

Travel Articles for Vacation Muse

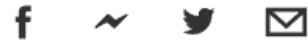


Hinterstoder:

Feel genuine Austria.

BY **BARBORA JIRINCOVA**

April 03, 2023



For the Austrians, skiing is everything. They revere their national skiers as superheroes; every child dreams of becoming one, and everybody in Austria skis. Hinterstoder, a small ski resort in Upper Austria, is an authentic Austrian resort. Unlike larger areas like Schladming or Zillertal, where tourists worldwide come to spend their holiday, Hinterstoder is popular with the locals. Come here to meet the Austrian soul.

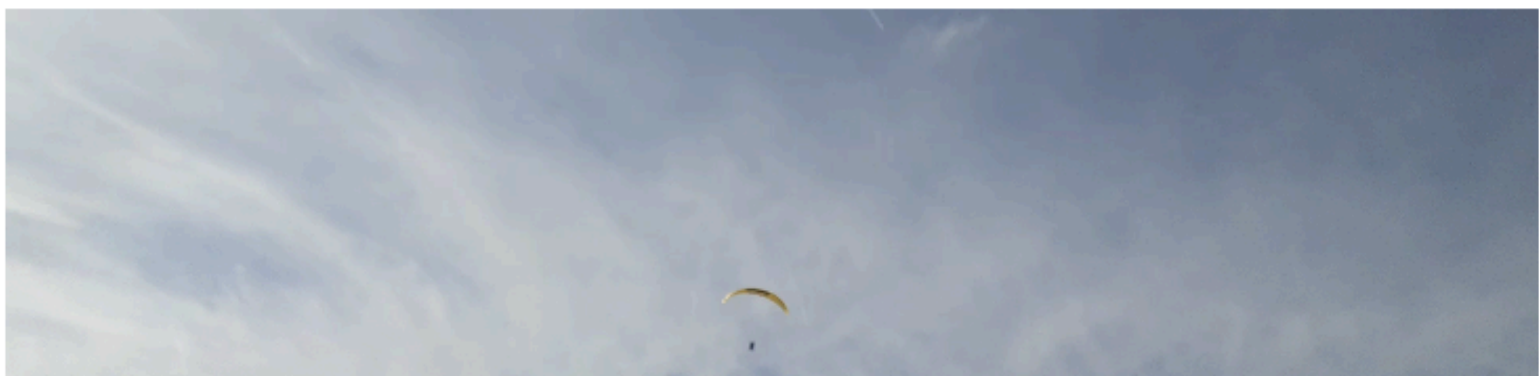
Hinterstoder is an alpine resort in Upper Austria, a northern part of the country bordering on Germany and the Czech Republic. While more famous ski resorts are popular with people from all over the world (from Russia to the Netherlands), the local tongue (German with a prominent "r" sound) and Czech are the only languages you hear around you in Hinterstoder. You will meet many Czech people here as this is the closest Alpine resort for them and skiing is very popular in the Czech Republic.

Skiing in Hinterstoder

When you arrive at the central parking lot, you immediately know you are among the top skiers. In other areas, at 8:30 AM, the tourists slowly get ready to ski. In Hinterstoder, at 8:30 AM, the parking lot is packed with people quickly changing into skiing boots and eager to hit the slopes. You meet training groups of all ages changing into their race suits. A new large bright red gondola takes you to an altitude of 1400 m, and lifts and chairlifts go even higher from here, up to 1900 m.

The first stop, at the top station of the central gondola, offers a magnificent view. You find yourself in a valley surrounded by slopes and cliffs from all sides. This valley is a meeting point for all the lifts, tracks, and additional facilities. Unlike other resorts where you can get lost at every turn, in Hinterstoder, most pistes end at the same spot. In the morning, two or three training or racing tracks are reserved for the racers, but they leave enough space for you to ski along. The locals provide a specialty for the visitors, a giant slalom track, adequately prepared according to racing standards (not the usual fun track you know from family resorts), where you can test your skiing skills. Around the ski slopes, there are tracks for ski alpinists, free riders, and hikers. Winter hiking trails are carefully cleared, and you won't get lost. In fine weather, you can see the silhouettes of paragliders in the sky. If you are a fan of flying yourself, know that the top of the mountain in Hinterstoder is a favorite starting place for enthusiastic paragliders.

