

ÖSTERREICH / AUSTRIA

SALZBURG BEYOND THE SOUND OF MUSIC

Over the course of an hour, we passed incredibly beautiful, iridescent blue and green sparkling ice formations, including frozen waterfalls and a smooth rink-like ice palace, which hung from the ceiling or rose from the ground. The largest attraction, called Hymir's Castle, has been known to grow for over 100 years due to a crack in the cave above, and the cave itself has expanded by a third since tours first began in 1920. It is hard to believe that this strange wonderland of which only a portion of the more than 20 miles of caves are open to the public was formed by nature.

After spending the day in lofty heights, we stopped overnight in the Grossarlal, also known as the "Valley of the Alpine Huts". Here people have lived off the land for generations, making top quality produce before "artisan" became fashionable. Around forty huts in the valley are open from mid-June until mid-September.

Whole families move to higher altitude pastures for the season, working with the animals in the barn, then processing the milk and serving meals to hungry hikers. "Only food that was produced on the Alm (Alpine Hut) like butter, bread, cheese and cold cuts are allowed to be sold", explained local Thomas Wirnsperger who was "born, works, and lives in the valley". Many Alms still have no electricity and homemade delicacies are prepared true to generations-old recipes.

Unfortunately, our planned day of hiking to an Alpine hut did not happen due to a downpour of heavy rain but there was still plenty to do in the valley. We drove to the Ötztal-see, at the beginning of the Hohe Tauern Nationalpark, for a short walk with an umbrella. Three fly-fishing anglers didn't

seem to mind the weather at all.

We dropped into the wooden 16th century Kösslerhäusl—part museum, part restaurant, part shop—and tried a *Krapfen*, a sweet pastry, followed by an arolla pine liqueur. The latter is made with grain spirit, candied sugar, and pine cones, and was surprisingly delicious.

While we were sitting in the tiny *Rauchkuchl* (smoke kitchen) next to the old cobalt stove under the low, soot-covered ceiling two elderly ladies sang religious songs in a local dialect. It felt really special, nearly intrusive, and like being transported back to times long past.

A visit to mask carver Hermann Prommegger introduced us to the legend of the Krampus, a half-goat, half-demon monster who punishes misbehaving children at Christmas. "The style is somewhat changing", said the autodidact. "A few years back, clients requested masks that reminded them of popular movie characters like Star Wars' Phantom Menace. Now we're reverting back to a more traditional way of carving".

According to folklore, Krampus purportedly shows up in towns the night of December 5, known as Krampusnacht (Krampus Night) and groups of Krampus' march through the Grossarl Valley that evening to knock on doors and check if the children have been naughty or nice.

We finished our trip to the SalzburgerLand region with a hike of the Liechtensteinklamm, one of the deepest and longest gorges in the Alps. The roaring waterfalls and torrential waters have been making their way for centuries deeper and deeper into the ravine, creating a wonderful sound in the process, just like music.



HERMANN PROMMEGGER CARVING A MASK.

