



Bavarian castles

Follow Germany's Alpine Road to explore a string of sumptuous fantasy palaces

When 'Swan King' Ludwig II of Bavaria drowned in unexplained circumstances in 1886, he left behind him a string of fanciful palaces up in his beloved Alps. Whether Ludwig was mad, like his little brother, or merely deeply eccentric, his palaces set new standards for royal intemperance – they really have to be seen to be believed.

But if loopy palaces aren't your thing, there's plenty here for you, with majestic Alpine views on show at the end of long walks or short cable-car rides, boat rides on glittering mountain lakes, and appealing historic towns.

GETTING THERE

Depending on which parts of the route you plan to take in, airport options include Zurich, Munich, Innsbruck, and Salzburg.

Zurich (Switzerland)

Birmingham (Swiss)
Glasgow (British Airways)
London (Air France, British Airways, Swiss, Easyjet)
Manchester (Swiss)

Munich (Germany)

Birmingham (BMI British Midland, Lufthansa)
Edinburgh (British Airways, Easyjet)
London (Air Berlin, BMI British Midland, British Airways, Easyjet, Lufthansa)
Manchester (Lufthansa, BMI British Midland)

Innsbruck (Austria)

Bristol (Easyjet)
Liverpool (Easyjet)
London (British Airways, Easyjet)
Manchester (British Airways)

Salzburg (Austria)

Bristol (Ryanair)
Exeter (Flybe)
Leeds Bradford (Jet2)
Liverpool (Ryanair)
London (British Airways, Ryanair)
Manchester (British Airways)
Nottingham East Midlands (Ryanair)
Southampton (Flybe)

GETTING AROUND

The German Alpine Road (Deutsche Alpenstraße) stretches some 250 miles from the edge of Lake Bodensee in the west to the Königssee in the east. You'll find it marked on maps, and it's clearly signposted all the way.

If you're hiring a car and driving the whole route, bear in mind that there can be steep charges for picking up a car in one country and dropping off in another. The palaces are accessible on (long) day trips from Munich.

GOOD PLACES TO STAY

Prices are given for a standard double room in April 2008. The dialling code for Germany from the UK is 0049.

Füssen | Zum Hechten

Tel 0836 291600 www.hotel-hechten.com
Some very basic rooms, but well-located right inside the old town walls, and well-priced too. Most characterful is the kitsch breakfast room. £63

Fraueninsel | Inselwirt

Tel 0805 4630 www.inselwirt.de
A small number of simple, homely rooms available on the idyllic Fraueninsel island, a much better bet than any of the dull towns ringing the lake. There's a restaurant downstairs with outdoor terrace where

lots of pine, ironwork and greenery make for a pleasant rustic atmosphere. £82

Lindau | Vis A Vis

Tel 0838 23965 www.visavis-lindau.de
A bit chainey, but smart and modern. Very close to the harbourfront, but without the price tag of the hotels right on the water. Impeccably cheery service too. £86

Oberammergau | Zur Rose

Tel 0882 24706
Dishevelled (in the best, homeliest way) family-run guesthouse with simple, good value rooms. The cosy restaurant is extremely popular with the locals, but we were a bit disappointed by an overdone, over salty, wild boar steak. £46

Oberau (Berchtesgadenland) | Denningelehen

Tel 0865 297890 www.denningelehen.de
The perfect mountain village location, surrounded by slopes of fir trees, offering pristine mountain views at a good price. Rooms are modern, bright and tidy. The indoor pool with glass wall is a bonus, but as was so often the case on our trip, the restaurant promised much (including those Alpine views) but the food was a let-down – an overcooked, bland schnitzel. £54

Partenkirchen | Post Hotel Partenkirchen

Tel 0882 193630 www.post-hotel.de
Right on the surprisingly pretty main Partenkirchen street, Post Hotel Partenkirchen is the town's grand old historic hotel, with surprisingly reasonable rates. This is an old Alpine lodge, perhaps a touch gloomy and in need of an update in places, but reeking of history. Look out for the huge, brooding hotel cat. £86

For the full magazine report on Bavarian castles, see p32 of the March 2008 issue of Holiday Which?

PLACES TO EAT AND DRINK

Many of the restaurants we ate in turned out to be nothing special – adequate but no more. So we've only made a couple of recommendations for this factfile.

Füssen | Zum Schwanen

Brotmarkt 4, Tel 0836 26174

Zum Schwanen in Füssen's pretty old town is a restaurant which offers on paper much the same sort of hearty Bavarian cuisine you'll find on menus all over the Alps. But we've singled out this restaurant for attention because where others were a let-down, Zum Schwanen delivered, with our venison stew and shredded dumplings enlivened by a piquant grated cabbage salad.

Surrounds are simple and inviting, with pine beamed ceiling and furniture, unadorned white tablecloths and low-slung leather lampshades casting a cosy light.

Garmisch-Partenkirchen | Reindl's

Bahnstraße 15, Tel 0882 1943870

www.reindls.de

A thoroughly traditional setting in this Garmisch hotel – heavy-set, deeply carved wood panelling and a profusion of statuary. Dinner comes on silvered plated under a

smart cloche, and with all this you'd expect the cuisine to be quite staid too. Instead, you can choose from an innovative menu which makes use of both local ingredients in specialities like Bavarian Ox (€19.50) and further-travelled ones such as Norwegian salmon steak (when we visited served with a delicate lavender-laced sauce).

We finished things off to glutinous perfection with a mountain of rich vanilla ice cream, encrusted with strawberries and balanced on liqueur-piqued macaroons. The best meal we ate outside Munich.

TIPS

■ The Alpine Road is just one of a number of Bavarian driving routes helpfully laid out for tourists, including the Castle Road in the north and the Romantic Road in the west. For more information, see www.bayern.by and click on 'Bavaria's Tourist Routes'.

■ As many of the main sights are in a few clusters, if you don't want to drive the whole route, you could pick a base and explore its surrounds in detail. Schloss Neuschwanstein is hugely popular, and Berchtesgaden also seemed favoured by British tourists – we saw few at Schloss Linderhof and fewer tourists still at Schloss Herrenchiemsee.

■ A visit to Berchtesgadenland can be easily combined with a stay in Salzburg just over the Austrian border.

■ If you want to start or end your holiday in Bavaria's cosmopolitan capital Munich, look out for our forthcoming report in the September 2008 issue.

■ At 9am the queues at Neuschwanstein were tolerable, but by 1pm tickets were being sold for 3.45pm at the end of a 20-minute wait. So book ahead at www.hohenschwangau.de.

■ Neuschwanstein and Hohenschwangau are both uphill walks from the ticket office, so make sure to leave plenty of time – 20 minutes for Hohenschwangau and 30 for Neuschwanstein. In suitable weather, there's a shuttle bus to Hohenschwangau and horse-drawn carriages to both castles. Access may not be possible for people with a physical disability.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Time difference UK +1 hour

Dialling code 0049

Money matters £1 = €1.34

GUIDEBOOK AND WEBSITES



- **Lonely Planet Munich & Bavaria, £13.99 (ISBN 9781740595285)**
- **Bavarian Tourism: www.bayern.by**
- **Bavarian Palace Department: www.schloesser.bayern.de**



MAPS Ann Thomson

