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**Snow bound:** many visitors to this region head out for invigorating walks through the snow



**Pretty as a picture:** the Wildschönau Valley is renowned for its lovely towns and villages

# Gentle slopes with cool runnings

## WILDSCHÖNAU VALLEY

This small resort is the perfect place for beginners – whether they're six or 60. By Leslie Woit

**G**entle skiers unite. Just down the road from the crowdless Innsbruck airport, the pretty Wildschönau Valley provides the perfect, mellow terrain for learning to ski or for brushing up a rusty technique. It's a holiday, so why stress? As if that wasn't enough to entice visitors to the area, Wildschönau also offers a special package for beginners and re-starters. The package includes tuition, carving ski hire and a lift pass – the rest is

up to you and your sense of adventure. Deep in the scenic Kitzbühel Alps, with no throngs to battle, families and first-timers are rightly attracted to the good value, low-key slopes of Wildschönau. Their moniker of "small but excellent" doesn't rhyme in English as well as it does in German ("klein und fein"), but the message still translates. Located in a quiet 24km-long valley, the Wildschönau region comprises four ski areas with a combined 70km of pistes served by 26 lifts, making it pleasantly

manageable and varied. Its typically Tirolean chalet-speckled villages of Niederau, Oberau, Auffach and Thierbach are connected by a free bus service. Best for little ones, the nursery slopes in Niederau and Oberau are right in the village. And all around the uninterrupted mountainscape, huts and restaurants serve home-made local dishes as well as more sophisticated menus. As hunger-making as a day on skis is, no one ever starved on holiday in Tirol. Best of all, Wildschönau's prices may surprise. A night in a four-star hotel with dinner can be had from as little as €54 per person. A week in a B&B, including a six-day lift pass, is available from €295. A five-day ski course for children costs only €130. And at Easter (from March 27 to April 11

in 2010), children up to the age of 15 ski free – as long as they are with two paying adults and ski for a minimum of five days. Another of the most popular activities is also free: hiking along the 40km of groomed winter walking paths in the clean mountain air. There are even more miles of cross-country ski trails, as well as guided snowshoe walks, sleigh rides, a high-rope course and any number of events – including the Snow Fest in Oberau, and carnival parades in Niederau and Oberau in February. Young and old love the 5km toboggan run down to the idyllic hamlet of Thierbach, where the smallest school in Austria teaches just nine pupils and the traditional Gasthof Sollererwirt is ready to welcome with food and drink, just as it has for centuries.

### TRAVEL FACTS

**GETTING THERE**  
UK tour operators to Wildschönau: Inghams, Thomson, Crystal, First Choice, Neilson and Ski Direct

**PERFECT PACKAGE**  
Package for beginners and re-starters with lift pass for three days, ski and boot hire, and ski school. Two days for beginners from €207, one-day ski school for re-starters from €49.50.

**MORE INFORMATION**  
0043 5339 82550  
[www.wildschoenau.com](http://www.wildschoenau.com)

# JUST IDYLIC

## AUSTRIA AND SOUTH TIROL

Nick Dalton finds the hotels where nature and modern comforts meet

**W**ant to experience Austria at its most perfect? Well, the grandeur of the great outdoors meets a timeless way of living on a Naturidyll Hotels ski holiday. The company offers a choice of independent, family-run hotels, all of which are in exquisite locations – giving you the opportunity to refresh mind and body. And while each hotel is enticingly different, they all share the same ideal: putting care for the environment on par with personal service. As a result, all of them have awards for their stewardship of natural resources and for their use of organic produce, most of it from within a few miles.

Naturidyll Hotels are generally set among trees and meadows – often with a waterfall nearby, but always with a majestic view. Almost all have spas, but they are not just places for adults to relax. Many have family apartments and offer baby-sitting and children's activities – the snowy meadows outside are ideal for snowball fights, and there are guided snowshoe tours and cleared hiking paths,

too. Altogether, Naturidyll represents 26 hotels, mostly in Austria's Alpine regions. Try the Hotel Tannbergerhof in the centre of the smart ski resort of Lech. It's near the lifts, but once inside the door you could be a world away – cosseted by the regional cuisine and the luxurious spa. Alternatively – less than

*It offers independent, family-run hotels, all of which are in exquisite locations*

48km from Salzburg, but in the Dachstein West ski area – there's the Hotel Gutjahr in Abtenau. It serves five-course dinners in its romantic conservatory restaurant. In the village of Mallnitz, in the Hohe Tauern National Park in Carinthia, the Hotel Alpengarten sits at almost 1,219m. Not only is there skiing in the Ankogel-Mallnitz area, your hosts organise tobogganing parties, sleigh rides and cross-country ski tours, too – after which you can relax in your feng shui-designed room. The spa



**Mountain views:** walkers stop to take in the magnificent landscape

features aromatherapy, classic massages, steam baths and more. Then there's the Achensee Hotel Wagnerhof, a country house-style hotel surrounded by meadows and close to the lovely Achensee lake; or the Hotel Hartweg in the little village of Haus, part of the

Schladming-Dachstein region, with its delicious local cuisine. But whichever hotel you choose to stay at, you're sure to find that its staff can't do enough for you. Just ask, and they'll prepare an early breakfast or packed lunch; pick you up and return you to the

hotel after a hard day on the slopes; arrange excursions; and even organise airport transfers. And the hotel owners? They most likely grew up in the area, so will no doubt be more than happy to offer expert, insider tips about the finest local attractions.

### TRAVEL FACTS

**GETTING THERE**  
Naturidyll hotels appear in the brochures of Crystal, Inghams, Austria Travel and Activity Breaks.

**PERFECT PACKAGE**  
Idyllic winter sampler: two nights for two people, including a rich breakfast buffet, at the hotel of your choice for £205. Ski breaks are available from [www.naturidyll.com](http://www.naturidyll.com)

**MORE INFORMATION**  
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