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Ostrich Tavern: Strausswirtschaft

By Anna Leigh Bagiackas

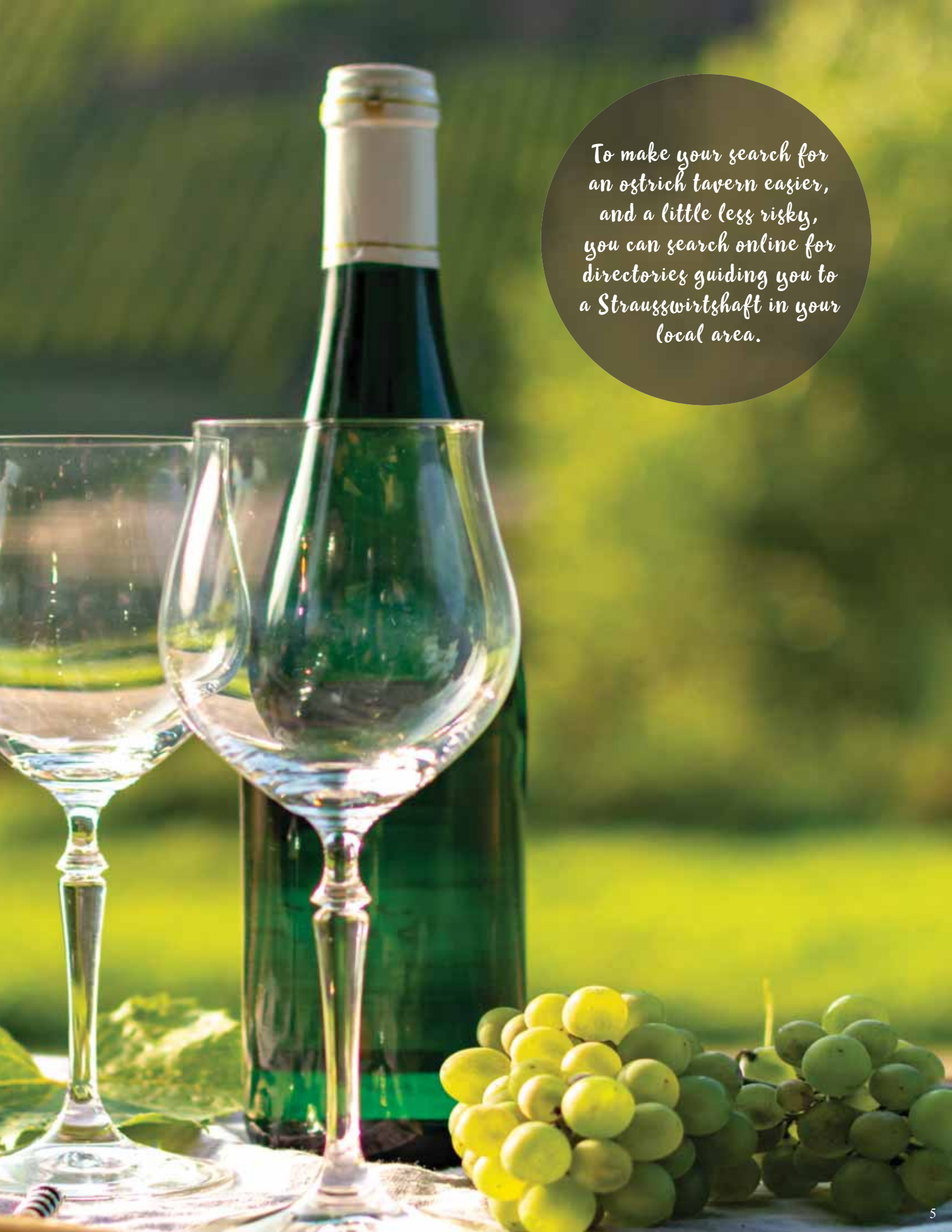
Are you a snacker? I consider myself a snacker, totally content grazing away from a snack platter, sipping a glass of German wine and calling it a day. I love building easy and elaborate charcuterie boards, seeking out unique cheeses, meats and snacks from all over Europe. So, when I learned about "Strausswirtschaft," I knew what my new German hobby was going to be.

