

## Pure nature: holiday bliss in Pitztal

**Impressing peaks, idyllic mountain lakes and real picture-book alpine pastures: the Pitztal is one of the most beautiful valleys in the Eastern Alps. And if you want, you can even dive into the icy worlds that Tirol's highest glacier has to offer in high summer.**

It is almost another world - the Pitztal, hidden between the Ötztal and Kaunertal valleys. A single road leads up to it. The mountains rise steeply to the left and right, impressive waterfalls captivate the view again and again. You pass through beautiful villages with churches, inns and traditional farmhouses. 40 km, then you are at the end. If you like to go further, you can take the cable cars and find yourself in the highest coffeehouse in Austria. It's called "Das 3440" - and indicates the exact altitude at which it is located, on the roof of Tirol. The panorama is indescribable. From the Zugspitze in Germany to the Dolomites in Italy or the Ortler massif, everything seems to be at your feet.

How about a short glacier safari with experienced guides? During the hike over ice and snow, holidaymakers learn interesting background information and can, if they wish, even be abseiled down into a crevasse. An unforgettable experience that is offered in the summer months.

Those who prefer to explore on their own can pay a visit to Austria's largest natural mountain lake. The Riffelsee, which shimmers in the most diverse shades of blue and green depending on the sunlight, is located at 2,232 m in the middle of the ski area and can be reached comfortably by gondola. Guests can experience the magical atmosphere from a very special perspective: simply check in on a raft. It offers space for up to 60 people and glides along almost silently with the help of an electric motor. The raft ride takes about 45 minutes. Afterwards, you can hike down into the valley past blossoming alpine roses. It just takes about an hour. On the walk down, shortly before you reach your destination, the Taschachalm, an alpine hut, will tempt you with Tirolean delicacies including delicious cheese from its own alpine dairy.

Everywhere you go in the Pitztal you will see cows grazing in front of real picture-book alpine pastures. The herdsmen on the Tanzalm hut, which is located at 2,000 m on the Hochzeiger mountain, have a very special trick: They simply flip a switch, and the freshly milked milk flows directly into the valley to the collection point in the village of Jerzens. This underground "milk pipeline" has been installed by farmers about 60 years ago. If you ask, you might be able to take a look behind the scenes, otherwise just enjoy the fantastic view, which stretches from the Kaunergrat mountains over the Arlberg to the Lechtal Alps.

There are also numerous hiking trails in the Hochzeiger mountain area, where you can either take the cable car or walk up the mountain. A very special hike leads over into the protected Riegetal valley, where you will find the enchanted Großsee lake. But beware: it is essential to be sure-footed, as the entrance is via a climbing path secured with steel chains.

Anyone who is out and about on the Hochzeiger should definitely take a deep breath. After all, one of the most beautiful stone pine forests in Tirol thrives here. The stone pine grows more slowly than any other conifer and only blossoms every six to ten years with its fuchsia-red cones. "The stone pine can be found up to 2,200 m above sea level," says Ernst Partl, managing director of the Kaunertal Nature Park, to which the Pitztal Valley belongs. It is the battle zone of the forest, only the most frugal trees survive here. On the other hand, the stone pine is extremely long-lived, it can live up to 1,000 years.

Would you like to enjoy the stone pine with all your senses? Then head for the ZirbenPark: the circular trail (suitable for prams), which was newly laid out in 2015. Tried and tested highlights are the adventure tower in the shape of a pine cone with a twelve-metre-high viewing platform and a 16-metre-long tube slide; as well as the water playground (ZirbenWasser), which invites you to play and build dams. Or how about a speedy ride on the ZirbenCart, a mountain cart? The track is 3.7 km long, with lots of turns and a good gradient. And of course, don't forget the culinary side, because from the "Queen of the Alps", as the stone pine is also called, you can not only make schnapps, but also stone pine soup, stone pine mustard and stone pine oil. Have you ever tried stone pine cappuccino? Or a stone pine marinade for the barbecue? Samples are available on site. And, oh yes: in the Zeiger restaurant on the Hochzeiger, they use grain for the "Zirben schnapps" and nothing else. Except for the quartered pine cones, of course, and maybe a little rock candy.

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