

# THE HILLS ARE ALIVE ... WITH GOLFERS

Yes, the Tirol region of Austria does have spectacular scenery, but golfing visitors will also be surprised at the other charming aspects of exploring this emerging golf destination / [By Stuart McLean](#)

The Wilder Kaiser mountain range are a backdrop at the superb Eichenheim course near Kitzbuhel.

Brought to you by

# KLIPDRIFT

## GOLD

# M

Most tourists visiting Austria do so with a pair of snow skis, hiking poles or mountain bikes, rather than golf clubs, yet this land-locked European country has a charming range of golf courses to discover, particularly in the beautiful Alpine countryside with its picture-postcard Sound of Music scenery.

The mountainous Tirol region in the far west was something of an unknown quantity for me when I visited last year in search of enjoyable golfing experiences, and I came away pleasantly surprised, for a whole host of reasons. I wasn't expecting to find world-class layouts, yet the quality of some of the courses I encountered made me eager to try them out.

Firstly, the scenery is indeed spectacular, with so many mountain ranges on display as backdrops to golf holes; the weather is hot and summery, interspersed with the odd showery day; the better courses are busy but not crowded, and the golfers get a move on having been trained in etiquette; not all the courses involve hill climbing, but are relatively flat; and Austria when it is without snow is in something of a low season, with prices that were reasonable at the time for a European country (this was before the euro bolted away from every other world currency).

Austrians themselves are more familiar with the exploits of downhill racer Franz Klammer than European Tour player Markus Brier (the golf boom only began here in the the 1980s), and many of the golfers I came across were Germans, all pulling their carts, who can make cross-border excursions into their neighbouring country with more ease than someone in Gauteng heading off to Zebula for the weekend. The Germans know a thing or two about the best places to play golf, and the Tirol is their hangout.



Clockwise, from top left; GC Kitzbühel; the Hotel Hochfilzer golf cart; Goldegg 18th; Kitzbühel main street.



And Austria is a great golfing venue for couples, or women playing on their own. It's not seen as a male-dominated sport, but rather one where men and women have equal rights on and off the course. It is refreshing to see so many couples, and families, sitting around in the clubhouse afterwards. This is very much the trend on the Continent, and the relaxed dress codes reflect the casual attitude everyone has to the game.

Being a single on this trip, I paired up with other golfing couples, always friendly and happy to have you along, with a good command of English, although unlike South Africans in that no one seemed that bothered about completing all 18 holes.

They would suddenly announce late in the round that they had had enough – usually led by the women – and peel away in the direction of the clubhouse, sometimes playing cross-country across other holes. Okay, they might have been slightly cheesed off with me when they learned that my clubs cost about a third of what they had paid for theirs in Munich. It was the weather that worried them the most – the Tirol does get its summer storms. Any sign of a dark cloud in the sky and they were muttering “blitz, blitz” before scarping off. On the one course, Schwarzsee, I suspected the disappearing act had more to do with the fact that two holes later I was

labouring up a par-5 fairway that clearly doubled as a downhill run in winter.

I was based in the village of Ellmau, near the medieval city of Kitzbühel, a famously fancy ski resort, although it also now promotes itself as the Alpine golf centre, with more than 20 courses in the immediate vicinity. One of those is a quite special modern layout (2001) called Eichenheim, designed by the American Kyle Phillips, of Kingsbarns fame in Scotland. It is part of the new Grand Tirolia resort.

My day there was a bit damp, and my golf suffered, but this is a terrific spot, built on the lower slopes of a mountain,



Eichenheim's third hole.



Hochfilzer hotel in Ellmau.

### EXCLUSIVE READER OFFER

Visit the Tyrol on a 7-day golfing tour with GolfAustria Tours from June 19-28. Priced from 1 015 euros per person sharing for golf and accommodation, plus R6 840 for flights on Emirates via Dubai to Munich including taxes.

#### THIS INCLUDES:

- 7 nights' accommodation at the 4-star Hotel Hochfilzer, an historic family inn, in the Alpine village of Ellmau, near Kitzbühel, with breakfast, dinner and packed lunches included
- 4 rounds of golf at Wilder Kaiser (Ellmau), Eichenheim, Kitzbühel-Schwarzsee, and Zell Am See
- Transfers from Munich Airport in luxury coach
- City excursions to Salzburg and Innsbruck (can be exchanged for two further golf rounds at Ellmau)
- Gala dinner on final night
- Spa treatments at Hotel Hochfilzer
- Wellness Spa, welcome hamper, golf shirt

For more information or bookings contact GolfAustria Tours, email, [info@golfAustria.co.za](mailto:info@golfAustria.co.za), or visit [www.golfAustria.co.za](http://www.golfAustria.co.za), or 021 785 2169



Wilder Kaiser course at Ellmau.

in forested countryside. The terrain is varied and challenging, the design novel and exciting, in a class above the other courses in that respect. Phillips has done well in creating some original looking holes, making the most of the elevations, and only having one serious uphill climb.

Ellmau has a 27-hole layout, a short walk from the village, called the Wilder Kaiser, named after the dramatic range of jagged peaks overlooking the valley. It's relatively open, fun to play, easy to walk, and a good introduction to golf in the region. There's also a driving range. There's a funicular train at Ellmau which climbs into the hills above the valley to a ski station, presenting

splendid views and hiking trails.

Zell Am See, just outside the Tirol boundaries, is a 36-hole facility, two flat parkland courses with prominent water features designed in the 1980s by the late Donald Harradine, an Englishman who during a long career beginning in 1929 had a major influence on European golf, particularly in Germany and Switzerland. His company is still designing courses today.

Austria, like any emerging golf country, has a wide disparity of courses to cater for all the beginners and high-handicaps. Some are just too boring and short for anyone who can play golf competently. To distinguish between them slope rating

exists in Austria, for every possible tee, and the higher that is the better the quality of the golf course, simple as that.

Other courses I enjoyed closer to Ellmau were Schwarzsee (slope rating 134) – which has hosted a tournament on the European Challenge Tour – and the 9-hole Kitzbühel Golf Club (125), on the grounds of an old castle in the town, now part of the A-Rosa resort. Further afield in rugged Salzburgerland was the intriguingly named Golf Club Goldegg (125), an eccentric hilly layout of only 5 429 metres in idyllic mountain surroundings. There's white river rafting in a river in the valley below the course, definitely for after the round. 🇦🇹