

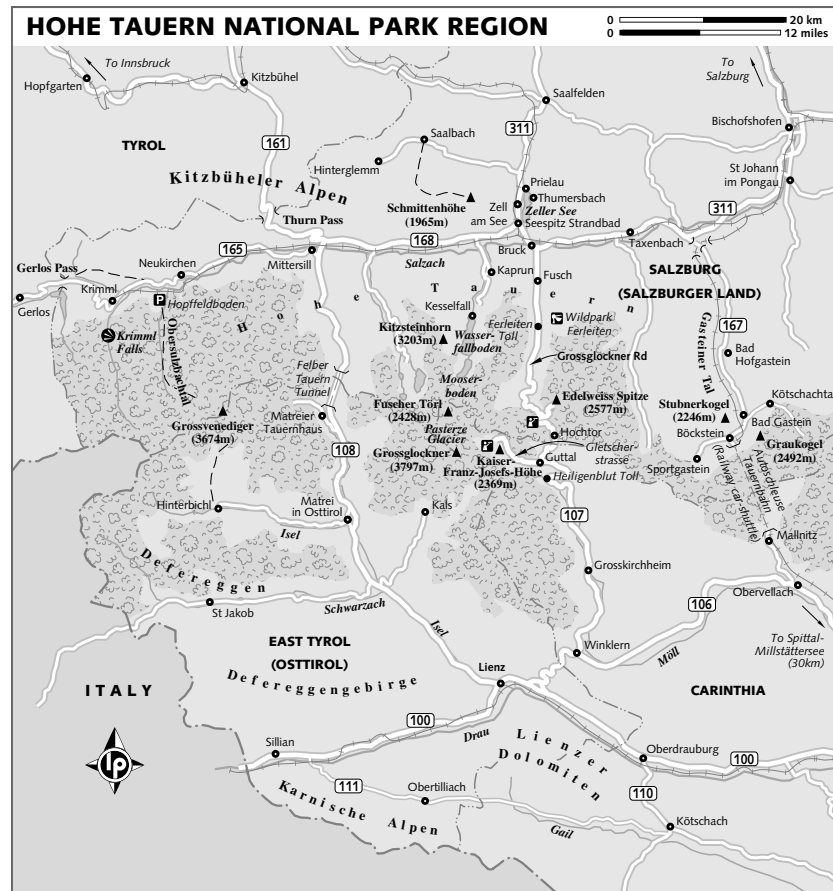
Hohe Tauern National Park Region



Hohe Tauern National Park is no place for acrophobes: you're constantly on a high. This vast tract of mountainous terrain is Austria's largest nature reserve, and three is its magic number: almost 300 peaks towering 3000m create enormous ripples in the landscape. The park is carved up between Carinthia, Tyrol and Salzburgerland (which naturally stole the biggest slice of the strudel). The scenery invites applause: waterfalls gouge deep ravines, Pinzgauer cattle graze spongy pastures, vultures wheel in a china-blue sky and glaciers shimmer like diamonds in spiky tiaras. It is amazing.

The central vein is the precipitous Grossglockner Road, which twists like a ribbon through a crumpled white sheet at the foot of Grossglockner (3797m), the granddaddy of the Austrian Alps. Down south the Dolomites give you a toothy grin in Lienz, a Roman-rooted city with Italian pizzazz, while stepping west the Krimml Falls begin to thunder when the ice cracks. Further north it's a different picture, with life spiralling around the lake at Zell am See and Bad Gastein serving up a winning combination of ski and spa.

This is where Austria's wild things are, but it's no empty wilderness and the resident marmots, chamois and ibex share their playground with active types. The locals have been legging it up these peaks since the Stone Age, so it stands to reason that opportunities for serious hiking are plentiful. If you'd prefer to freewheel over hill and dale, tourist offices hand out maps of the cycling routes that crisscross the reserve. Up for an adventure? Nearly every village offers an array of pursuits for those keen to throw themselves down a cliff, along a river or off a mountain's edge. Tempted...?



