Go Slow ... in the Austrian Alps

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1  Fly Munich and transfer Ehrwald
Day 2/7  Natural history excursions from Ehrwald
Day 8  Transfer to Munich and fly London

Departs
June

Focus
Alpine flowers and other wildlife

Grading
Grade A – easy walks but in mountain habitat – please see grading section for further information.

Dates and Prices
Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code AUT02)

Highlights:

- Enjoy the Austrian Alps’ epic scenery & fascinating wildlife at a gentle pace.
- Chairlifts take you straight to the best areas – no need for long hikes!
- Flowers including Alpenrose, Sword-leaved Helleborine & Lady’s Slipper Orchid.
- Many other orchids possible too, including the rare Chamorchis alpina.
- Alpine birds such as Snowfinch, Lammergeier, Nutcracker & Golden Eagle.
- Take a spectacular cable car ride up the Zugspitze, Germany’s highest mountain.
- Stay in a delightful 4-star hotel, with heated pool, spa & gardens.
Introduction

Set in the beautiful Austrian Tyrol, close to Austria’s border with Germany, the picturesque village of Ehrwald sits at the base of the mighty Zugspitze, Germany’s highest mountain. The 4-star Alpen Residence Hotel, lying at the heart of this small Tyrolean village, will be our base for the week. From it we will enjoy a range of leisurely botanical and wildlife excursions, exploring the magnificent surrounding alpine landscapes of the Tiroler Zugspitze Arena by means of the region’s extensive network of cable cars and chairlifts. In June each year the mountains burst into life with alpine flora, including masses of gentians, primroses and orchids. There are 42 species of orchid found in the valley here; around 20 or so are possible in late June. Golden Eagle are commonly sighted overhead, and such species as Nutcracker and Western Bonelli’s Warbler may be found in the forests. Higher up on the mountains, Snowfinch, Alpine Chough and Alpine Accentor are all likely. We will enjoy walks in the varied habitat each morning, aiming to enjoy a picnic lunch and then return to the hotel in the mid-afternoon in time for cake, leaving ample time to relax, enjoy the gardens, wallow in the hotel’s warm pool or spa, or take a gentle stroll in the nearby larch woodlands. Our plan will be to use chairlifts and cable cars to cover the ascent each day, then walk for up to around three miles over flat or gently undulating terrain. We have chosen our walks carefully to avoid steep, prolonged ascents or descents, though it should be noted that we will be based in the mountains for the week, so short sections of uphill and downhill are unavoidable!

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Fly Munich, transfer Ehrwald

We begin our holiday with a flight to Munich, aiming to use the midday British Airways flight from London Heathrow (some regional flights are also available with EasyJet, Lufthansa and using KLM flights via their hub in Amsterdam – please just ask in the Naturetrek office for further information). From Munich, we will drive south for around two to two and a half hours, crossing the German-Austrian border and arriving at our delightful base in Ehrwald shortly thereafter. We should arrive at our hotel in time to check-in and settle into our rooms before dinner.

The Alpen Residence is a 4* family-owned and run hotel, with excellent food, spacious bars and a lovely swimming pool and spa area. It is situated in a quiet spot just a short walk from the village.
Breakfast is a comprehensive buffet, and cake is served from 4pm every day (when it is also ‘happy hour’ at the bar!). For dinner we have a choice of starter, main course and desert, plus soup, extensive salad buffet and a cheese board. The spa has a sauna, two steam rooms and lots of beds on which to lounge and read a book at the end of a day spent in the mountains.

Days 2 – 7

We will keep the next 6 days fairly flexible, as our walks will depend on how early or late the spring has been this year, and, of course, the weather each day. We will be hoping for plenty of spring sunshine, and it could be very warm – even hot – but in the mountains it is always wise to be prepared for all eventualities, and bringing layers, waterproofs and decent footwear is essential!