"Strausswirtschaft," or ostrich taverns, are informal wine bars where a winegrower can sell his wine directly and offer simple snacks and treats to guests. What makes these "establishments" so enticing is that you have to go searching for a sign, typically in the form of a wreath, vine or broom to see if the spot is open for business and welcoming in hungry (and thirsty) wanderers. Legend has it that in the year 812, Charlemagne—unifier of western and central Europe—allowed winegrowers to run "wreaths" or inns identified by a wreath made of vines. The rest was history.

Compared to more formal restaurants, these taverns have fairly few legal restrictions over them. You may find yourself in a garden, room or even a rustic barn. With this more informal setting, guests have a chance to get to know the winegrower a little better than at a typical wine tasting at a winery.

This centuries-old tradition can be found in wine regions all over Germany and the names differ depending on where you are: in Baden-Württemberg they are called "Besenwirtschaften" or "Besenenschänken"; in the Lake Constance region, "Rädlwirtschaft"; in Franconia, "Heckenwirtschaft"; with "Strausswirtschaft" being the term in western Germany. Culinary offerings will also differ depending on what region you are in, ranging from steak, fried potatoes, meats and cheeses to seasonal asparagus, salmon and game dishes.

While many of us like to plan ahead, the surprise nature of ostrich taverns makes the hunt for them even more fun. You can usually research to find when they are open, but each one is different. They may be open daily for a certain stretch of days or only on the weekends for a couple months. Wherever you're located or wanting to explore in Germany, you are sure to find some ostrich taverns within the local wine regions. All you have to do is know what to look for: a wreath, broom or vine inviting you in. ■



*To make your search for
an ostrich tavern easier,
and a little less risky,
you can search online for
directories guiding you to
a Strausswirtschaft in your
local area.*



GERMANY'S HIGHLIGHT

Langener Waldsee

By Stacy Roman

Germany in the summer is as beautiful as it is warm. Long, lazy days filled with sunshine and gentle breezes stretched out for weeks on end. It's the perfect time to get outside (especially with a lack of air conditioning) and soak up some much-needed vitamin D. As a child, summertime Saturdays were some of my favorites. We'd load up the back of the car with fluffy towels, packed ice chests with sodas and food, inflatable inner tubes and hit the road to the nearest lake. With plenty of natural, glacier-fed lakes and man-made swimming holes, there is no shortage of fantastic spots to cool off. In the heart of Hesse is one of the largest lakes in the region, Langener Waldsee.

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WHERE IS IT?

A mere 15 kilometers south of Frankfurt's city center and two kilometers from the Frankfurt am Main International Airport, it's hard to imagine the busy metroplex is nearby. Surrounded by acres of dense forest, the noise of the autobahn drifts away. From the early 1920s, Langener Waldsee was a bustling quartz quarry. Although a private company still uses part of the acreage to mine the in-demand mineral, in 1972, a large gravel area was filled with natural groundwater and was designated a recreational lake area.

