



Fame and Fortune

A place that elicits flourishing adjectives has a lot to live up to. But this writer melted into the sublime town of Hallstatt and was almost lost for words – but not quite. BEV MALZARD





VIEW FROM KRIPPENSTEIN

Hallstatt is a village on Lake Hallstatt's western shore in Austria's mountainous Salzkammergut region. Its 16th-century Alpine houses and alleyways are home to cafes and shops and charm of the prettiest sort. A funicular railway connects to Salzwelten, an ancient salt mine with a subterranean salt lake, and to Skywalk Hallstatt viewing platform. A trail leads to the Echern Valley glacier garden with glacial potholes and Waldbachstrub Waterfall.

The village Hallstatt is such an unbelievably spectacular place that the Chinese have created a copy of the ancient salt mine village. But only in the original will you discover this truly individual

culture with such a history in a breathtaking mountain setting. The market municipality was already inhabited in the first millennium before Christ: during this period – the iron age – the civilisation flourished.

CHOCOLATE BOX POSTER GIRL

The overwhelmingly beautiful Austrian region is the poster girl for all calendars and chocolate boxes produced since printing began.

The name Salzkammergut originates from 'white gold' – salt that has been mined since Celtic times throughout three provinces here: Upper Austria, Styria and Salzburg, giving it fame and fortune

and indeed laying the foundations of the towns of the regions and the city of Salzburg's wealth.

The abundant profit due from the dark recesses of the mountains over centuries built many palaces and financed lavish lifestyles for the rich, royal and famous.

There is still mining activity but the main attractions now are the towns and villages, the stupendous nature and the promise of good health that the beautiful, traditional spa towns have offered since the 19th century.

The Emperor Franz Joseph and his holiday buddies gave the region a licence to print money when the aristocracy visited and promenaded around the spa



towns, tramped up and down mountains, hunted deer and wild boar and took to the lakes in boats.

IT'S A CLOSED VILLAGE

We were heading to Hallstatt, 300km from Vienna. A quick stop along the way and we could taste the clean mountain air. Arriving in Hallstatt after a short distance in a tunnel, a glorious world opened up and we spied the towering Dachstein mountain range that is backdrop to the southern lakes, and a jaw-droppingly beautiful town.

Hallstatt deservedly made the UNESCO list as a World Cultural Heritage Site. It's a closed village – no cars except service vehicles

come in and out. This is to protect the picturesque town and the ambience of what is probably the loveliest looking settlement on the planet. Hallstatt has a seductive charm that weaves its spell as soon as you encounter its old-school impeccable hospitality.

We arrived on a brilliant sunny day; the mountains in the distance were glowing with the last remnants of left-over winter snow – at 3000m. The lake was still and silky, reflecting every pastel-coloured lakeside building, full-blossomed trees and the soft shadow of swans skimming across the shimmering surface of the lake. Hallstatt the town, is breathtaking and being there urges one to stroke

the buildings – it's a magical place.

There is one main street and the offshoots are paths to shops and lanes that lead you up the side of the mountain and on to a long terrace where the town church stands.

A NEAT LITTLE CHARNEL HOUSE

Amid this dazzling beauty are some experiences to remind you that this is not a picture postcard – it's real and so is its past.

The Beinhaus (Bone House) is a neat little charnel house – of macabre fascination. There are rows of today, stacked skulls, decorated with painted flowers and the names of their former



owners.

The tiny graveyard outside the Beinhaus behind the 15th century Catholic Church has been in use since the 1600s and the ancient practice of mass burials rather crowded the small space. So, bones have been exhumed and the skulls have been preserved tastefully piled up (the last skull was added to the pile in 1995).

In the church (1510), the beloved Saint Barbara and Saint Katherine flank Mary in the middle of three winged altars.

High above Hallstatt on Salzburg (Salt Mountain) – ascended by funicular railway – is the Salzbergwerk (salt mine) where, in 1734 a perfectly preserved body of a prehistoric miner was found. The ‘Man in Salt’ is the reason behind the tour here that takes you deep inside via the underground railway and timber mountain slides to an illuminated lake, and to view glittering salt crystals.

This writer chickened out as she’s not fond of confined spaces. But stayed behind and enjoyed a splendid afternoon on a café terrace on the mountain sipping

fragrant coffee and counting sheep ambling around the steep slopes. The history here dates back 7000 years, so there’s much to ponder when not going into ‘Saltworld’.

We ate dinner in the village at the Braugashof that was originally a beer brewing establishment – the beer was modern but the food was traditional, and we ate with gusto in the family-owned preserved building that had good gourmet memories.

Trundling up the hill to our rooms (lucky to be staying in a mediaeval castle that had become a hotel), the lights above us twinkled from the windows of the houses and chalets that crowd the mountain leading down to the town. Cosy, friendly and reassuring, the lights of Hallstatt glow, perfectly in sync with the mauve, approaching twilight – flawless, as everything else is in Hallstatt.

MORE TO SEE IN AUSTRIA?

f @mydiscoveries
@ @mydiscoveries
info@mydiscoveries.com.au
www.mydiscoveries.com.au
1300 404 606