Although we will have our minibuses at our disposal, each member of the group will also be provided with a “Z-ticket” which provides free access to all the chairlifts, cable cars and buses in the area. This gives those that wish to do a little more, or a little less, than the group each day complete freedom to do so. We plan, however, to cover many of the following areas:

Seeben Waterfall Trail

The ‘Water Adventure Trail’ to the viewpoint for the Seeben waterfall is an absolute must. It includes stops for children to explore and play; for us it presents a delightful circular route from the Almbahn cable car station following the Gaisbach stream through the woods, towards the Seeben waterfall and then back to Ehrwald over the meadows. Here we could find Coral Root, Small White and Pink Globe Orchids, Lesser Twayblade, Monkshood and Masterwort (*Astrantia bavarica*). We hope, too, that we are in time to see the beautiful Lady’s Slipper Orchid in full bloom; they will be the highlight of our walk if they are still at their peak and so we will choose this as one of the very first walks that we do in Ehrwald!

Heiterwangersee

Starting from the Fischer Hotel (to which we can later return for a drink), we will stroll along the shoreline of this beautiful lake. Just a short way along the path we should find Fly and Burnt-tip Orchids and One-flowered Wintergreen, amongst many other botanical highlights. It’s a little under 2 miles to walk the shoreline along the length of Lake Heiterwangersee to the boat station on neighbouring Plansee. From here, we can either take the boat for a relaxing journey along the lake and ultimately back to the Fischer Hotel, or for those that wish, we can walk to the far end of the lake to catch the boat back from there.
Ehrwald to Biberwier

Starting out on foot from our hotel this morning, we will walk through the beautiful larch and spruce woodlands. Black Woodpecker is possible here, along with both Greater and Middle-spotted Woodpeckers, and there will be plenty of orchids, primroses, and more. The woodland opens out to join the ‘panoramaweg’ (panoramic walk) to the neighbouring village of Biberwier, rising slightly through the middle section, before gently descending into Biberwier. The walk is around 2.5 miles in total. From here, we can either take the bus back to Ehrwald, or if anyone wishes to stretch their legs a bit further, we may choose to explore the ‘Moos’ before returning to our hotel.

Exploring the ‘Moos’

The centre of the ‘triangle’ formed by the three villages of Ehrwald, Biberwier and Lermoos is a slightly marshy area with plenty of farmland and a network of paths weaving in between the fields. In the spring, the fields are alive with birdlife – Common Rosefinch, Whinchat and both Great Grey and Red-backed Shrike are all possible – and so it is worth spending a couple of hours slowly pottering through the Moos to see what we can find. The ‘Golfino’ restaurant to the north of the Moos is well worth a visit too at some point, in order to sample a slice of their delicious Apfel Streusel cake!

Top of the Zugspitze

We will choose a clear morning to drive the 15 minutes or so to Obermoos, from where we will take the Tiroler Zugspitzbahn to the top of Germany’s highest peak, the mighty Zugspitze at 2,962m. The cable car ride itself is spectacular, and the views at the top are simply stunning. At the top we can cross the border into Germany, and perhaps from here take the cable car down to the glacier. The focus of this morning will be on the wonderful views as opposed to the wildlife, but we might catch site of Chamois during our cable car ascent … and of course the Alpine Choughs at the top will keep us entertained! The museum at the top of the Zugspitze, which tells us a little of this history of the mountain and the Zugspitzbahn, is also worth a visit.

Ehwalder Almbahn (and optional hike to Sebensee)

On the edge of Ehrwald is the Ehrwalder Almbahn cable car, taking us up to 1502m and the delightful Tirolerhaus restaurant, which is perfect for a coffee stop in the sunshine and for enjoying the beautiful mountain views. We will explore meadows, which should by now be snow-free and bursting with colourful alpines including Spring and Trumpet
Gentians and Birds-eye Primrose. We will also take the short walk (around 10 minutes – not including any flower stops!) down to Lake Almsee to enjoy the mountain reflections in the lake here.

