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Five reasons you'll love Austria's Bregenzerwald

There is truly something very special about this charming Austrian valley

October 13, 2017 by [Amy McPherson](#)



I am face down on the massage table at Romantik Hotel das Schiff in Hittisau, a village in Austria's Vorarlberg region, allowing Johannes' soft hands to rub herbal oil over my back and shoulders.

The setting is picture perfect. The therapy room windows look out to the crisp green hills shadowed over by the dark shades of pine. It was the sort of dreamlike landscape advertisements are made of.

Johannes is born and bred a 'Walder', as the locals from Bregenzerwald call themselves. He is especially proud of this land he calls home, and couldn't think of anywhere else he'd rather live.

"God must like me because he put me here!"

There is truly something very special about Bregenzerwald. Nestled on the border between Austria and Switzerland, the valley lies quietly in Austria's western-most state of Vorarlberg.

It is a place of fertile farmlands and natural beauty, popular with those who enjoy the great outdoors.

I was charmed by it, and here are five reasons why you'll also fall madly in love with Bregenzerwald.

1. Uncluttered outdoors



Fresh mountain air and uncluttered paths make Bregenzerwald a hiking paradise. From easy one-day round-trip routes to multi-day hikes taking in charming villages, gorges and rivers, there is truly something for everyone.

With 450 kilometres of signposted bike paths taking in various different terrains and landscape, cycling enthusiasts will also find themselves spoilt for choice. Bring your own or hire a bike with a guided tour, and the speed and the challenge of cycling will allow you a broader perspective of the region.

For the more adventurous, there are climbing, canyoning, rafting and caving opportunities all through summer, making Bregenzerwald one of the best places in Europe to enjoy the great outdoors.

2. Natural therapy and moorland healing



Locals have a tradition of foraging edible moor herbs, plants and berries and Petra Nussbaumer, a local guide of Krumbach, a village in Bregenzerwald, is a keen advocate of the healing powers of the moorlands. On her Moors Walk, visitors are invited to walk barefoot across the cold spongy peat, where wild rosemary, cotton grass, orchids and the miniature carnivorous Sundew thrive among its meadows.

Many of these plants are good for something – from stomach ulcers to fertility issues – Petra believes that nature has a way to heal anything our bodies can suffer.

All around Bregenzerwald, similar use of natural ingredients can be found in many of the wellness hotels and products on offer. For a complete lifestyle experience, stay at the Auszeithotel Rossbad for therapeutic fasting, wholefood cuisine and homeopathy.

3. Designer bus stops



It will surprise many that the Bregenzerwald, as a rural farming community, had a really reliable bus network. Public buses connect the valley's villages with Bregenz, capital city of Vorarlberg at an hourly interval. Wishing to highlight and celebrate the infrastructure, and village of Krumbach began a community project called BUS:STOP Krumbach, and invited seven international architects, including local hero Bernardo Bader to design seven of its bus stops, with inspirations drawn from the surrounding environment and traditional culture of the valley.

What began as a way for locals to embrace public transport is now the spotlight for architecture enthusiasts around the world. A tour of the bus stops is easily arranged, simply by catching a bus through Krumbach with the Bregenzerwald Guest Card.

4. Organic farmland with top quality local produce



Much of the praise for Bregenzerwald is the gourmet offerings produced here from locally sourced organic ingredients, and it is a valley with some of the finest dining experiences around Austria.

One of the best ways to sample a range of the regional specialties is to embark on a culinary hike, a self-guided package available from Bregenzerwald Tourism.

The culinary walks takes you up the mountain slopes and across the rise and fall of the landscape, stopping at mountain huts, family run cafes and restaurants to taste the flavours of the valley.

For a less active foodie break, hit up one of the restaurants in the towns and villages of Bregenzerwald, such as the Sunday Inn, an institution often booked out in advance by locals and visitors alike. Open only on Sundays (hence the name) the restaurant features a creative menu combining cooking styles from all over the world using the best of the local ingredients both farmed and foraged.

Hotels in the Bregenzerwald also offer excellent half-board packages with seasonal daily set menu with a focus on regional cuisine, and you will be surprised and delighted at the remarkable quality on offer.

“People here do things well,” local guide Helga Radler explains, “and they will not serve you anything that isn’t connected with the land.”

5. Hittisau Women’s Museum



A popular story tells of the bravery of the women during historic wars of defending their communities while the men were drafted elsewhere to fight the wars.

The Walder are known to be particularly self-confident and proud. As a former farmer’s republic with its own constitution and independent jurisdiction from the Habsburg Empire, there is a strong sense of community and belonging.

So having the Women’s Museum here simply just made sense. •

Photography by Vorarlberg tourism.

TRAVEL FACTS

Getting there

Situated on the border of Austria and Switzerland, the fastest way to Vorarlberg and Bregenzerwald is from Zurich.

Swiss Air and partnering airlines have daily flights to Zurich from most major Australian cities, with connections from Singapore or Hong Kong. [swiss.com](https://www.swiss.com)

From Zurich Airport, direct inter-Europe train connections service Bregenz and Dornbirn, gateways into the valley, then transfer to the valley by bus.

A Bregenzerwald Guest Card will allow you unlimited public transport within the valley during the warmer months.

Where to stay

Das Schiff hotel in the town of Hittisau is a tranquil retreat in the valley, with comfortable and modern rooms with spa facilities and an excellent restaurant. [schiff-hittisau.com](https://www.schiff-hittisau.com)

Further information

[bregenzerwald.at](https://www.bregenzerwald.at)

[vorarlberg.travel](https://www.vorarlberg.travel)