

The Alps On a Budget

Have you always wanted to ride the fantastic roads through the Alps but not had enough time or funds to do it? Well with a little careful planning you can – here's how myself and two biking mates Ashley and Chris combined sightseeing in the Alps and two days of biking heaven on hired bikes.



Ashley (left) and myself in Landeck

Last year I picked up a leaflet from a biker at Squires Café at Sherburn In Elmet advertising The Hotel Enzian – a biker friendly hotel in Landeck in the Austrian Alps. A quick look at their website confirmed that in addition to the usual hotel facilities they had a fully fitted workshop, secure bike parking, drying rooms for wet biking gear and a range of motorbikes for hire. This last point caught my eye.

I had always wanted to ride the Alps but the logistics of riding from the north of England to the Alps and back would take up a significant amount of annual leave. The thought of hiring bikes from the hotel was a different proposition however. Chris took the leaflet and started surfing the internet to see if we could put together our own fly / drive / ride package. The three of us agreed we wanted a combination of driving over some of the mountain passes, hiring three bikes for a couple of days to do more of the same, and a day to sample the sights, sounds and hospitality of Innsbruck. Five days off work seemed sufficient to meet our criteria. After checking out airlines, hotels, car hire and numerous emails in best schoolboy German to the Hotel Enzian we managed to put together a package which fully met our criteria.

This is how it went.

Sunday afternoon saw us in Manchester airport boarding the 3pm plane to Salzburg. We arrived at 6.30pm and were shown to the car hire desk where we were given the keys to a brand new diesel BMW 3 series. Within 5 minutes we were on our way to our overnight stop at a hotel in Kufstein, approximately 60 miles away. The evening meal and a number of beers were quickly disposed of before retiring to bed.

We set off the following morning in brilliant sunshine to take a scenic route to the town of Landeck which ensured we took in several mountains and passes. The Brenner Pass was dispatched in short order, followed by the Giovo and the Timmeljoch Pass. The scenery was absolutely stunning which meant frequent

stops for Chris and Ashley to take photographs, and having seen the results David Bailey has nothing to worry about. The roads were very quiet, with bikers outnumbering cars by a ratio of four to one. Being able to drive the alpine roads enthusiastically only served to whet our appetites for the next two days of bike riding.

We arrived at the Hotel Landeck late on the Monday afternoon and were met by very helpful and friendly staff. Having checked in we went off to the bike centre in the hotel grounds to complete the necessary paperwork for hiring the bikes for the next two days. The hotel hires out their own range of bikes but there are also a range of BMW demonstrators available for hire as well. Prices varied depending whether you were on a demonstrator or hotel bike.

After a bit of negotiation we all settled for different bikes. Chris normally rides a Honda Pan European and chose to ride a BMW R1200GS. Ashley rides a Bandit 1200 at home and wanted to try something different with a lot of engine braking and opted for the BMW 650 X Country. I currently run a BMW100RS and an early Yamaha TDM 850. I chose to ride the BMW 800S – their latest parallel twin with similar characteristics to my TDM. Once we had sorted out the bikes we retired to the bar to conduct a study of the different tastes of German and Austrian beers.



Chris on the BMW 1200 GS

On Tuesday morning we set off on the bikes heading for the town of Neuschwanstein in southern Germany, to find the castle built by Mad King Ludwig and made famous in the film “Chitty Chitty Bang Bang”. Taking the main roads to the castle gave us the opportunity to familiarize ourselves with the handling and performance of the bikes.

After much photographing of the castle we headed south west back into Austria on quiet valley roads and mountain passes. The roads and scenery was amazing, crystal clear visibility, dry twisting empty roads and quiet passes with tight challenging bends taking us up and above the snow lines on the mountains. Lunch comprised of sandwiches and coffee in the town of Impst after which a further 150 kilometer route was completed. We returned to the hotel at teatime, washed the bikes using the complimentary power washer and parked the bikes in the garage for the night. The evening was spent in the bar swapping stories and bike routes with fellow bikers. There were approximately 60 bikers staying at the hotel, comprising mainly of British and Germans (no the war wasn't mentioned!).

A large number of Brits had brought their own bikes, taking an average three days to get there, staying for a week and then touring back. When we discussed the cost of ferries and overnight accommodation with them we began to realize how cheap our trip was. Ashley did his best to drink the hotel dry and we all retired in the early hours of the morning having had a very sociable evening in the hotel with the other bikers and the owner, Klaus Stubenbock. Klaus is also a bike nut and organizes guided trips out from the hotel to all the famous passes. His local knowledge is invaluable and he can provide maps, route planners, bike clothing and equipment if needed free of charge.