The facilities and snow conditions



The altitude offers adequate snow conditions all season round. The slopes are perfectly prepared according to the high alpine standards. You can choose from a variety of tracks. The mild blue ones are wide enough for everybody, no matter their skiing level; the intermediate skiers will enjoy the red slopes, and the black slopes will satisfy the expert skiers. And let us remember the World Cup track. Locals are proud of their spot in the World Cup alpine skiing calendar. They will gladly remind you that the first race was staged here in 1912, and Hinterstoder has hosted World Cup races since 1986. In 2004 construction works began to build a new standardized racetrack. They named it after Hannes Trinkl, a famous Austrian ski racer born in Hinterstoder.

Hinterstoder is a spot to breathe in the Austrian atmosphere. You get the perfect Austrian service: clean bathrooms at every corner, a warming area, fast and safe lifts, and a ski school for your children. The kids' area has toys, attractions, a popular merry-go-round, and three magic carpets ideal for beginners. And then there is gastronomy.

The Austrian food

While pubs in larger and more popular ski resorts compromise to please the tourists and offer popular drinks like Bombardino or Aperol and international cuisine, Hinterstoder does not. They take great pride in the local cuisine. You can taste the typical Austrian soups—Kaspersknödelsupe or Leberknödelsuppe, a strong broth with one giant dumpling with either cheese or liver flavor. A local specialty is a Mostsuppe, a creamy soup with a specific sour taste, and the spicy Gulashsuppe with a bread roll. Then, there are the sausages and the Gröstl, a mix of potatoes, bacon, and meat with a fried egg on top. Sweet meals bring a culinary delight as well. The traditional Germknödel is a giant dumpling filled with plum jam covered with poppy seed, sugar, and butter or vanilla sauce.

All the pubs in the area provide inner and outer space where you can enjoy the sun and the magnificent view. After some time, you will become a fan of Alpenpop, fun music with simple and often a little rowdy lyrics in German. Every pub plays popular songs, and people sing along. You will experience a typical Austrian après-ski atmosphere.

Austrians and their nature



As everywhere in the Alps, in Hinterstoder, you can climb, hike, cycle, and enjoy many outdoor activities in summer as well. Austrian nature is beautiful, and remember that the Austrians love mother nature and work hard to preserve it. Let us say that the Austrians promoted ecology even before it became cool in the rest of the world. They know nature and live close to and with it in the alpine regions - most work in agriculture. If you want nature to provide for you in the mountains, you must deeply understand and respect your environment. The Austrians do that, and Hinterstoder is Austrian to the core. You won't find big modern hotels and shopping malls near the slopes. Everything here looks as alpine as possible. So, give it a try. Here, you'll get the feeling of authentic Austria, which no big modern skiing resort can provide.



Val Gardena –

Enjoy skiing in the sun.

BY BARBORA JIRINCOVA

April 03, 2023



Val Gardena – enjoy skiing in the sun.

Val Gardena lies in the heart of the Italian Alps, the Dolomites. This part of the Alps offers magnificent views and fantastic sunny weather for most of the year. On your skiing holiday, you get more days with clear blue sky in the Dolomites than in any other European mountains.

Skiers come here to enjoy the perfect snow surface, and the locals are proud to be a part of the World Cup downhill calendar. And if you come here, take advantage of the local cuisine, which offers the perfect blend of Italian and Austrian cuisine. In fact, the whole area represents the ideal blend of Austria and Italy. Meet South Tyrol, the most exciting corner of this part of Europe.

Skiing in Italy offers the best conditions.

