

RIDING THROUGH POSTCARDS

It's easier than ever to ride great bikes across great routes with great people...

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A view of a castle overlooking a village



Our tour group posing with a tank

Schröcken, Austria, is simply amazing. I wanted to spend hours, days, weeks waiting for the light to change, waiting for the perfect photograph of this incredible mountain range, waiting for an image which could become a postcard... except we don't do postcards anymore.

Every day on the Best of Europe Tour with Edelweiss Bike Travel felt like we were riding through the scenes of postcards. When I was a kid they would arrive from relatives having exciting travel adventures, with images of foreign lands or wherever they were on holiday. These days we just post selfies to Facebook, and do it so often it's no longer exciting — and travel becoming easier over the decades has made it a bit less exotic too, I suppose.

But if the idea of international travel isn't as exciting as it once was, the idea you can fly and ride certainly is — jumping on a bike overseas was for the brave, adventurous and crazy, not for people with jobs, deadlines, responsibilities and mortgages.

Not anymore.

BEST OF EUROPE

Edelweiss offers a huge range of bike travel tours across much of the world, celebrating 45 years of taking people riding. A family-owned business with its home in the awesome riding areas of the Austrian alps, Edelweiss takes thousands of riders and pillions touring every year. The Best of Europe tour worked out well for Kirrily and I as we were able to attend the company's 45th birthday celebrations after the tour.

THE PLAN

Beer. The plan was beer. Well, seeing it in its natural state that is, on the first day — as hops growing in the fields. German farmers string the plants up on wire to have it grow upwards, which encourages growth, and it was the first stop on Day 1.

The Best of Europe Tour would take us in a loop, leaving from and arriving back at Erding, a small town just outside Munich in Germany, which gives everyone an easy location to fly into. Our crew would be two Aussies, one Canadian and five Americans

(including Kevin Wing writing and shooting for *Rider* magazine in the USA, also here for the 45th Anniversary celebrations).

The first day's ride was easy, allowing us to get familiar with riding in Germany — good for those of us from the antipodes; it's easier to follow someone who rides on the right-hand side of the road rather than the left, as that's not a mistake you want to make.

The route involved a brief stretch on the Autobahn to navigate past the Ingolstadt area, followed by a picturesque traverse of the Danube and a meander along the Altmühl River. The Altmühl Valley proved to be a visual feast, with its deep incision into the limestone of the Fränkische Alb, lined by impressive cliffs, ancient fortresses and castle ruins. Lunch was in a lovely restaurant overlooking Eichstätt and the perfect place for a drone flight, capturing some fabulous images of the area including Willibaldsburg Castle. A former bishop's town and baroque jewel, it was rebuilt after being burned down in the Thirty Years' War.

At the end of the day, many of our crew enjoyed the fruits of the farmers' labours when they enjoyed a German beer or three at Rothenberg ob der Tauber, a well-preserved town which dates back to medieval times and managed to survive World War II relatively unscathed. A walking tour hosted by one of the night watchmen was an enjoyable way to spend the glorious warm evening as the sun sets very late in a Bavarian summer.

THE BIKE

For our tour, Kirrily and I chose the BMW R1300 GS — partly because I want one, but I also wanted to see how Kirrily would go on the back of the big adventure bike for a week.

On the tour, riders chose a mix of machinery — William a BMW F800 because he has short legs, Bill a Yamaha Tracer because he likes a lighter machine than his K1600 he rides in Canada. Frank and Kirsten went with a Harley-Davidson Ultra because that's what they ride at home, Andrew was on an R1300 GS and Kevin an R1250 GS. Our guides shared a CFMOTO 800MT.

Edelweiss offers a vast range of different bikes — there's bound to be something to suit your taste and budget. Insurance is included and you can opt to pay a little extra to reduce the excess to zero.



ABOVE: Texaspass is situated near the Black Forest in Germany BELOW: Loaded up and enjoying the best of Europe

EVERY DAY ON THE BEST OF EUROPE
TOUR WITH EDELWEISS BIKE TRAVEL
FELT LIKE WE WERE RIDING THROUGH
THE SCENES OF POSTCARDS





Spectacular mountain views

Pretty soon we were settled into days filled with great food, postcard-worthy scenery, interesting stops to sample the local culture and coffee before a little time between arriving at our hotel each evening and dinner as a group.

A VARIETY OF EXPERIENCES

The Best of Europe tour takes you to numerous countries, including Germany, France, Switzerland, Austria and Lichtenstein. In some ways it's a great introduction to some of the other European tours which might concentrate more on the Alps, forests or cities.

We visited Schöntal Monastery, which dates back to 1157... it took decades or even centuries to get built, then was repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt. Götz von Berlichingen, a famous knight later immortalised by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, was buried here in 1562, with his tombstone still visible.

The monastery offered a wonderful morning tea to most of our riders, but the look on the waitress's face when Kirrily ordered her preferred iced long black was pretty interesting — you'd have thought she'd ordered a bucket of hemlock!

With 45 years of experience running tours, the Edelweiss guides know the best roads — not necessarily the twistiest or fastest, but a great mix of enjoyable touring, fun cornering and great places to stop and take in the history and culture... kind of why this tour is called Best of Europe I suppose. We stopped at places like the

roofless monastery in Bad Herrenalb, which has a tree growing from a stone arch, something I've only seen before at Angkor Wat in Cambodia, the black lake at Mummelsee, and the Marginot Line Museum on the French border. This was a section of the famed battlements which were going to prevent a German invasion... so the Nazis just went around, driving their tanks through Belgium first.

Kirrily and I loved the Black Forest in Germany, but the Alps of Switzerland and Austria were stunningly gorgeous and offered great riding, too.

