

The Salzkammergut



Sometimes called the ‘cradle of Austrian culture’, the Salzkammergut is a spectacular region of alpine and sub-alpine lakes, picturesque valleys, rolling hills and rugged, steep mountain ranges. The highest mountains climb to almost 3000m. Not least because of the Salzkammergut’s startling beauty, parts of this region – especially those lakes easily reached from Salzburg – can at times be swamped with visitors. But don’t despair – much of the region is remote wilderness, and even in those heavily visited parts such as the Wolfgangsee and Mondsee, you’ll always find isolated sections where peaceful, glassy waters provide limitless opportunities for boating, swimming, fishing or just sitting on the shore and chucking stones into the water. The popular Hallstätter See is no exception. When the pretty streets in Hallstatt township are full of summer visitors, across the lake a sleepy, swampy Obertraun retains a village atmosphere. Strike out deeper into the region, and you will be rewarded with isolated splendour.

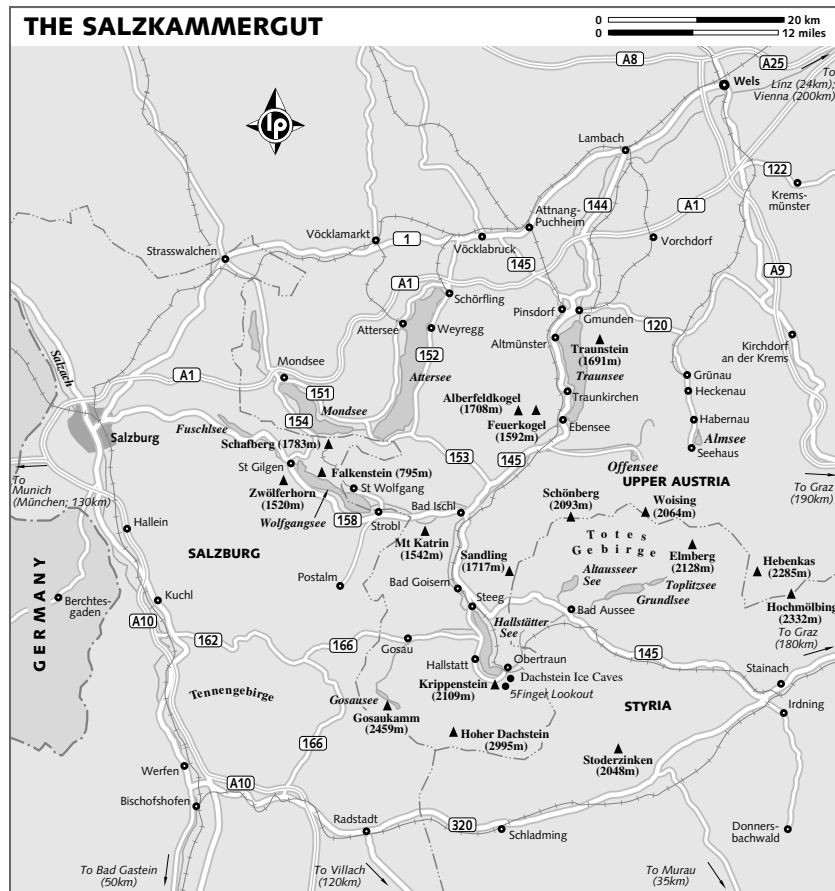
Salt is the ‘white gold’ of the Salzkammergut, and the mines that made it famous now make for an interesting journey back in time to the settlers of the Iron Age Hallstatt culture, and to the Celts and Romans – all of whom sullied their hands in the mines. Along the western side of the Hallstätter See is a pipeline reputed to be the oldest in the world, used to transport brine. Today, the narrow swathe cut out to build and service the pipeline is a lush hiking trail.

Whatever your reason for coming to the Salzkammergut – swimming, boating, hiking, climbing or exploring cultures – this region rewards the curious and adventurous.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Reeling from views at the surreal **5Fingers platform** (p253) in the Dachstein Mountains
- Hiking around the **Hallstätter See** (p249) from Obertraun to Hallstatt and cooling off in the crystal waters between trails
- Exploring the Wolfgangsee and the remarkable pilgrimage church in **St Wolfgang** (p260), filled with priceless works of art
- Strolling through the **Kaiservilla** (p247), Franz Josef’s summer residence, now a handsome museum set in parkland
- Plunging into the chilling depths to masterfully illuminated towers of ice in the **Dachstein Caves** (p252)
- Finding the toilet in Gmunden’s **Museum für Historische Sanitäröbekte** (p257) – a museum dedicated to loos? They must be potty...





Orientation & Information

The Salzkammergut falls within three provinces: Upper Austria, which takes the lion's share; Styria, comprising the small area around Bad Aussee; and Salzburg province. For general information, check out www.salzkammergut.at.