When you travel to the Alps, you can choose from Austria, Italy, France, or Switzerland. Each country delivers its own specific conditions. Freeriders come to France, and in Switzerland, the tourists look for luxury; Austria represents the classical Alps, where everything is perfect, and Italy brings you the ideal snow and sunny weather. The Italian side of the Alps faces the South, so the weather is often sunny. The snow that falls melts under the sun's rays and freezes at night, resulting in a firmer and more durable surface. It rarely snows because most storm clouds stop on the other side of the Alps. So, the Italians had to learn how to create artificial snow. And reached near perfection with this skill. The quality of the artificial snow in the Italian Alps is the highest.

South Tyrol is not Italy.

Geographically Val Gardena lies in Italy. But Italy gained this region only after the First World War. It was part of the Tyrolean lands – tied to the Austrian part of Tyrol. When Italy got its prize after the war, Tyrol was divided for the first time in its history. The locals did not agree to be part of Italy, and some don't approve of being a part of Italy even today. However, European integration helped to soften all the nationalist and separatist tendencies in Europe. Because in the EU, Tyrol is one again.

The complicated history resulted in a complex language present. The locals speak three languages – German, Italian, and Ladin. The latter is a Romance language similar to old Latin and distinct to the region. All geographical names are written in three languages. But not all of South Tyrol is the same. In Val Gardena, the locals prefer German. As you move through South Tyrol further South, the Italian trait of the region becomes more prominent. More people speak Italian, drink Aperol than beer, and the locals are friendlier and louder. Traveling through the South Tyrolean skiing resorts and letting the local atmosphere talk to you provides a rare experience.

South Tyrolian cuisine

South Tyrolean cuisine offers a perfect blend of Austrian and Italian food. You get *Weizen* beer (made from wheat instead of barley) or wine, which resembles the Austrian white wine. But the specialty here is the *Gewürztraminer*, an aromatic yet dry or semi-dry wine. In South Tyrol, the famous *Bombardino* originated. This hot eggnog liquor with heavy whipped cream drinks all around European skiing resorts. Another renowned drink South Tyrol created is Aperol Spritz (*Veneziano*), a typical orange bitter-sweet wine-based cocktail that people enjoy worldwide. Further South, you can taste the sweet lemon-based liquor *Limoncello*, which tastes like a sweet juice but contains surprisingly high alcohol.

As for the food, you can choose from typical Tyrolean soups with giant dumplings in strong broth and a whole variety of sausages. South Tyrolean cuisine resembles Austrian or Italian with a unique twist. For example, you get the *Strudel*, a typical Austrian sweet cake-like meal made from apples or curd cheese. Still, the South Tyrolean version uses a different type of dough, which brings a different taste. As we are geographically in Italy, you would expect pasta here. And you would be right. But here you should try, for example, *Pasta Pastura*, which you don't get anywhere else. The fundamental specialty of South Tyrolean cuisine is *Knödel Tris* – three big dumplings each of different taste – *Käseknödel* (cheese), *Spenatknödel* (spinach), and *Speckknödel* (bacon).

Skiresort Gröden - Val Gardena

Let us look at the Val Gardena (Gröden in German) a little closer.

Where to stay

You can stay in three towns – Santa Christina, Wolkenstein or St. Ulrich. You can set out on a skiing tour from each of them and continue to other resorts connected with slopes and lifts. The accommodation is the cheapest in St. Ulrich (Ortisei in Italian) as it offers the least skiing opportunities and you have to travel far to get on the famous tracks. The most popular is Santa Christina because here you can start skiing on the famous Saslong with its World Cup track. This place is also the most expensive to stay. As everywhere in the Alps, you can stay in a hotel, but most tourists stay in apartments. In this accommodation, you cook for yourselves.

Skiing opportunities

The most famous mountain is Champinói, where the downhill heroes race every December in the famous Saslong World cup race. The Saslong offers a red and a black (World Cup track) with more possibilities in the upper part of the hill. Saslong is situated on the mountain's North face. Hence, the surface holds firm until late afternoon, even in spring.