Many tours have a rest day, where the planned ride starts and stops in the same place — so you can sit that one out if you like, enjoying a day off the bike. Ours was the French town of Ribeauville, which actually feels quite German because it's changed "hands" a few times over the centuries as the border moved depending on who had been winning the wars of the times! In Ribeauville Kirrily's niece suggested (via WhatsApp) we try the Paris-Brest, a light choux pastry filled with a rich, nutty praline-flavoured cream. Kirrily gave me a little try and it was fabulous... she got the last one, of course. Dammit.

Which brings me to food... don't pack tight clothes. I've already mentioned the beer, but the wines — inexpensive and very good, especially if purchased at a supermarket, but they aren't low calorie. The food is spectacular. Most dinners and all breakfasts are included in the Edelweiss tour cost and the variety and

options are fantastic. Europeans are very good at eating and cooking.

SNOW, ALPS AND POSTER-WORTHY PICTURES

The Best of Europe tour was great, but day seven — the second-last day of riding — took it to another level. We left Schaffhausen in Switzerland and headed for the Alps of Austria, including the postcard-worthy view of the mountains of Schröcken. The riding had been awesome — great roads at a decent clip, but

OUR GUIDES

For the Best of Europe tour we had two guides — Heiko and Felix. One would lead the group and the other would drive the support van, which meant our luggage didn't need to be carried on the bikes — just the stuff we needed for the day (wet weather gear, cameras etc). The van also had a spare bike in case something went wrong with a customer bike (which it did when William's taillight stopped working).

Both guides were knowledgeable, approachable and always keen to solve any problems, organised meals when we weren't eating in restaurants, and basically put in really long days to make sure all the riders were enjoying themselves.

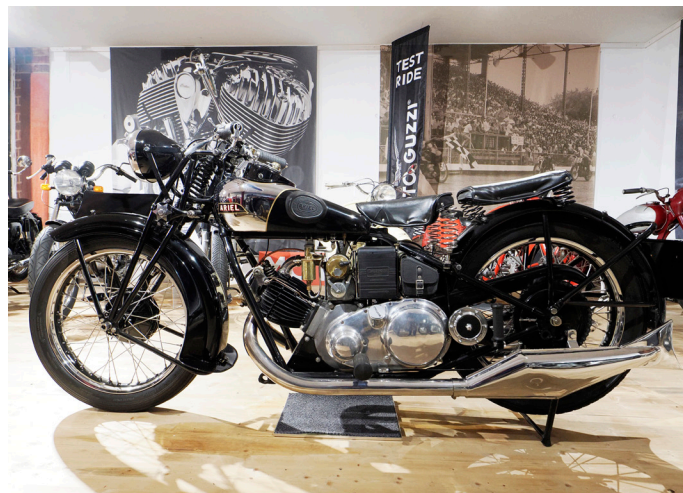


ABOVE: Will, Bill, Frank and Kirsten enjoying the amazing roads BELOW: Shooting from overhead provides a different perspective of a European castle





Felix, Kevin and Heiko with Heidelberg Castle in the background



We spotted this classic Ariel during a coffee stop at a museum



Frank and Kirsten rented a similar bike to the one they have at home



The R 1300 GS was a great companion on this tour

not so fast you were worried about missing the scenery; over each hill and around each bend there was yet another fantastic view.

We rode the cable car to the top of Mount Säntis, a 2500m-high mountain is eastern Switzerland for spectacular views, to play in the snow and enjoy an expensive lunch (everything in Switzerland is expensive). The views were a bit hit-or-miss and the trip up top is an optional extra in the package, because if the weather had been any worse we probably would have given it a miss due to the clouds around the peak – but I'm so glad we didn't. This is tourism at its best, even if it was below freezing outside – and the photos are worth it.

By the end of the day we were in Austria, staying at a beautiful hotel built for the ski fields just outside its doors. They were covered in grass in July of course, so the roads were available for us to enjoy on two wheels.

Our last day on the road had us wandering around Linderhof Castle, the former hunting and summer residence of Bavaria's fairy-tale king, Ludwig II. While smaller and less famous than Neuschwanstein, Linderhof is less crowded

and was the only castle Ludwig II completed during his lifetime, and also his favourite. Built between 1869 and 1879, it resembles a French palace, notably featuring a grotto inspired by Richard Wagner's opera "Tannhäuser".

We got to see Neuschwanstein from the side of the road – the spectacular castle's tours are booked out for months in advance and it would have soaked up too much time anyway (and, to be honest, I think all of us were a little tired of castles by then).

The Ettal Monastery, a Baroque Benedictine monastery founded in 1330 by Emperor Ludwig the Bavarian, was our last stop on the tour – it's now a boarding school, liquor-producing monastery and brewery. Its majestic dome is fabulous from both inside and out.

The final lunch was a riverside picnic organised by our young guide Felix, and what a fabulous lunch it was, including sampling Fleischkäse, a very fine-textured meatloaf, the literal translation being "meat cheese".

Travelling around Europe with a bunch of new friends – even if we never see them again – was great. We were all there to see the sights, ride the roads, enjoy the food, drink

the wine and broaden our minds, and we all achieved those things in spades. While I love to travel solo and as a couple, travelling with Edelweiss was a wonderful experience, and a way to have an overseas motorcycling holiday without the planning, logistics and stress of shipping, buying or renting a bike. **ARR**

TOURING WITH EDELWEISS

Edelweiss offers an incredible array of motorcycle tours across most continents and many countries. The best place to start is on their website, edelweissbike.com, where there is heaps and heaps of information. You can sign up for more information to be emailed to you and start to work out what your perfect adventure might be.

The Best of Europe tour had seven days of riding (although you can sit out the rest day if you prefer) and was priced from €4600.



ABOVE: A covered bridge between Germany and Switzerland BELOW: Nigel and Kirrily leading away from another castle



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