If anyone does wish to enjoy a longer walk today, there is an excellent option to hike to Sebensee. The walk is graded as ‘easy’ on the local maps, but without stops takes on average two hours to walk to the lake and then around 1.5 hours back, covering about 6 miles in total. There is some ascent / descent – not excessively steep – but gently sustained uphill and downhill stretches over the course of a few hundred metres. We should find Alpine Clematis and Mountain Pennycress along the way, and the views at the lake are worth the effort; Sebensee has bright turquoise water and a stunning backdrop of mountains, and is surely one of the most beautiful lakes in the Tirol.

**Grubigstein**

One day we will drive to the neighbouring village of Lermoos and take the cable car firstly to Brettlam at 1,327m, then on to the top of the Grubigstein at 2,028m. Here, we have the chance to find the rare and diminutive *Chamorchis alpina*, the beautiful Black Vanilla Orchid, Fairy Thimble bellflowers, plenty of gentians, Alpine Rock-jasmine, Alpenrose and perhaps False and Sword-leaved Helleborines. At the middle station we can talk a short walk through the woodland edges, or even walk back down to Lermoos, looking out for Fly, Burnt-tip, Frog and both Greater and Lesser Butterfly Orchids.

The panoramaweg winding its way from Lermoos back to Ehrwald is also a lovely option for anyone that wishes to walk an extra 2 miles this afternoon. Marsh Helleborine is possible along the way, along with field gentians and various saxifrages, and on a sunny day we are likely to see lots of beautiful Swallowtail butterflies.

**Marienberg to Mittersee**

From the base of the Marienberg chair lift we will take a path that winds through the woodlands to and then more open areas to Mittersee. It’s a gentle walk that leads to an idyllic lake, along the shoreline of which we can find Red Helleborines, and on the way we might even spot Dark Red Helleborine too.

Returning to the Marienberg chair lift we have a couple of options: taking the two lifts all the way to the top offers a nice scenic descent to the middle station. Or, we can stop half way. From the middle station there is a summer toboggan run all the way back down to the bottom – a fun alternative to walking down the mountain!
Day 8

Fly Munich, transfer Ehrwald

We will have some time this morning for a final walk, time to potter in the village, or simply relax at the hotel, before we must set off back to Munich. We plan to take a mid-afternoon flight back to London Heathrow, arriving in the early evening.

Tour grading

Grade A – we will enjoy walks of up to around 3 miles each day, all taken at a leisurely pace. Although we have carefully selected our walks to avoid sustained stretch of uphill or downhill walking, and the terrain is easy to walk on, as we are in the mountains there will always be some uphill and downhill sections. We would recommend bringing walking poles, though these can also be borrowed from the hotel (subject to availability).

As each member of the group will be provided with their own "Z-ticket", it will always be possible to do more, or less, or something completely different, than the main party. The Z-ticket also gives us free use of the local buses for anyone that wishes to return to the hotel separately to the rest of the group.

Focus

Alpine flowers, plus birds, butterflies and the beautiful mountain scenery.

Food & accommodation

We are based at the 4* Alpen Residence in Ehrwald. We will be staying in ‘Deluxe’ rooms which are available on double or twin occupancy (the rooms here are ‘Austrian twin’ style, consisting of one bed frame with two single mattresses and separate single bedding), or on single occupancy for a supplement. The rooms are spacious with free Wi-Fi, mini fridge (though no in-room tea/coffee making facilities – these are available from the bar though) and a balcony and sitting area. The hotel’s spa includes a warm pool, two steam rooms, sauna and comfortable relaxation areas. An
excellent buffet breakfast and evening meal will be taken at the hotel each day, and we will plan to take picnic lunches to keep us going during our daily excursions.

Weather

We hope for pleasant sunny days, but should be prepared for anything! It can be warm – even hot – in late June, but equally we could experience rain, afternoon thunderstorms, or even snow in a very late spring. It’s best to bring a variety of layers and plan for all eventualities!

Your Safety & Security

You have chosen to travel to Austria. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice regularly prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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