HIGHLIGHTS

- Getting high on glacier views on the precipitous **Grossglockner Road** (p318)
- Bathing in radon-rich waters and basking in *belle époque* glory in **Bad Gastein** (p320)
- Kicking off your ski boots to chill in the igloo at **Kitzsteinhorn Glacier** (p314)
- Soaking in the misty spray of **Krimml Falls** (p317), Europe's highest waterfall at 380m
- Letting llamas lead the way through the dramatic Dolomites in **Lienz** (p323)



■ AREA: 1816 SQ KM

■ HIGHEST ELEVATION: GROSSGLOCKNER 3797M

History

The Austrian Alps once formed the boundary between the more-established southern Roman territories and their newer, less stable conquests to the north. The main trade route for pack animals ran along the pass at the end of the Tauern Valley, but few settlements were established due to the Romans' distrust of the treacherous climate (tales of malevolent, snowy spirits abounded) and difficult mountainous topography.

In 1971 the provinces of Carinthia, Salzburg and Tyrol agreed to the creation of a national park; regions were added in stages between 1981 and 1991 until it became Europe's largest national park. Today it's widely regarded as one of Europe's biggest conservation success

stories, an example of an approach where the needs of the local population are addressed right from the start.

Information

All tourist offices in places bordering the park have maps of and information on Hohe Tauern. *The Experience in Nature* map (in English) shows information offices, overnight accommodation and tour ideas. You could also investigate the national park's website at www.hohetauern.at, listing the various provincial tourist offices responsible for the national park.

Climate

The national park has an Alpine climate with high rainfall, short summers and long winters

with heavy snowfall. Avalanches are common in spring. Be aware that the sun is intense at high altitudes.

Dangers & Annoyances

Extremes of climate and terrain make parts of the park potentially dangerous for walkers and climbers. Always come prepared for abrupt changes in weather conditions and visibility, bring warm clothing and adequate maps, and consider taking a guide on more difficult routes. For more tips on staying safe in the mountains, see p86.

The number for emergency mountain rescue services is ☎ 140. Call ☎ 0512-291600 for weather information.

Getting There & Around

The main hubs for train services are Zell am See (for services to Salzburg and points north via St Johann im Pongau) and Lienz (for trains east and west into Tyrol and Carinthia).

The authorities are determined to limit the flow of traffic through the park, so most of the roads through it have toll sections and some are closed in winter. The main north-south road routes are Felber Tauern Rd, open year-round, and the Grossglockner Road (p318). The 5.5km-long Felber Tauern Tunnel is at the East Tyrol-Salzburg border: the toll is €10 for cars

and €8 for motorcycles. Buses on the Lienz-Kitzbühel route operate along this road.

Getting around by bus is made more attractive by special passes; such deals change periodically, so make inquiries upon arrival. Buying zonal day or week passes for provincial transport should work out significantly cheaper than buying single tickets.