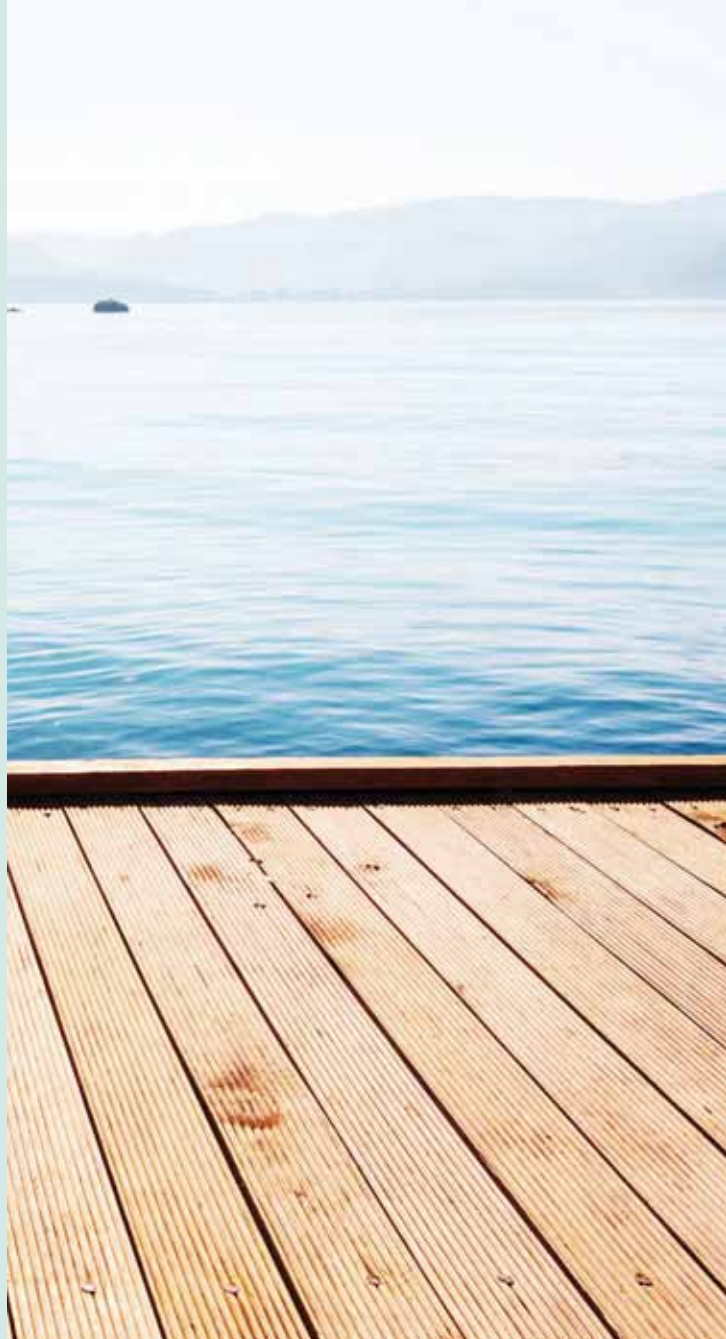
THINGS TO DO

With more than 900 meters of golden sand beaches along the shoreline, visitors have plenty of room to bask in the warm weather. Little ones can splash and cool off in the shallow depths of the lake, while teens and adults can perfect their cannonballs from one of the four wooden platforms floating in the deeper water. Watch sailboats glide along the lake, or dust off the fishing rod (and obtain the proper permits, of course) and see what kind of fish are hiding beneath the surface.

If water sports aren't your cup of tea, explore the vast network of hiking trails surrounding the water. With varying degrees of difficulty and lengths, there is something for all athletic abilities. The lush canopy of trees provides shade on warm days, as well as serene and peaceful views. Quench your thirst or satiate your appetite with a pit stop at the cafe near the water's edge. The kids can burn off any excess energy at the large pirate ship playground.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO


Langener Waldsee is open mid-May through mid-September. Its prime location provides the perfect spot for the Ironman European Championship in late June. During hot weather spells, the lake can see upward of 20,000 visitors, so plan accordingly. There is a small fee for admission; 4 euros for adults and 3 euros for children. The beach is open daily during the season from 8 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. If you claim your spot on the north shore, just be aware nudity is allowed in that section. ■



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TIMELESS NATURAL BEAUTY FLOURISHES

in Tyrol

By Jessica Zen

If you've been searching for the perfect place to become one with nature, the historical region of Tyrol in northern Italy and western Austria is ideal. It was once the country of Tyrol from the 12th century to 1919. Today the largest cities in the region include Innsbruck, Trento and Bolzano; however, the best part about Tyrol is that it is entirely within the Alps and overflowing with natural beauty. Towering mountains, plunging valleys, fairy-tale towns, cow pastures, wildflower fields and half-timbered houses are just a few of the reasons you should spend time in Tyrol.



LEFT: The Achensee is the largest Alpine lake in the Austrian Tyrol. Nestled between the Karwendel and Rofan massifs, it's rightly called the "Fjord of the Alps."

BOTTOM: Wooden boat house and pier on the shoreline of beautiful Achensee.





