt Karwendel region before he joined the G7 summit near Krün. Fairytale King Ludwig II. of Bavaria, on the other hand, writing in his 1871 journal, waxed lyrical about the romantic setting and beautiful, clear views here in southern Bavaria. However, mostly it's not kings or government heads but lovers of outdoor sports and nature and families who appreciate this holiday region in the Eastern Alps. Above all, they enjoy the diversity of nature in the upper stretches of the Isar, one of the last wild alpine riverscapes. Along the Isar, Mittenwald, Krün and Wallgau lie nestled in the Wetterstein mountain range surrounded by the Zugspitze, Karwendel and other mountains. Idyllic forest paths lead to small bathing lakes, panoramic trails to pleasant alpine meadows, challenging trips to craggy peaks. Precisely because of this diversity the Alpenwelt Karwendel region was selected to host the 2016 international hiking event "24 Stunden von Bayern" (24 Hours in Bavaria).

Nature-loving families are particularly well served in the Alpenwelt Karwendel. For example, a must for young and old alike is the gondola trip with the Karwendelbahn, Germany's second-highest mountain railway: at the mountaintop station the huge telescope-like structure, presenting the nature show "Bergwelt Karwendel" (Mountain World Karwendel), looks out over the mountainside. Here, at roughly 2,300 above sea level, you are shown the exciting world of the upper mountain ranges, and through an enormous panorama window you can look far into the Isar Valley. At your feet there are 700 km of hiking paths at three levels of difficulty. Below small lakes offer refreshment, and for good measure 12 themed paths offer all the variety you need. Among these, crystal-clear streams squeeze through whispering ravines. In the Leutascher Geisterklamm, for example, you can hike on metal footbridges up to 75 m above the chasm. This "Kingdom of the Ravine Ghost" is another highlight for families with children. Further up, paths lead to lush meadows, cozy huts and secondary summits. Particularly impressive is the panorama from the Hoher Kranzberg, which shelters a barefoot path with 24 imaginative stops but is also comfortably accessible by chairlift. At the top level, mountain climbers scale peaks of c. 2,000 m, and experienced ones clamber up the Karwendel range or the Mittenwalder Klettersteig.

Lovers of the great outdoors can also enjoy a large selection of cycling tours, as well as one of the best mountain biking terrains of the Alps. Sports fanatics can power away here on 1,000-km-long bike tours that take them up to 30,000 m above sea level. Those that like to take things a

little bit easier will prefer to stay nearer ground level, for instance on the Isar cycle path, which follows the river to Munich.

In winter, families and those who go in for "gentle" winter sports feel particularly at home in the Alpenwelt Karwendel. While you're skiing, ice skating, hiking or taking a sleigh ride you can enjoy guaranteed snow 900 m above sea level, far away from the hurly-burly. A family favourite is the skiing area at Kranzberg with its seven lifts and toboggan run. Freeriders go wild on Germany's longest ski route in Dammkar. Visitors can emulate biathlon Olympic champion Magdalena Neuner – who hails from Wallgau - on c. 150 km cross-country ski trails and at guest biathlons. Whether you choose a hike, a cycling tour or a cross-country ski run, the new Alpenwelt Karwendel online tour module simplifies your leisure planning. You can select any number of 85 tours with English descriptions.

In addition to all these outdoor activities, the Alpenwelt Karwendel also offers rich cultural experiences: in Mittenwald, Krün and Wallgau traditions are maintained in the lively customs which the locals perform in authentic traditional costumes – and, of course, in the alpine folk music. Absolutely unique are also the many paintings on the facades of the houses. Mittenwald's cultural fame derives from its violin-making tradition, which Mathias Klotz started 350 years ago. Today the "Bavarian Stradivariuses" are in demand worldwide and the violin-making school trains pupils from the far corners of the globe. In the Violin-Making Museum one learns that even Mozart played a Mittenwald violin. In Roman times the Via Raetia, at that time an important trade route, crossed the region that is today the Alpenwelt Karwendel. Pomp and ceremony reigned from the 15th to the 17th centuries. At that time the merchants of Venice had relocated their trade from Bolzano to Mittenwald. To celebrate this, the Bolzano Market, a grand spectacle which brings the Middle Ages to life again, is still held every five years. The next celebrations will be held from 5th to 13th August 2017.

The cultural scene becomes particularly lively and colourful every autumn, when the Farmers' Weeks are celebrated with beer and brass music. The highlight is the "Almabtriebe", the return of hundreds of goats, sheep, cows and horses from the summer pastures. In the winter, at carnival time, the mysterious "Maschkera" (masked figures) – their identities hidden behind artistic wooden masks and colourful clothes – pass through the streets. The highlight is the procession of the "Schellenrührer" (bellringers), men in short lederhosen symbolically driving away the winter. Even more culture can be experienced on excursions, such as to Munich, to the royal castles Linderhof and Neuschwanstein or to Innsbruck in the nearby Tyrol.

English-speaking guests can find comprehensive information and tour suggestions on www.alpenwelt-karwendel.de/en as well as in the brochures on hiking, cycling, and family or winter holidays. Guided tours, also with a specific theme, are offered in English. Most of the landlords of the wide variety of tourist accommodation in the Alpenwelt Karwendel - holiday homes, camping sites, pensions, guest houses, inns and luxury hotels - offer friendly advice in English to their guests.

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