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Austria Off The Beaten Path ?Zell am See, Innsbruck and Bad Gastein

Mention Austria and everyone thinks of Vienna and Salzburg. In addition to great names, Zell am See, Innsbruck and Bad Gastein are great locations off the beaten path.

austria, innsbruck, bad gastein, olympics, zell am see, austria skiing, off the beaten path

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Zell am See

Zell...am...See. The name just rolls off the tongue, but it pails in comparison to the place. Often described as heaven on earth, Zell am See is a dream location in the mountains of Austria. With towering mountains on one side and a lake on the other, the town looks like something out of a postcard. If you pull up photographs of the town, you'll swear they have been touched up with a software program. This town is simply that beautiful. In the winter, Zell am See is all about skiing with numerous resorts for glacier skiing. In the summer, one can lounge on a boat on the lake or hit the mountains for hiking, camping and rock climbing. The Krimml Waterfalls are extremely impressive. Zell am See isn't the cheapest of travel destinations, but it should top the list if money isn't a concern. The best month to go is December when skiing is good and winter festivals occur in the town.

Innsbruck

Built on the Inn River, Innsbruck was the home to the 1976 Winter Olympics. And for good reason. As with much of Austria, the town is picturesquely set against mountains and ripe with street cafes and surrounding areas that look like something out of the movie Heidi. As the Olympic designation would suggest, the town is a good launching point for hitting the slopes, but there is much more to it. The historic district has the cobblestone atmosphere you've come to expect from town in the Alps. In addition to atmosphere, you can visit historic locations such as the tomb of Emperor Maximilian 1.

My only gripe with Innsbruck is the boring, modern developments around the core of the town that were brought on by the Olympics. They sort of kill the mood, which brings us to Bad Gastein.

Bad Gastein

Bad Gastein definitely gets a nomination for name of the year. It just sounds like a town where bikers would hang out. Admittedly, it is hard to image Austrian Hells Angels, but you get my drift.

Bad Gastein is an old Austrian village without the droll modern fixtures of Innsbruck. Built overlooking a valley, the town has some incredible views. Historically, Bad Gastein is the spa town of Austria with emperors and other VIPs taking in treatment. For atmosphere, the town feels like it hasn't changed since the 19th century. If you're looking for old world Austria, this is the place. Make sure to hurry though as the town is supposedly grabbing the attention of developers who are thinking hotels and casinos are a must.

If you visit Austria, Vienna and Salzburg are definite destinations. Just make sure you get out to the incredible towns in the mountains.

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