Marvelous Mountain Adventures

*The best part
about Tyrol is
that it is entirely
within the Alps and
overflowing with
natural beauty.*

For an outdoor adventure you won't soon forget, visit Hohe Tauern National Park. It is the largest national park in the Alps and is home to forests, lakes, waterfalls, rivers, peaks, valleys and alpine pastures. This place has it all! Visit the oldest mountain huts in Austria at the end of Defereggental Valley or view Austria's highest peak, Lucknerhaus. Wander on the Umbalfälle Nature Trail to see a series of waterfalls on the Isel River and relax amongst some of Austria's most stunning natural wonders.

If you want to be around water, head to Lake Achensee, known as the "Sea of Tyrol." It is the most popular and largest swimming lake in the region. This area has over 300 miles of maintained and signposted hiking trails, so it's perfect for taking a hike and cooling off with a swim. Of course, there are numerous water sports and opportunities to go on a boat ride around the lake as well.

A great hike for the whole family can be found in Reutte. Highline179 and Castle World Ehrenberg offer history, hiking and an adrenaline rush all mixed together. For the ultimate hiking and bridge experience, start your expedition by hiking to Fortress Schlosskopf from the parking lot at Ehrenberg. From the fortress, hike down the mountain toward the ruins of Ehrenberg Castle. For the adrenaline junkies, continue on your journey via the Highline179 suspension bridge. This bridge is the longest Tibet-style footbridge and hovers above the ground at 374 feet. You'll feel a floating sensation as the bridge bobs and sways. After crossing the highline bridge, you'll arrive at the Fort Claudia ruins where you'll see the last of the ruins.



TOP LEFT: Typical chalets along the meadows and high mountains of South Tyrol.

TOP RIGHT: Navigate through the medieval streets of Kufstein Fortress.

BOTTOM: 360-degree panorama views of beautiful valleys and imposing mountains can be found atop the Highline179 in Reutte.



© FOOTOO 123RF.COM

Take a Tour

If you want to see a more intact piece of history, Kufstein Fortress is a great place to stop. It towers over the town and was first mentioned in 1205. Take the panorama gondola to the top of the hill to explore. Here, you'll find the world's largest outdoor organ, as well as underground passageways and prison cells inside. Become submersed in history with knights, princesses and fortress life while touring this beautiful structure.

Not only are the towering mountains incredible in Tyrol, the underground mines also pack a punch. Schwaz Silver Mine, fondly referred to as "The Mother of all Mines," will take you back in time to the Middle Ages, when it was the largest and wealthiest silver mine in the world. On a tour you can learn about the mine's glorious past as you ride on a mini train through the bowels of the earth. ■





LEFT: Innsbruck City Tower - A 150-ft Gothic tower. Home to beautiful views of the town and the Nordkette Mountain Range.

RIGHT: The Hofburg Innsbruck

Up Close and Personal *with* Old Town, Innsbruck

by Karen Bradbury

If a city could choose its geography, it might opt for that of Innsbruck, Austria. A flat, fertile valley that catches the sun, a rapid river with glacial green waters and the jagged peaks of the Alps are the features that shaped the destiny of the Tyrolean capital and contribute to its unique, rustic charm. The city named after a bridge across the Inn River was long an important stopover along one of the major routes between northern and southern Europe.

With enough activities to keep outdoor enthusiasts occupied for days, Innsbruck makes an ideal base for exploration of western Austria. Before spreading one's wings, however, it's worth spending some time getting to know this vibrant, welcoming city from its historical core, the Old Town.

Begin exploration at the St. Anne's Column (Annasäule), a popular meeting point along the pedestrianized Maria-Theresien-Straße. The 43-foot-high marble column topped by a statue of the Virgin Mary's mother commemorates the expulsion of Bavarian troops from the city in 1703.

The wide boulevard upon which you find yourself, named after Empress Maria Theresia, is the city's beating heart and home to dozens of shops, cafes, museums and sights of interest. Be quick to grab any outdoor seating that frees up and enjoy a coffee as you watch students, tourists and business people going about their day.

As you saunter north along Maria-Theresien-Straße, take in the harmonious facades of the recently renovated buildings. Looking for unique souvenirs to take back home? The Swarovski Kristallwelten dazzles with crystal jewelry and ornaments. Tiroler Heimatwerk, along Meraner Straße, offers "tracht," the traditional attire of "dirndl" and "lederhosen" that locals pull out for beer fests and special occasions.