We awoke on Wednesday morning again to clear blue skies and dry roads. After an early breakfast we set off. Today's ride was to take us into Italy up the South side of the famous Stelvio Pass, down the north side into Bormio and then back to Landeck via several other passes. The route into Italy was fast and smooth with little traffic despite it being a main arterial road. At Sluderno we turned off the main road and followed the signs for the Stelvio Pass. The south ascent of the pass was a brilliantly challenging series of 48 hairpin bends, some of which were so tight cars were doing three point turns to get round them. The viewing point at the top was yet another major photo opportunity for the budding David Baileys amongst us. After a coffee and sandwich at the ski resort at the summit of the pass we set off for the decent into Bormio.

For me this bit of the run was the highlight of the trip. In contrast to the ascent, the descent consisted of mile after mile of tight hairpin bends, all correctly cambered and of uniform radius, coupled with long incredibly fast straights and breathtaking scenery. All three bikes took the roads and occasional over enthusiastic inputs from their riders in their stride.

From Bormio we took the road to Zenez which follows the side of Lake Livigno for approximately 15 miles. At the far end of the lake we came to a control booth where we were told we would need to pay 7 euros each in order to proceed. Despite speaking in German there was some initial confusion, until we realized this was a toll charge



Stelvio Pass looking towards Bormio

to use the Laschera Tunnel running under the adjacent mountain. On emerging from the tunnel we were immediately stopped by border guards who told us we were now entering Switzerland and needed to see our passports. At this point Chris realized his passport was safely tucked up under his pillow back at the

hotel. Ashley and myself duly handed over our passports to the guard and suggested they lock Chris up for attempting to illegally enter Switzerland. Despite our pleadings the guard let Chris through on the production and examination of his driving licence. The guard wasn't impressed and if my basic grasp of the language is correct I'm convinced I heard him muttering something about Chris being of doubtful parentage!

Switzerland provided more of the same stunning biking roads and magnificent scenery, again with only a smattering of traffic. We eventually returned to the hotel at 6pm and washed, refueled and returned the bikes to the hotel garage and reluctantly handed over the keys. The two days on the bikes had exceeded all our expectations and we immediately tried to book the bikes for an extra day. Sadly this couldn't be done so some comfort was sought in the hotel bar where Ashley again failed in his mission to drink the place dry.

We checked out of the hotel on Thursday morning and took a circuitous route in the car to Innsbruck. We checked into the overnight hotel in the early afternoon and spent the rest of the day sampling the hospitality of the town. After a very late night we packed up and returned to the airport during Friday afternoon, handed the car back and boarded the plane for the return flight to Manchester.

The trip was a great success and left us wanting to rebook for next year but with a slightly different itinerary. Having done it we would still go for 5 nights but go straight to the Hotel Enzian at Landeck from the airport. We will be booking the bikes for 4 days and probably try different ones. Overnight stops are not really necessary if the motorways are used.



Beer analysis in Innsbruck

It's worth checking out the hotel website to check on recent developments as Klaus is trying to do a deal with BMW to make it possible to hire bikes direct from Munich airport. Put Hotel Enzian at Landeck in a search engine and follow the links for the latest info on their website.

Costs? The trip minus spending money cost £390 each in September. This paid for airfares, (Thomsonfly £42 return) car hire and insurance, five nights accommodation (2x bed and breakfast, half board at the Hotel Enzian for three nights) and two days bike hire including insurance. Bikes have to be returned cleaned and full of petrol. Maximum mileage without having to pay a surcharge is currently 350 kilometers per day.

Additional costs included diesel for the car – a total of 55 euros / £38 and fuel for the bikes. We rode approximately 600 kilometers over the two days and the BMW 800S managed nearly 60 mpg despite the occasional blast at 200kph. We have agreed to stop arguing whether the collective bar bill exceeded the cost of hiring the bikes as the amount is too painful to consider.

The Hotel Enzian is one of a number of biker friendly hotels in the area and is an ideal base to tour the Austrian, Swiss and Italian Alps with ease. There are so many passes to tick off the list we will be returning for many years to come. This is the cheapest way to do the Alps – get on the internet and make it happen!

Paul Marshall