

St. Anton, Lech, Innsbruck, Salzburg, Vienna – South Jersey Ski Club’s 2017 Austrian Adventure

With 55 participants, the largest crowd for a SJSC European Trip in our memory recently spent 10 eventful days in Austria. There were weather ups and downs, some injuries and some illnesses, but the gorgeous natural setting, beautiful cities, abundant food and drink and friendly, caring participants made it a memorable and overall wonderful experience for most. This recap will give readers a small glimpse into what was experienced during those 10 days.

We departed Newark late in the evening on **Friday**, 27 January and arrived after our overnight flight on **Saturday**, 28 January. We were greeted by Sandy G. and her lovely sign! She had arrived from Florida with Lisa G. and joined by Nancy L. from Denver shortly before us. Sandy had already located our bus drivers, and, with little delay, we were off for the scenic 2.5-hour drive to St. Anton. Check-in at the **Hotel Nassereinerhof** was handled smoothly and very professionally. Well before dark, equipment was rented and bags unpacked, and a lively welcome reception hosted by hotel owner, Christian G., had the libations flowing. A delicious dinner of grilled meats and vegetables plus an abundant salad/appetizer bar that first night set the tone for more tasty meals to follow. We were very well fed all week!

On Saturday evening, trip leaders, Bianca and Dale M., set up a flip chart just outside the hotel restaurant, and their daily updates kept everyone informed about what was happening both inside and outside of the hotel. Each day they offered “Ski with The Trip Leaders”, and Don M., Don B., Michelle T., Eric T., Debbie L., Terri C., Stephanie S., Ken C., Marty C., Joe H., Cheryl R., Janet R., Tom J., Gene Z., Richard M., John L., Susan L., Dianne D., Lisa and Sandy G., Nancy L., Jack W., Kathleen M., Ken S., Marie O., Suzanne D., Donna C. and Paula H. were among the many who took them up on the invitation at various times throughout the week.

Other groups who always skied together were Judy R., Judy S., Richard R., Dennis S., Janis B., Sean O. and John B., and it was reported that the Krazy Kangaruh was one of their favorite haunts for lunch or apres. Bob and Lorraine S. might have covered more terrain than any others on the trip. They were the first to make the new Flexenbahn link to Zurs and Lech. Rich K., John McM., Nancy A. and Jan H. were a ski foursome, and at the end of the week they finally found the weather and conditions right for completion of “Der Weisse Ring” from Lech to Zug to Zurs and return. Lori D. and John S. and Bob B. and Karl P. were duos who usually skied together, with occasional others joining them for a run or two.

Young couple, Brett P. and Michelle M. enjoyed all that St. Anton had to offer with excursions to the huge indoor/outdoor pool complex, lots of runs on the lower slopes and a snowshoeing excursion in the Rendl area. Our non-skiers, Gayle E. and Erika B., were able to take excursions up to the top of all main lift stations for the views, and they were delighted with that option. All of those stations featured a wonderful spot or two for a delicious lunch as well.

Sunday, 29 January, was a real bluebird ski day, and almost everyone hit the slopes for a little while. Unfortunately, Michelle J. took a tumble that day, and she ended up with a painfully bruised hip that made skiing no longer an option for her. She took it like a trooper, and she and Roseann C. spent most of the week enjoying the beauty of St. Anton and its fun shops and cafés.

Monday, 30 January, two large groups took the Postbus over to Lech and enjoyed a great day of strolling/ skiing/lunching/shopping there. After a very enjoyable morning skiing some of Lech’s longest and most beautiful runs, the still standing group of Dale and Bianca M., Ken and Marty C., John and

Susan L., Michelle and Eric T., Terri C. and Don M. enjoyed a leisurely and delicious lunch under the heaters on the beautiful **Hotel Montana** terrace in Oberlech while the first snowflakes began to fall. That evening, after some relaxing time in the Spa area of our hotel, everyone enjoyed the hotel "Italian Night" with copious pasta choices for dinner.

Tuesday, 31 January, heavy snow fell all day long, and it was extremely difficult to see a thing on the upper slopes. Most either skipped the day or quit at noon. Lots of drinking took place while the snow accumulated up above and turned to "snain" down below. It was simply not a good day to be out on the slopes at all.