Peek into the lovely pink Spitalkirche, the Hospital Church of the Holy Spirit. Its once-adjacent hospital namesake is long gone, but the interior's sumptuous baroque altar, stucco decorations and frescoes continue to impress and make this church a pretty backdrop for religious contemplation or music and cultural events.

A short stroll leads to the city's most famous landmark, the Golden Roof. This is not a roof in the traditional sense but an alcove balcony topped by 2,657

gilded copper tiles that glitter in the sun. The unique structure was built in 1500 upon the orders of Emperor Maximilian, who enjoyed taking in the sight of his subjects from on high. Note the relief on the building's facade: the emperor is shown facing wife number two as wife number one looks off from the side.

On the opposite side of the street, a lovely white house with pastel trimmings catches the eye. The 15th-century Helbling House was revamped with the changing of architectural fashions. The stuccowork gracing it like icing on a wedding cake is an exuberant expression of Rococo.

The massive Hofburg Innsbruck is not only stunning; it helps visitors grasp history. This lavish palace, considered Austria's third most important historical building, bears traces of four centuries of Habsburg rule. The portrait-lined staterooms used for Maria Theresia's banquets and Empress Elizabeth's silk-decorated imperial apartments are highlights of any tour.

Emerging onto the banks of the Inn River and turning left, you'll come across yet another iconic sight. On the opposite riverbanks, a stretch of brightly colored row houses in the historical Mariahilf District perches prettily between flowing waters and soaring, snow-capped peaks.

Is it cocktail hour already? Retrace your steps to the Rathaus-Galeria, a collection of shops and restaurants under a glass roof. Take the elevator to the top floor, where the 360° Café entices guests with cool drinks and outdoor seating, offering views over the Old Town and the ubiquitous Alpine scenery. ■

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Fragile

48 HOURS **IN VENICE**

By Mary Del Rosario



Picturesque canals, blue-green water from the Adriatic Sea, gondolas, sumptuous Italian eats and an otherworldly atmosphere are all elements that make Venice a one-of-a-kind destination.

With so many sights to see and lucky finds to explore, how do you conquer such a beautiful city in 48 hours? Use this itinerary to maximize your time for a memorable weekend getaway.

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Day One

The first day in Venice should be all about experiencing the noteworthy sights and crossing the must-dos off your bucket list. In order to do this, you'll need to pay a visit to Saint Mark's Basilica. Located at the Piazza San Marco, this famous city church is riddled with Italo-Byzantine architecture and features a storied past. Since you're already situated at the beautiful Piazza San Marco, meander through this buzzing square and sip on a cappuccino at one of the many cafes. Don't forget to gawk at Doge's Palace, which was once the home to the Doge of Venice, the ruler of the city.

Of course, you'd be remiss if you didn't take a gondola ride through the Canale Grande, Venice's main waterway channel. With so many gondoliers coasting back and forth, you don't need to book in advance. Look out for the Rialto Bridge, Venice's most popular bridge.



Day Two

Your second day of Venice should include discovering the underrated treasures sprinkled across the city, so put Ponte de Chiodo on your list. This stone-built bridge is unique, as it has no handrails on either side. For the booklovers, be sure to take a few photos while sitting on a staircase made entirely of vintage books at the Libreria Acqua Alta. The book shop houses a sea of antiquated books, which can also make a great souvenir.

If food is one of the reasons that brought you to Venice, head to the beautiful gem known as Cantina do Mori. This traditional Italian restaurant is a local favorite serving appetizers and sandwiches, so you know the food here will be authentic. However, sampling Venetian dishes such as "Risotto al nero di seppa"—risotto with squid ink, "Bigoli in salsa"—spaghetti-like pasta with salt-cured fish and "Moleche"—small, green crabs, can be enjoyed in many restaurants throughout Venice.

If time allows, be sure to get lost in the streets of Le Mercerie for shopping, Fonamenta alla Misericordia for bars and restaurants and Via Garibaldi for a quiet respite. However, for views that will take your breath away, climb up the Campanile bell tower at the Piazza San Marco for the most gorgeous views of the city. ■



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