Under the town of Santa Christina, an underground train connects Saslong with the second big resort Col Raiser. Its peak is Seceda, and skiing here is perfect in the cold weather as the hill faces South and skiers enjoy the sun all day. Traditionally at the end of the season in April, the locals host Gardenissima on this slope – the longest giant slalom in Europe. This race is famous because it provides a rare opportunity for amateurs to race alongside professional World cup racers and ski legends. The oldest participants are 80, and the youngest, who run in the Gardenissima kids – only six. On race day, the whole valley lives with the race, local farmers offer their products, and the day after the race, the season ends.

The next resort, Monte Pana, is connected with Saslong through lifts and blue pistes and is excellent for families with children. Here you can find short, mild slopes with convenient lifts and magic carpets. Not only can children ski here, but also they can use various playgrounds. Monte Pana is popular with advanced skiers as well. From the top of the mountain, you can follow the wide black or red tracks. While hidden in the forest, you are protected against the occasional bad weather.

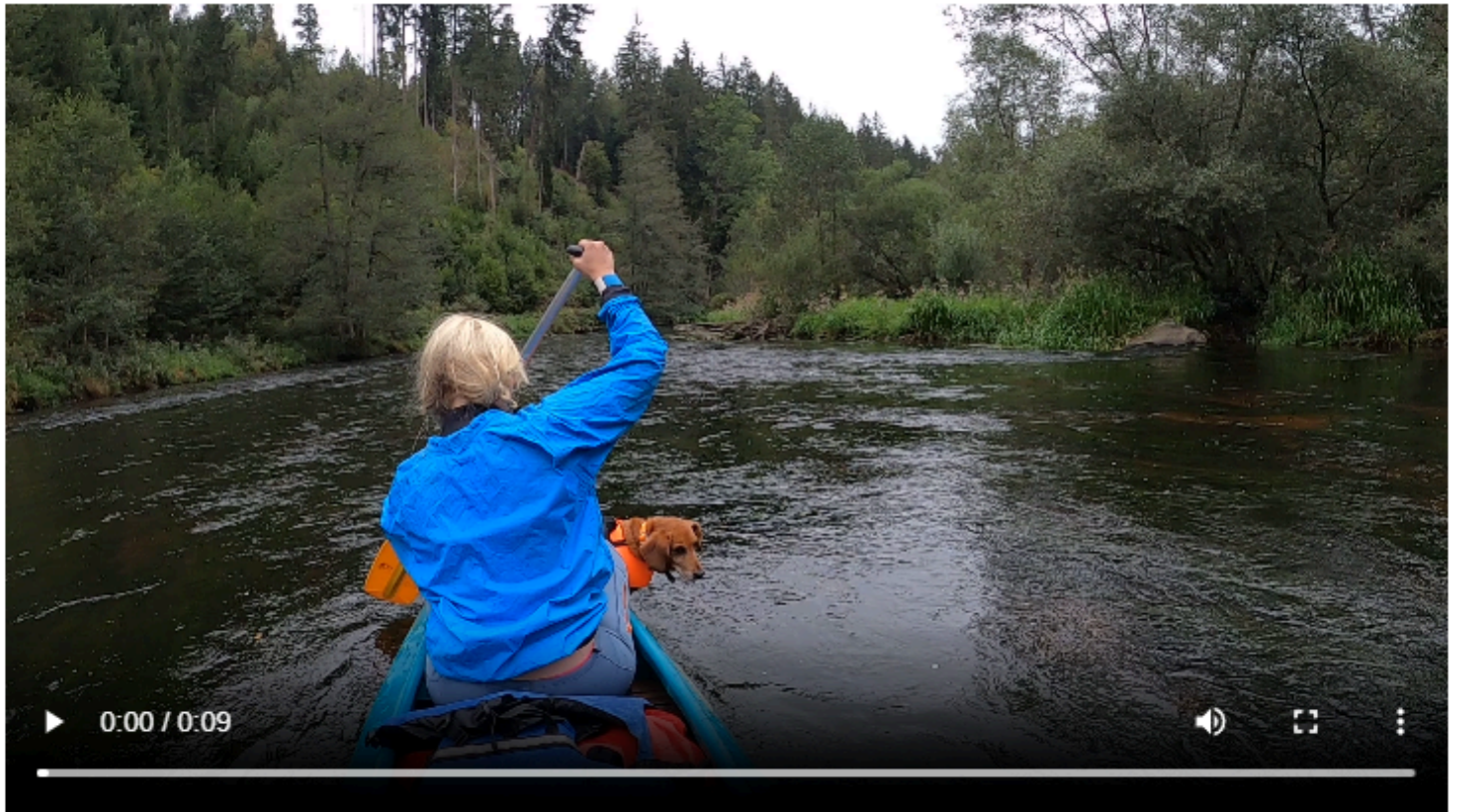
Other popular skiing facilities are located in Wolkenstein with Dantercepies – a skiing resort for families and expert skiers alike, or St. Ulrich, with the longest tracks.

