

Alpenwelt Karwendel, an insider tip for lovers of Bavarian culture

The image of Barack Obama with a wheat beer went around the world in 2015 when the G7 summit was held in the Alpenwelt Karwendel area. Insiders perceived more in the unique Alpine cultural mix that typifies this Bavarian region. Here, authentic customs are tightly knit with Alpine nature and architecture as well as a violin-making tradition the spans over 350 years.

Back in 1871, another famous head of state was enthralled by the region around Mittenwald, Krün, and Wallgau: fairy-tale King Ludwig II of Bavaria raved about the "romantic setting and beautiful views" in his diary. He gladly retreated to the region, around 100 kilometers south of Munich. He had the Schachenhaus and Linderhof Palace built nearby. In 2015, it was now the G7 heads of state who enjoyed the view of the Bavarian Alps under a white and blue sky.

Kings and heads of state are less frequent visitors than mountain-loving vacationers, however. Such guests appreciate, for one, the natural variety and many outdoor possibilities. Yet connoisseurs are also acquainted with the authentic culture that connects the local people to their home country. One example of this is the traditional Werdenfelser costume, which is often worn here on a daily basis and is handed down from generation to generation. The men in short black lederhosen with green embroidery and hat, the women in dirndls with ornately pinned hair. Societies for traditional costumes preserve this cultural heritage, with all its rich detail, in all three municipalities. In "Heimatabend" presentations, they give audiences a taste of traditional dance and Alpine folk music. The three marching bands also appear frequently.

Cultural activities in the Alpenwelt Karwendel area become especially lively and colorful every autumn. With beer and brass band music, people celebrate "farmer's weeks" with the ceremonial driving down of cattle from the mountain pastures into the valley. The herdsmen return home from the summer grazing with hundreds of goats, sheep, cows, and horses and parade them through the streets. Awards are even given to the most beautiful sheep and goats, while regional specialties are sold at farmer's markets. It is especially festive in the beer tents. The pasture customs, if anything, are keeping the Alpine cultural landscape open, and the mountain pastures and hillside meadows are truly a sight for sore eyes.

Later during carnival season, the "Maschkera" – with their hand-carved wooden masks – pass through the streets. This culminates in the procession of the "Schellenrührer", in which men in short lederhosen drive away the winter with giant cowbells.

Yet the region owes its worldwide cultural renown above all to Mittenwald for its violin-making tradition, founded 350 years ago by Mathias Klotz. Today, violins crafted by the Mittenwald masters are highly sought after in the major concert halls of the world. The violin-making school trains students from all over the world, while the violin museum, with its exhibition workshop, gives visitors insights into the world of music.

The period between the 15th and 17th centuries also promoted culture. During this time, Venice merchants relocated their trade from Bolzano to Mittenwald. In remembrance of the flourishing trading town, people still celebrate the "Bolzano Market" every five years as a major medieval spectacle. The next celebration will be on August 5 to 13, 2017.

All over the Alpenwelt Karwendel region, frescoes on house fronts tell stories about the Bolzano Market, country life, and the bible. The abundance of this 18th century "Lüftlmalerei" is unique in the Alpine region. For this reason, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe called Mittenwald a "living picture book".

Even more Alpine culture can be experienced on outings to places like Munich, the royal castles Linderhof and Neuschwanstein, or to Innsbruck in nearby Tyrol.

For more information on cultural experiences in Mittenwald, Krün, and Wallgau, please visit www.alpenwelt-karwendel.de/en. Local and thematic tours are also offered in English.

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