

HIHS 2015 HOLIDAY IN AUSTRIA: THE SOUND OF KAZOOS!



Forty-four members and friends set out on the long two-day journey to St Wolfgang am Wolfgangsee in the Austrian Lake District, or Salzkammergut, on Thursday, 10th September in a Lucketts coach driven by Kevin who is well known to many of us. After crossing from Dover to Calais and an overnight stop in Aachen, we finally arrived at the Försterhof hotel and the holiday really began. The accommodation was excellent, some rooms having circular beds, the staff were welcoming and helpful and the meals were expertly prepared and very generous.



Our first warm and sunny day started with a walking tour of the town of St Wolfgang which is situated on the shores of Wolfgangsee. The town is very pretty with typically Alpine architecture and abundant balcony floral displays. Our American born guide was attired in the traditional national dress of dirndl and apron, tight-fitting bodice and white cotton and lace blouse. Surprisingly, female regional traditional dress was seen everywhere in the Salzkammergut in addition to the male lederhosen, fancy braces and long socks.



The Salzkammergut area, we heard, has been a tourist venue since the 19th century. We saw the outside of the original White Horse Inn and the church founded by St Wolfgang who was apparently able to hurl an axe for four kilometres! Wolfgangsee is very clear and like the other lakes of the area, of drinking water quality.

Later, we made our way to the SchafbergBahn station near the lake and ascended the Schafberg mountain riding in the carriages of the steepest cog railway in Austria. The SchafbergBahn has been running since 1893 carrying visitors to the top of the 1783m high mountain and now has a variety of vintage and modern steam and diesel locomotives.



We were booked in for a lunch of goulash and bread at the Schafbergspitze, Austria's oldest mountain inn. We were told that the inn was adjacent to the station. It was true, but it was vertically adjacent! It was a hard slog up the very steep trail, but the views of the mountains and lakes of the Salzkammergut and Upper Austria from the balconies and paths were superb. That evening, some folks enjoyed the local brass band concert down in the town.

The second day dawned fine again and following the raid on the breakfast buffet by a party of Chinese, we travelled to Mondsee. Some walked to Mondsee lake through the attractive park, but we went to the open square in front of the St Michael's Church, the one used for the wedding in The Sound of Music.



It was harvest festival Sunday and when the congregation poured out, at least half of them were in traditional dress, some of the women wearing historic gowns and golden hand-made bonnets called "goldhauben" made by their mothers and grandmothers. Little boys drove out on wooden pedal tractors pulling trailers laden with harvest fruit and vegetables, or their little brothers! We were able to enter the light and bright church and see the harvest displays including the large elaborate crown near the chancel steps. We then made our way through the park to the lake shore.



The coach took us to St Gilgen on Wolfgangsee where the group sought lunch and where there is a Mozart museum (closed on Sunday afternoons), though he never lived there. We later boarded a WolfgangseeSchiffahrt boat to take us back on the Wolfgangsee to St Wolfgang in a leisurely manner, calling at jetties around the lake.

Monday greeted us with cloudy skies and the threat of rain for our trip to Salzburg. We were divided into two parties for a walking tour. Our guide, Hans, was the Austrian equivalent of a UKIP party member and did not hesitate to give his own personal opinions on migration and politics. He called his tour, "*The One with English Black Humour*" and was a mine of information, imparting much interesting information and history. We began the tour in the Mirabell Gardens where one of the scenes in the Sound of Music was filmed 50 years ago. The gardens belonged to an impressive palace built in 1606 by Prince-Bishop Wolf Dietrich von Ratenuau for his mistress and fifteen children! The whole Salzkammergut area was important for salt due to a prehistoric dried-up sea being buried during the geological Alpine upheavals, and the church, the nobles and people owed their prosperity to the vital salt trade.



We saw Mozart's birthplace and other buildings associated with his short life, the cathedral dedicated to St Rupert and St Virgil, a beautiful but rather gloomy church. By midday, everybody was ready for lunch, which in some cases consisted of coffee and fantastic cakes at Tomaselli's, a cafe used by Mozart and run by the same family for 150 years.



Some of our party took the funicular up to the Fortress Hohensalzburg, the home of the Archbishops and rulers of the area since 1077. It was like a small village with so many buildings for all purposes, including a school for soldiers' children. The keep contained the unfurnished former state rooms and some exhibitions, including a scene of soldiers made out of scaffolding like stick men in armour and helmets with all their weaponry. There were many floors, lots of stairs and no lifts. The views from all sides of the fortress were breathtaking, with sheer drops below the outer walls which are built into the mountain top. The day in Salzburg ended with a deluge, but spirits were not dampened.

Back at the Försterhof, after dinner we were entertained by an accordionist and four Austrian slap dancers in lederhosen and full costume. They leapt into the room, whooping as they twirled into position and then proceeded to weave, stamp, whack and slap their way through four different dances. Following this the world famous Kazoo Orchestra of Great Britain gave a short concert to the entertainment and bewilderment of the hotel staff, the Austrian dancers and other guests. The renowned Hayling Male Voice Choir had already rendered all present speechless on another occasion - the birthday of one of our party, whilst on the final morning after breakfast at the Hotel Buschhausen in Aachen, another birthday girl was serenaded by the internationally famous Combined Choirs of Hayling Island.



Our final day was warm and sunny again and we set off for Bad Ischl where many visited the Imperial Villa, the summer palace and gardens of the Kaiser Franz Joseph and Empress Elizabeth.

The villa was their refuge from the rigid protocol of the court in Vienna. The gardens, ascending the hillside were pretty and well laid out, merging into a more natural landscape at the top.

Finally we were driven to Hallstatt, a Unesco World Heritage site on the shore of Hallstätter See, and a settlement clinging to and built into the rocks.

The Chinese have built an entire replica in Huizhou, Guangdong Province. Surprisingly, Hallstatt was once a Celtic settlement and was possibly the site of the world's first salt mine.



There was no road until the late 19th century when one was blasted from the rock. Hallstatt is mindblowingly picturesque and the lake is often likened to a Norwegian fjord with sheer cliffs surrounding it. There were hordes of Chinese, Japanese and South Koreans everywhere, with cameras, phones, tablets and selfie sticks. Two of our party took an electric boat out onto Hallstätter See and circled some of the lake seeing different views of Hallstatt and the sheer cliffs.

Sadly the time came to leave St Wolfgang as Kevin eased the coach down a lane only meant for small cars and tractors, but we were more prepared for the gruelling 900 km to our overnight stop in Aachen. Small change had been accumulated for the autobahn service station "toiletten" and we all marvelled at the sheer magnitude of the volume of traffic, mostly trucks" on the roads. A highlight of the final day was the visit to a French "greasy spoon" cafe and the adjoining wine supermarket. The coach groaned as it took on the extra load!

Thanks, Bill and Ann for another superb Horti Holiday. What a great job you do.

Jan Mitchell