History

Mining has been the principal activity in the Salzkammergut since Celtic times, when tunnels were hacked into the rock and water sloshed down them to release the salt. After the demise of the Celts, the prince-archbishops of Salzburg took over the shafts and used the profits from the dark, dank mines to build their elaborate palaces and pleasure gardens.

Ironically, considering its later popularity as a tourist area, the whole of the Salzkammergut region was banned to visitors until the early 19th century because the Salzburg government, which held a monopoly on salt mining here, wanted to prevent salt from being smuggled out. Later, Emperor Franz Josef's patronage brought central European aristocracy to the region in their droves. They came to promenade around the parks of the elegant spa towns like Bad Ischl, or to tramp through the snowy mountain forests in search of unwary deer.

Climate

Summers down by the Salzkammergut region's lakes tend to be quite warm, with an av-

erage temperature of 15°C to 25°C. In spring and autumn especially, beware of the so-called 'string rain' – a soft, yet drenching rain that can soak you through before you've even noticed it. During winter (mid-November to February) the average lies at around -4°C.

Getting There & Away

To reach the Salzkammergut from Salzburg by car or motorcycle, take the A1 to reach the north of the region, or Hwy 158 to Bad Ischl. Travelling north-south, the main road is Hwy 145 (the Salzkammergut Bundesstrasse) which follows the rail line for most of its length. By train, the main rail routes into the province are from Salzburg or Linz, with a change at Attnang-Puchheim onto the regional north-south railway line.

Getting Around

The Salzkammergut is crossed by regional trains on a north-south route, passing through Attnang-Puchheim on the Salzburg-Linz line and Stainach-Irdning on the Bischofshofen-Graz line. The rail line linking these two access points is 108km long, and hourly trains take 2½ hours to complete the journey. Smaller stations on this route are *unbesetzter Bahnhof* (unattended train station); at these you'll have to use a platform ticket machine or pay on the train. Attersee is also accessible by rail.

Regular bus services connect all towns and villages in the area, though less frequently or not at all on weekends. For bus times and prices from Salzburg to the various towns in the region, see p281.

Passenger boats ply the waters of the Attersee, Traunsee, Mondsee, Hallstätter See and Wolfgangsee.

The non-transferable Salzkammergut Erlebnis Card, available from tourist offices and hotels, costs €4.90 and offers significant discounts for 21 days between 1 May and 31 October.

BAD ISCHL

☎ 06132 / pop 14,070

This spa town's reputation snowballed after the Habsburg Princess Sophie took a treatment here to cure her infertility in 1828. Within two years she had given birth to Emperor Franz Josef I; two other sons fol-

lowed and were nicknamed the Salzprinzen (Salt Princes).

Rather in the manner of a salmon returning to its place of birth, Franz Josef made an annual pilgrimage to Bad Ischl, making it his summer home for the next 60 years and hauling much of the European aristocracy in his wake. The fateful letter he signed declaring war on Serbia and sparking off WWI bore a Bad Ischl postmark.

Today's Bad Ischl is a handsome town that makes a handy base for visiting the region's five main lakes.

Orientation & Information

Bad Ischl's town centre is compactly contained within a bend of the Traun River. There are moneychanging facilities at the post office and train station.

Post office (Bahnhofstrasse; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat)

Salzkammergut Info-Center (☎ 240 00-0; www.salzkammergut.co.at; Gützstrasse 12; ☎ 9am-8pm) A helpful private regional agency with bike rental (per 24hr €13) and internet (per 10 min €1.10).

Tourist office (☎ 277 57-0; www.badischl.at; Auböckplatz; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) A telephone service (8am to 8pm) for rooms and information complements this office.

Sights & Activities

KAISERVILLA

Franz Josef's summer residence was the **Kaiservilla** (☎ 232 41; Jainzen 38; www.kaiservilla.com; adult/student/child €9.80/6.50/4.50, grounds only adult/student/child €3.50/2.50; ☎ 9.30am-4.45pm May-mid-Oct), an Italianate building that was bought by his mother, the Princess Sophie, as an engagement present for her son and Princess Elisabeth of Bavaria. Elisabeth, who loathed the villa and her husband in equal measure, spent little time there, but the emperor came to love it and it became his permanent summer residence for over 60 years. His mistress, Katharina Schratz, lived nearby in a house chosen for her by the empress.

The interior of the villa can only be seen by guided tours (which leave every half-hour in summer), with English information sheets. You'll learn of the emperor's habit of rising at 3.30am each morning to take a bath before beginning his day's work punctually at 4am, and that the only recreation he allowed himself was hunting. The walls of the villa are liberally studded with the fruits of