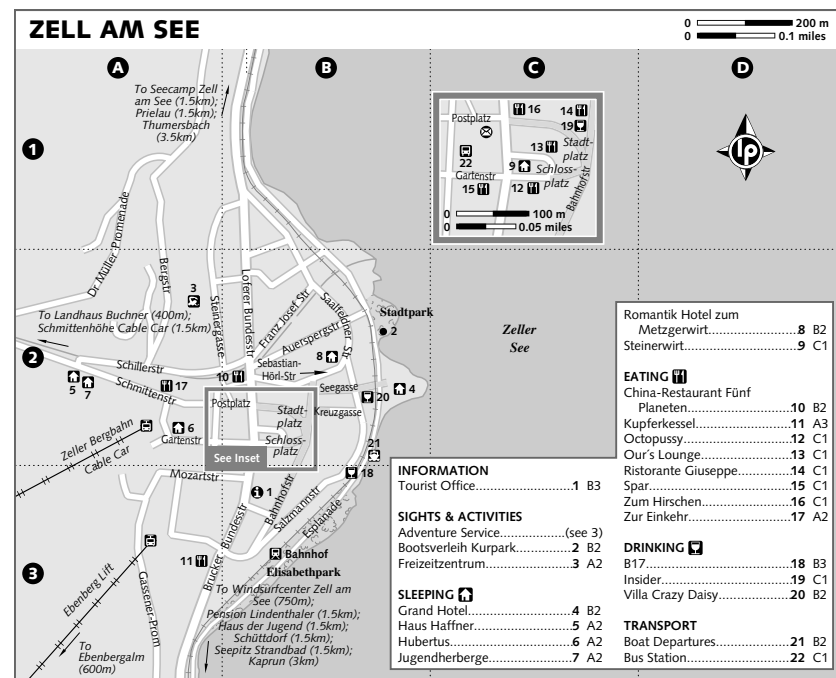
ZELL AM SEE

☎ 06542 / pop 10,050 / elev 757m

Zell am See is Austria's Van Gogh – it lays on its colour thick. Taking the ice white canvas of the Hohe Tauern range, it suffuses it with a sapphire blue lake, emerald spruce forests, golden moors and the multicoloured sails of windsurfers. Step into the picture in summer and you're within easy reach of High Alpine walking trails, the Krimml Falls and the awe-inspiring Grossglockner Road. In winter, the scene shifts to downhill thrills in Zell am See and Kaprun, which together form the Europa Sports Region (p75). In both seasons, Zell am See's medieval centre serves up excellent dining and nightlife in its tangle of pedestrianised streets.

Orientation & Information

Almost adjacent to the main resort of Zell am See is the residential area of Schüttdorf,



which is generally cheaper for accommodation. Both are on the western shore of the Zeller See. You should ask for the handy *Gästekarte* (guest card) wherever you stay and show it for discounts on activities, sights and transport.

Tourist office (☎ 770-0; www.europasportregion.info; Brucker Bundesstrasse 1a; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon, 2-6pm Sat, 10am-noon Sun mid-Dec-Feb & Jul-Aug). Staff at this office will help find rooms; there's also an accommodation board in the foyer with a free 24hr telephone.

Activities

SKIING

Zell am See has plenty to please powder freaks with 132km of downhill runs in its mountainous backyard, the Europa Sports Region. The terrain tends to be more tree-lined and scenic than hair-raising, but there are a couple of steep black pistes. The two must-ski biggies are **Schmittenhöhe** (1965m) and the glaciated **Kitzsteinhorn** (3203m); the latter also offers cross-country skiing, year-round glacier skiing on up to 13 pistes,

LORD OF THE RINGOS

Zell am See has plenty of pedalos and rowing boats, but you might like to venture into the resort's wackier waters with a spin in the brand-new **BBQ-Donut** at Schmittenhöhe. From June to early October this giant Ringo (inflatable ring), complete with a charcoal grill in the centre and a shady parasol above to block the rays, floats leisurely across the summit's 2000m reservoir.

It's a deliciously different experience to glide across an Alpine lake with the aroma of steak filling your nostrils, an ice-cold beer on the side and 3000m-high peaks drifting into view. The Alps-meets-Australia experience costs €20 per person per hour for groups of up to five. Solo travellers keen to give the whole donut thing a go should turn up for the **Grilling & Chilling** picnic programme, which departs from the Schmittenhöhe cable car at 9.45am every Friday and costs €15.

HIKING & CLIMBING IN HOHE TAUERN NATIONAL PARK

Europe's biggest national park, Hohe Tauern is a mecca to hikers and climbers with its extraordinary landscape of verdant valleys, towering mountains, virgin forests and shimmering glaciers. The reserve has treks to suit every level of ability, from gentle day walks (see p102) to extreme expeditions to inaccessible peaks and ridges.

Freytag & Berndt produces nine 1:50,000 walking maps covering the national park and surrounding areas. If you plan to undertake major walking expeditions, you should plan your overnight stops in advance – some small-scale guesthouses provide food and accommodation, but they are widely scattered. Contact the regional or local tourist offices for accommodation lists.

Popular walking trails include the ascent of the **Grossvenediger** (3674m), a peak permanently coated with ice and snow and flanked by glaciers. The closest you can get by road is the **Matreier Tauernhaus Hotel** (1512m; ☎ 04875-88 11; www.matreier-tauernhaus.at; A-9971 Matrei in Osttirol) at the southern entrance to the Felber Tauern Tunnel. You can park here and within an hour's walk gain fine views of the mountain.

Anyone with mountain-climbing experience and a reasonable level of fitness can climb the mighty **Grossglockner** (3797m) via the 'ordinary' route, though guides are recommended. The main route for hikers begins from the **Adlersruhe (Eagles Rest) overnight hut** (☎ 04876-500), a four- to five-hour hike from Heiligenblut. From here, the route to the summit crosses ice and rocks, following a steel cable over a narrow snow ridge. The final ascent to the cross at the summit is relatively easy. It's essential to have the proper equipment (including maps, ropes and crampons) and to check weather conditions before setting out. For guides, contact the tourist offices in Heiligenblut or Kals, or ring the **mountain guides association** (☎ 04824-2700).