So, what does Val Gardena offer?

Why visit Val Gardena? You get to know a specific atmosphere; the not- Italian and non-Austrian culture has charm. While Austria may feel a little sterile, South Tyrolian feels warm and domestic. Skiing is perfect, the sun shines, and the food is the best.

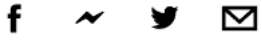
Canoeing trip in the Czech Republic

Canoeing is a national sport in the Czech Republic. It may be because the Czechs don't consider it a sport; it is simply a way of spending a holiday on the river. This tradition originated in the Communist era. A simple holiday on the river, sleeping in a tent, and singing around the campfire gave people freedom. On the river, there was no secret police; the people who met around the fire shared the ideals, sang forbidden American songs, and talked freely. Today, the Czechs can listen to American songs anywhere they like, and the freedom of speech is codified in the Constitution. Still, canoeing trips are an alternative to expensive holidays in sterile hotel rooms. Here, the people feel connected to nature, have to play according to her rules, and when a problem comes, depend on each other. The canoeing and camping tradition remained and is becoming more popular every day.



Canoeing trip in the Czech Republic

BY BARBORA JIRINCOVA
May 09, 2023



Canoeing on Czech rivers requires no skill.

Most paddlers chose a plastic canoe. This kind of boat is relatively stable, sits two people, and survives anything. For faster-flowing rivers, they primarily use rafts. Rafts are very popular with families as they provide enough space. Unlike rafting and kayaking trips on wild rivers, there is no adventure in this kind of holiday. The rivers flow slowly; you paddle, admire the nature around, and frequently stop to have a beer or ice cream or bathe. Occasionally you meet a weir. In that case, you can always carry the boat across; in some cases, you must, as the weirs can get dangerous, and those that are part of water power plants are deadly. However, some weirs have been rebuilt to be safe for paddlers.

And in some cases, you have to use your experience to decide whether you will try to get across the weir in your boat. Getting wet is expected in canoeing sports. The canoes can trip over very quickly on the weir or in occasional wilder passages, and the paddlers have to swim. Thus they use waterproof containers for all their possessions.

Camping along the river

In the evening, you find a camp, build a tent and overnight. You can find a base after a few kilometers on the most famous rivers, like Vltava or Ohře. There may be just one camp or none on the rivers where paddlers rarely come. In that case, you can camp in the forest (camping is allowed in the woods) or in some public area (with permission of the community or town). When you sleep in the camp, there is usually a bar that only prepares fried food and sausages. Czechs love fried cheese (a piece of Eidam cheese covered in flour, eggs, and breadcrumbs, and then deep fried), and after a few days on the river, you start to hate this kind of food because you cannot get anything else. If you are lucky, they have some soup, usually a goulash soup, or you have to leave your boat on the bank and walk some distance to the closest town to find a proper restaurant. Most people spend their evenings around the campfire with a guitar and singing tramp songs. When there is fire, people grill their sausages - without a grill, they simply pin it on a sharp stick.