Unfortunately, two of our new participants, Jay and Shari T., decided to ski down from a mid-station that morning, and a freak accident occurred. We were not to see Shari again the rest of the trip. She had badly broken her leg in a fall while attempting to avoid another fallen skier, and she was transported down the valley to the hospital in Zams for stabilization prior to an emergency return home. Fortunately, she and Jay had taken out an excellent insurance policy that allowed for full transport back to the USA with an accompanying nurse. Needless to say, this sad incident cast a cloud over the group. Shari and Jay were on our minds the rest of the vacation, and we have since heard that she was operated on at the University of Michigan Hospital where 4 plates were inserted in her right leg. We all send her our best wishes and hopes for a complete recovery.

Wednesday, 1 February, the snow continued to fall heavily in the high alpine, but rain was the story in St. Anton. As a result, Bob and Lorraine S., Lori D., John S., Don M., Terri C., Michelle J., Roseann C., Donna C., Marie O., Stephanie S., Michelle and Eric T., Tom J., Janet R., Ken S., Paula H., Joe H., Cheryl R., Suzanne D., Debbie L. and Gayle E. joined Dale and Bianca M. on a "Train with Your Trip Leaders to Innsbruck". The rain in that city did not stop the intrepid band at all, and everyone enjoyed the extra day of touring. Lots of us bought wonderful felt shopping bags, and many of them were full at the end of the day! We rushed back to the hotel just in time for "Fondue Night", then after dinner many rushed back out for "The History of Skiing Multi Media Show with Fireworks" held on the snow at the World Cup Stadium. Tens of thousands of steps were registered on Fitbits and Smartphone Apps that day! The day ended with multiple rounds of drinks in the Salon!

Thursday, 2 February, the sun came out again, and a huge group joined the trip leaders on a trek to Lech on skis. The run down to the Flexenbahn was a challenge for many, but all made it over on a gorgeous day. The group split up some during the day, and several took the bus back earlier than others. The wind picked up in the afternoon, and we were unable to ski a couple of our favorite Lech slopes, but outdoor apres at **Hotel Ilga**, Oberlech made up for it. "Make that double" was a repeated phrase as Michelle and Eric T., Cheryl R., Paula H., Janet R., Tom J. and Dale and Bianca M. settled into those oh, so comfy sheepskin lined lounge chairs on the sun terrace! An "Austrian Night" with delicious Tyrolean specialties awaited us upon our return.

Sadly, on this day, Lori D. took a tumble and injured her ankle. A torn ligament was diagnosed, and Lori gamely spent the rest of the trip on crutches. John S. and others helped her out as she made her way around city tours, hotel lifts, bus steps and more. Thanks to those helpful gentlemen.

Yes, this was our first trip with so many injuries. The level of difficulty of the slopes in and around St. Anton really put it at the top end of challenge for so many of our group. For the first time, more people took time off from skiing than ever before, and only about a third of the people were able to keep skiing

for five days. The Blue runs were equivalent to Black runs at most US resorts, with the Red runs even steeper, and the sustained pitch on many of them tried the legs of even the most conditioned skiers.

Friday, 3 February, was forecast to be another snowy day, but after the first super flat light runs of the day, the sun came out, the clouds cleared and our expectations were completely exceeded. Lots of us traveled up the Vallugabahn to over 2800 meters (9222 ft.) where the views were absolutely breathtaking. The skiing was superior on the new snow, especially off the Nassereinbahn and Galzigbahn, and it was a great way to end the week. Those who quit early thinking all was lost were disappointed with that choice, but they drowned their sorrows over Schnapps and Pils and were smiling in the late afternoon sun! After a last delicious hotel dinner, a few hardy souls ventured out on the town while all others packed for our early morning departure.

