



A walkway on the Liechtenstein Gorge ends at this spectacular waterfall.

The sound of music & sights so charming

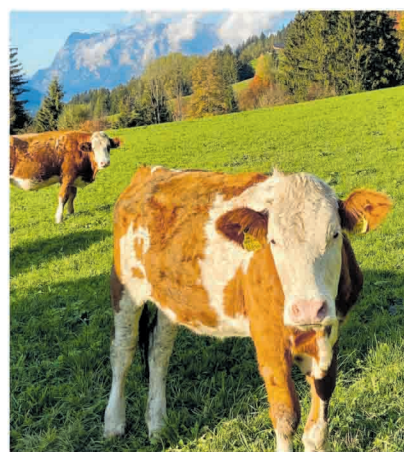
SUZANNE MORPHET is equally enchanted by Austria's epic landscapes and hospitable locals

If you grew up in the 60s or 70s, *The Sound of Music* probably left you with an itch to one day visit Austria. It did for me. Even though I now realise just how sappy and sentimental the 1965 film was (Austrians apparently didn't like it either), I'm excited to finally be on my way. I'm sure that mountains and music, lakes and lederhosen are not the sum of Austria, but those all sound fine too.

I arrive by train in mid-October, the sweet spot after summer's hikers depart and winter's skiers descend en masse.

A resort on the outskirts of St Johann im Pongau is my base for the first three days. St Jo, as locals call it, is about 70km south of Salzburg (it's also known as St Johann im Salzburg), where much of *The Sound of Music* was filmed.

Waiting for us at the Aktivhotel



Alpendorf are picnic baskets (you can order them from the local tourism office) and walking directions to a variety of scenic spots on which to enjoy a spread for our first adventure. My group of five decides on a viewpoint high above the hotel.

Perhaps in our haste to eat we dispense with the instructions. So instead of following a gently winding road we launch ourselves almost directly up the mountain side. Now I know why Austrians are such great downhill skiers. The slope is unrelentingly steep and as we ascend, we also encounter barbed wire fences to crawl under or gingerly step over. But an hour or so later — it was no shortcut — we spread our blankets victoriously on a knoll with the lush, green Salzachtal valley stretched out before us.

The next day we're happy to let a guide lead the way to another mountain top, this one much higher. At 1826m, Hochgrundeck is one of the highest forested mountain peaks in all Europe. It's a rainy day but fog makes the forest eerily interesting, even more so when we come to a deer blind in the woods. Built of split logs on stilts with a tin roof, the



Above: A spiral staircase is a recent addition to the Liechtenstein Gorge.

Left: Cows graze in the meadows above St Johann im Pongau.

Below left: Traditional European healing educator Viktoria Obinger.

Below right: A hunters' blind on Hochgrundeck mountain.



blind lets hunters see their prey without being seen themselves.

Hunting is popular here and deer hides make the best lederhosen, says Hannes, our guide. Not just a cliché, lederhosen are as popular as ever, I learn. "About 10 years ago women started wearing them," he tells me, adding that he was gifted "good ones" of deer skin for his 40th birthday, which he reserves for special occasions. (Austrians also have a fondness for killing and stuffing other wild animals, including marmots and rabbits, which adorn alpine huts and resorts.)

In a mountain hut at the top of Hochgrundeck, we dig into typical Austrian fare (tiroler groestl, for instance, is a tasty combination of



fried potatoes, onions and bacon) while a young man wearing lederhosen serves the requisite rounds of beer to wash it down.

After lunch, we walk to a mountaintop chapel dedicated to peace and learn that Hochgrundeck has long been revered as a "power spot" where people would practice ancient rituals. Continuing on, we reach the very summit with views in every direction. A sign reminds us that people still need to seek sanctuary in places like this in

CONTINUED PAGE 16



Picnicking in a meadow above St Johann im Pongau.

