

Austria - Lech & The Vorarlberg

Wildlife at Leisure

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1

Arrival in Lech

A morning arrival in Innsbruck means we can cover the one and half hours to Lech and still be at the hotel in time for a late lunch!

We will soon be out exploring the meadows close by the hotel. The mixed sward is very varied with the glowing heads of Orange Hawkweed, spikes of pretty Alpine Bistort, and Tofield's Asphodel. Our first orchids will be Fragrant Orchids, the deep purple marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza majalis*, and Short-spurred Fragrant Orchids. Thistles are not everyone's cup of tea but here are some beauties such as pink Mountain Thistle, the aptly named Cabbage Thistle and the attractive pale Dwarf Thistle. Other lovely flowers include Scheuchzer's Bellflower, Round-headed Rampion, and the purple-flowered insectivorous Butterwort. Dippers are along the stream, Crag Martins overhead, Water Pipits and Black Redstarts around the village.

Day 2

Forminsee

This morning we'll have our first chance to enjoy the hotel's wonderful breakfast spread. Then we'll collect our rather superb packed lunches and take the half hour scenic bus ride to Forminsee.

Only the bus and official cars are allowed along this road so there's almost no traffic other than cows. We'll spend the day pottering along the wide path through a never-ending array of flowery meadows and rock gardens, with mountain peaks topped by the magnificent Rote Wand all around and the glacial blue lake below. Lech is at 1450m and Forminsee is at 1793m. The lake lies in a cirque and was formed by a landslide.

Marmots are very common here, and their warning whistles will frequently be heard. Yellow Oxeye Daisy mixes with Arnica, Golden Hawksbeard and many lovely Campanulas, notably Fairy Bells and Bearded Bellflower. We'll see purple *Erigeron neglectus* with its' orange centres and the more delicate *Erigeron uniflora*. Butterflies are abundant with Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Mountain and Berger's Clouded Yellow, Swallowtail, and Mazarine, Large and Small Blue amongst others. Day-flying Moths are very common in these meadows including some rather lovely species such as Mountain Highflyer, Rosy Wave, and the Plain Golden Y. We'll see Ring Ouzels too. More botanical highlights will be creamy Wolfsbane, pink *Adenostyles alliariae*, Globeflower and Snowdrop Windflower. Orchids such as Short-spurred Fragrant Orchid are this time joined by Globe Orchid

and the gorgeous Vanilla Orchid. Starry Saxifrage and Marsh Marigold put on quite a show amongst wet green mosses along a gushing mountain stream.

Day 3

Lech Church, local woodland walk, and Rubikopf

We'll pay a visit to Lech Church today. Constructed in 1390, it has a 33-meter-high Gothic bell tower topped with a Baroque onion dome added in 1694. Inside, are 1791 frescoes by Josef Anton Schuler, and beautifully carved wooden pews. The immaculately kept graveyard has ornate iron crosses and tiny rockeries on each grave, some sporting Edelweiss and Fairy's Thimbles. Mature pine woodland behind the hotel has Red Squirrel and flowers such as Alpine Blue Sow Thistle, and birds such as Crested Tit and Serin. Later, we'll take the Rubikopf cable car which takes us up to an altitude of 2350m in just fifteen minutes. Arnica grows thickly around the cable car station, in turf scattered with Spring Gentians. We will take a wide path towards the Monzabensee (see = lake), which takes us above a shallow valley teeming with Marmots, Alpine Snowbells and Trumpet Gentians – both *Gentiana acaulis* and *Gentiana clusii*. On rocky outcrops grow mats of purple Moss Campion, white-starred Ciliate Sandwort and Chamois Rockcress. A real highlight here is a colony of the rare pale Yellow Bellflower *Campanula thrysoides*. Snow Finches accompany us as we tuck into our picnic. Around the lake we'll find the low-growing Mountain Buttercup and patches of Dwarf Snowbell. We'll also see bright yellow Mountain Avens, Musk Saxifrage, and a nice area with both Vanilla Orchid and the red subspecies of Austrian Vanilla Orchid. Alpine Accentors hop around the path.

After dinner, for those that wish, we can again take the Rubikopf cable car up the mountain, for a once-weekly opportunity to watch the sunset from the top. The light can be marvellous and the views spectacular as we watch the sun drop behind the mountains.