Where to go canoeing

The most famous river in the Czech Republic is undoubtedly the Vltava. It springs in the Šumava mountains, but the wild passages at the beginning are only for expert paddlers on kayaks. Then it runs through a national park, where special permission from the park officials is required, and you must have a guide with your group. Most trips start in the historic town Vyšší Brod. Vltava runs swiftly but not too swiftly to demand extreme skill from the paddlers. Beautiful nature and exciting historical sights surround it. The weirs are rebuilt so that even a beginner can get over them without harm. But this makes the Vltava River so popular that in summer, the camps are full, the river is busy, and it loses its charm. There are other rivers in the Czech Republic, Otava in South Bohemia, Ohře in the West, Jizera in the North, and Morava in the East. In summer and pleasant weather, the paddlers are everywhere on the rivers; you would rarely be alone; it is very popular with the Czechs, the Germans, and the Austrians come as well.

Canoeing: Nature and Adventure

What makes canoeing so unique is that nature still has its say, and there is nothing a man can do about it. First, in summer, droughts occur more often in later years. You can plan a trip, but when it doesn't rain, there is no water in the river to carry your boat. You must choose a different river or postpone your trip to another time. Next, when it rains too much, you have no cover on the boat, so many paddlers give up. But the most dangerous situation comes when it rains too much. The slow and pleasant river can abruptly change to a fast-flowing adventurous course. Its easy and safe weirs can transform into deadly places where many paddlers lose their lives. The water demands respect, and the complete beginners need a guide on their trip, someone who can read the water and tell when the fun ends and the danger begins.

Czech national specialty

There are also wilder rivers in Bohemia, popular with kayakers and rafters. But that is a sports opportunity similar to kayaking and rafting worldwide. The safe, relaxing family trip is the real Czech specialty. It is more about freedom than adventure. Nostalgia creeps in, singing around the campfire, nature whispers to you, and the river reminds you how small you are. But still, the reminder is soft enough to let you take your kids, dogs, and friends with you on your holiday.



WINE VINEYARD WINE TASTING

Moravia - Czech Republic

BY BARBORA JIRINCOVA

May 29, 2023



Meet Moravia.

Moravia lies in the Eastern part of the Czech Republic, bordering on Slovakia and Austria. The vineyards lie in the Southern region, with the capital Brno (the second largest city of the Czech Republic), and some of them span to Austria, sharing their terroir. But Austrian wine production differs from the Moravian, and so do the local culture and traditions.

The weather in Moravia is usually dry and very sunny. Lately, the bright and warm weather allows the production of very decent red wines next to the traditional white varieties.

Moravian Traditions Revolve around Wine.

Traditions are alive in this region, and many rituals revolve around wine. The season begins with the wine festival in Autumn—usually, a Catholic priest blessing the grapes. The whole village gathers, and as nearly all families in the town own their little vineyards or work on the bigger ones, everybody participates in picking the grapes. When the work is done, the celebrations begin; tourists are welcome to taste the last year's specimens, traditional music plays, and people dance in folk costumes.

The *Federweisser* Season

At the brink of Autumn, wine festivals are about work. However, the rest of the rituals are about wine tasting. Very soon after the grapes are safely under the roof, the first product is sold in Moravia and wineries around the Czech Republic. The *Federweisser* is a partly fermented sweet drink made of the first harvest. It is typically very lively, so the bottles tend to explode. Its taste changes literally from hour to hour. Early on in September, the drink tastes very sweet and is low in alcohol; in October, you won't recognize it as the fermentation is nearly over. The first *Federweisser* celebrations occur in September, and tourists especially love and demand the drink. The locals don't appreciate it that much; they don't drink it. For wine-makers, the *Federweisser* is the first opportunity to earn money.