Saturday, 4 February, after bidding Auf Wiedersehen to St. Anton at 7:30, our two buses, with 26 on one and 27 on the other, headed along the Inn River valley to Innsbruck and then north to Salzburg. We arrived in Salzburg at around 11 and for the next two hours, our two groups, Bus B and Bus D, were treated to a tour of the city with Jugen and Christian of **Bob's Special Tours** followed by a yummy lunch at the picturesque **Stiegl-Keller**. It was a gorgeous warm, sunny day and absolutely perfect for such an excursion. We departed Salzburg at 2:30, and our drivers, Gert and Daniel, aptly delivered us to the **Hotel Wandl** in Vienna at exactly 6 PM. Again, our check in was very smooth, and everyone admired the beauty of this perfectly located gem of a hotel before setting out in search of dinner. Vienna greeted us with the lights, action and excitement of a mild winter night.

Sunday, 5 February – Tuesday, 7 February – Vienna

Breakfast was the only meal on offer at the hotel, and it was abundant, delicious and served in gorgeous rooms that made us feel like we were dining in a palace. Many of us loved the hot from the oven cakes, the mimosa bar and the yummy coffees from the interesting coffee machines the most!

On Sunday morning, a very large group of Catholics and non-Catholics alike attended Mass at the **Hofburg Kapelle** to hear the Vienna Choir Boys. That was a beautiful and moving experience. In the afternoon, we were all treated to a 2+ hour walking tour on a lovely, sunny day. We were definitely blessed with good weather for that activity because...

Monday was a totally rainy day. After grabbing the free hotel umbrellas, some toured the **Hofburg Palace** and its many museums while others wandered over to the outdoor winter garden in front of the **Rathaus**, toured **St. Stephens Cathedral** and climbed the 343 steps to the **South Tower**, visited an art museum or two or three and indulged in those famous Viennese tortes! **Mozartshaus** and **Haus Der Musik** were also popular attractions.

In the wee hours of Monday morning, the group of Marie O., John S., Debbie L., Rich K., John B., Don M., Janet R. and Tom J. watched the Super Bowl in the hotel bar while others watched in their rooms. Fortunately, the hotel had one channel available that showed the game albeit with German announcers and commercials! The Patriots fans in the group were delighted with the outcome, and the hardest stayed up until almost dawn on Monday in celebration.

There were more than a few within the group who attended various classical music concerts at **Schoenbrunn Palace**, **Kursalon**, **Stadtoper Haus** and other venues. All who attended a concert

reported the experiences to be very memorable. The influence of Mozart, Beethoven, Mahler and Strauss among others is very evident on the culture of Vienna.

Vienna's café' culture was popular with the group, too, and **Café' Central**, **Café' Demel**, Café' Hawelka, **Café' Sacher** and **Café' Griensteidl** were all popular haunts. One can only imagine how many calories of Sacher Torte, Anna Torte and various Strudels with Schlagobers were consumed during our short time in Vienna. So many of the group were suffering from coughs, colds, Bronchitis and who knows what else by this time, too. Warm and cozy cafés were the best place to be, and remember that old saying, "Feed a Cold"!

Shopping the pedestrian only **Kartner Strasse**, **The Graben** and **The Golden Quarter** was a popular pastime, too. Window shopping was enough for some, but others could not resist the temptations on offer. The strength of our dollar versus the Euro helped with that. Vienna is a very fashionable and cultured city, and the wares on display in all shops really brought that reality to bear. How wonderful it would be if Philadelphia could turn its Center City into such a wonderful pedestrian only zone as that in Vienna!

Our transfer out to the airport on **Tuesday**, 7 February, and our subsequent flights back to the US were comfortable. Our transatlantic flight was particularly nice as the plane was only 1/3 full. Many were able to stretch out and catch up on lost sleep. We were a bit late landing due to the fog at Newark, but by Midnight on 8 February, almost everyone was back home again.

Overall, despite the injuries, illnesses and weather variables, the trip was lots of fun for most of the participants. Our tour vendor did a masterful job in helping the Ski Committee put this trip together, and almost everything ran like clockwork. The group was excellent and cohesive, and many new friendships were made while old ones were strengthened. Your trip leaders particularly enjoyed watching everyone having a great time while listening to their excited chatter and happy laughter.

Thanks to everyone!

Until next time,

Bianca and Dale Mandel