Day 4

Spullersee

The Spullersee is a reservoir surrounded by meadows and mountains at an altitude of 1838m. Here is an incredible floral display; Yellow Oxeye and Alpine Oxeye Daisies, Baby's Breath, tall spikes of blue Monkshood and huge feathery magenta *Centaurea alpestris*. Martagon Lilies will be a highlight. Marshy areas are full of Marsh Orchids amongst the Fox and Cubs, sedges and cotton grasses. Choice plants here are Lesser Butterfly Orchid and numerous Moonwort. Globe Orchids proliferate amongst the Rusty Alpen Rose. Bearded Campanulas are very common, as are the white flowers of tall Aconite-leaved Buttercup and Shining Scabious. Not surprisingly butterflies are special here too, we'll see Mazarine Blue, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Thor's Fritillary and the magnificent Apollo. Wet flushes are dominated by the Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*), drier turf by purple Alpine Sainfoin and white and lilac *Astragalus alpinum*. A tumbling stream down the mountain side supports a good population of the yellow *Saxifraga aizoides* and Grass of Parnassus.

Day 5

Oberlech and Petersbodenbahn cable cars, Gruber Hus Museum

A gondola will take us up to Oberlech and then a chair lift to Peterbodenbahn. Chair lifts are great for lazy botanising as the chair drifts silently up the hillside over the swathes of Bearded Campion and Marsh Orchids. Peterbodenbahn lies at an altitude of 1930m and the trail takes us through meadows to some gypsum sinkholes. Alpine Newts swim in shallow pools surrounded by Spring Gentians. Viewpoints showcase ranges of distant snow-covered mountains. The gypsum holes and outcrops are covered with Baby's breath (*Gypsophila repens* – *Gypsophila* literally means gypsum loving) and big patches of Fairy's Thimbles. The alpine turf is full of Bearded Campion, *Campanula scheuchzeri* and three species of Rampion, Black (*Phyteuma nigra*), Round-headed (*Phyteuma orbiculare*), and the blue spikes of Betony-leaved (*Phyteuma betonicifolium*). Other botanical highlights today will be Narcissus-flowered Anemone, the small flowered Carinthian Buttercup, and meadows full of Ragged Robin, Cotton Grass, Marsh Orchids and Red Rattle. Butterflies of note are Mountain Clouded Yellows and various Ringlets.

Late in the afternoon we'll pop into the Huber Hus museum. According to dendrochronological analysis of the wood, the Huber House was dated to 1590 and offers visitors insights into rural living and working culture in Lech.

Day 6

Seekopf

Today we will head to the heights of the Seekopf, a lake at an altitude of 2211m. The lake is surrounded by a circle of mountains and rocky outcrops, and between these are snowfields and mountain streams, wet meadows pools and marshes. By snow will be sheets of pink *Soldanella pusilla* and by the running water a veritable treasure-trove of little *Brassicaceae* - white candytuft-like *Hornungia alpina*, pink Round-leaved Pennycress, tall Alpine Rockcress, Chamois Cress, Soyer's Rockcress and *Cardaminopsis halleri*. Alpine Coltsfoot and Birdseye Primula bloom with the perfect white flowers of Alpine Butterwort.

As well as little *Soldanella pusilla*, there are also some white *Soldanella minima* and purple, deeply fringed *Soldanella alpina*. These flowering with some lovely clumps of Oxslip, Alpine Leek, and frilly Alpine Buttercup. This is a wonderful place for Gentians - Spotted and Purple, *Gentiana acaulis* and *Gentiana clusii*, and three 'spring' gentians, *Gentiana verna*, *barbata* and *brachyphylla*. We'll take our picnic sitting on rocks next to the glacial blue lake. In the afternoon further exploration will reveal the rather outrageous purple and orange Alpine Bastard Toadflax, glorious deep yellow patches of Heart-leaved Leopardsbane and some fine butterflies including Black-veined White, Small Blue and Dewy Ringlet.

Day 7

Spullersee to Gasthus Alpela

A scenic bus drive will again take us to Spullersee, where we'll follow a different path taking us past flowering Yellow Gentians, Grass of Parnassus, blue Monkshood (*Aconitum napellus*), and Hairy Alpenrose. Swarms of Blues and Ringlets mud-puddle on wet areas of the track. The habitats change constantly from meadow to scattered woodland, and from woodland to marshy meadow. Every meadow is chock full of a range of Crepis, Rampions and Orchids. Ringlets and Fritillaries are frequent, and with many species – Titania's, Thor's, Pearl-bordered and Dark Green Fritillaries are all common here. As the valley opens up we'll see *Soldanella minima*, Rock Valerian and Leafless-stemmed Globularia by the stream. We'll enter forest where the understory is dominated by moss, through which grow Single-flowered Wintergreen and Wood Cow Wheat.

Day 8

To Innsbruck and Home

After breakfast a ninety minute drive will take us to Innsbruck Airport.

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