The Moravians are very proud; they typically look down upon the folks from the capital and make fun of them. The popularity of the *Federweisser* is proof to the locals that the tourists from the capital cannot appreciate their exquisite wine and only fall for any advertisement.



Moravia - Traditional Wine-Tasting Trips

In the heart of Europe, there is a land where people come to combine the pleasures of wine tasting with hiking, sightseeing, and even cycling. A land where basically everything revolves around wine and people live tightly connected to nature that provides their gems - the grapes.



Vineyard in Moravia

Meet Moravia.

Moravia lies in the Eastern part of the Czech Republic, bordering on Slovakia and Austria. The vineyards lie in the Southern region, with the capital Brno (the second largest city of the Czech Republic), and some of them span to Austria, sharing their terroir. But Austrian wine production differs from the Moravian, and so do the local culture and traditions.

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The Young Wines Season

On the 11th of November, the name day of St. Martin comes. Folklore has it that the first snow falls in Central Europe on this day. The first proper wine products come to the market. The young wine - a Moravian alternative to Beaujolais Nouveau named The Wine of St. Martin - is sold at festivals nationwide. This wine is usually cheaper, lively, aromatic, and lower on alcohol, but it needs to be consumed until Christmas. The traditional celebrations consist of a big feast where the goose of St. Martin is served. The whole goose is baked, served with dumplings and sauerkraut.

Summer in Moravia

Summer is for the tourists in Moravia. Most wine-makers run their own boarding houses or offer accommodation to tourists. Their cellars are open all season long; you can order a whole degustation with traditional dishes and a sommelier or taste a specimen as you go by. In most wine-making villages, the wine-makers serve shifts. Every week one wine cellar must be open all day to serve the by-goers and tourists. The first proper wines of every year are ready during Summer, but that differs according to variety and the wine-maker's preferences.

Wine-tasting holidays

The Czech, the Germans, the Austrians, and other Central European tourists know that Moravia is an excellent place for wine tasting. You come to taste wine and do some sports and sightseeing simultaneously. People usually book an apartment or a room in the boarding - house (you won't find many hotels in the region). Then they travel on foot or by bike to the vineyards or go sightseeing in beautiful historical cities like Znojmo or Mikulov. And now and then, they stop by a wine cellar, taste the wine, and buy some bottles. Nearly every second house produces wine in the villages around Mikulov or Znojmo. You can look up the wine maker's phone number and schedule a quick or extended tasting session. Or you just walk by and stop when you see an open cellar. There are wine-tasting huts in the vineyards or the fields, so you won't go thirsty even on longer trips. Thus, you can choose your favorite type of holiday - biking, hiking, canoeing, sightseeing, or simply lying in the sun and bathing in a lake - but anything you do, there is the wine for you to taste.

The Characteristics of Moravian Wine

Moravian wine grows in quality every year as the climate changes and it gets warmer. Some twenty years ago, you would not find a fine specimen of red wine here, as the blue grapes (used for producing red wine) need much more sun than their white siblings. Lately, it has changed. There are better red wines, sweeter and more alcoholic beverages next to the traditional light and aromatic varieties.

Moravian wine has been winning awards around Europe and is a decent competition to more famous wine regions in France, Italy, or Rhineland. The array of Moravian wines makes the wine-tasting trips exciting even for seasoned wine lovers. In most countries, the appellation system {the system used to evaluate wine quality} tends to create uniform wines - every wine-maker in France or Germany needs to fit the typical characteristics of their region with their products.

In Moravia, this appellation system has found its way to larger wineries lately, but most wines don't fit into this system. Thus every wine-maker produces 7 - 12 varieties of wine, each with a distinct taste and aroma that can differ from year to year. Wine-makers also regularly breed new varieties, while the two most famous here are *Welschriesling* and *Moravian Moscato*. Both are very aromatic, distinct, and unlike anything you taste elsewhere.

If you find yourself in Central Europe, come to Moravia, and book a wine-tasting trip, an experience you won't find anywhere else.

