

Green Skiing in the Alps

At the first glance, Werfenweng is one of those delightful mountain towns that anyone familiar with the European Alps will recognise. Located in the heart of Austria's Tennenengebirge range, around 45km from Salzburg, it is barely a few hundred properties strewn about the foot of an expansive valley, and dwarfed by snow-covered mountains. I arrive in bright sunshine to be met by a series of Para gliders sweeping down into a meadow of snow. Looking up to a cerulean sky more than 2,000m above, I spot a dozen or more gliders catching the thermals. As well as being a near-perfect location for paragliding, Werfenweng is also an intimate, family-oriented skiing and snowboarding area. It will surprise few people that Werfenweng's main industry is tourism. In a way it appears to be entirely unexceptional. Except it is not, Werfenweng is one of only two places in the Alps (the other is Arosa in Switzerland) that offers carbon-neutral holidays. For a number of eco-conscious travellers, this will immediately set the pulses racing. Equally, for many, the thought of a carbon-neutral holiday might set alarm bells ringing, manifesting images of paying over the odds, tiresome journeys on public transport and a lack of independence caused by restrictions on car use. But for those of the latter persuasion, Werfenweng could come as a surprise. Werfenweng is a member of the Alpine Pearls organisation, a project that seeks to promote sustainable tourism in the Alps, the central focus being to combine great sights with environmentally friendly transport initiatives. Today, 24 communities from Austria, Germany, Switzerland, France, Italy, and Slovenia are involved. The result, in Werfenweng at least, is something approaching a model sustainable tourist destination, where sustainability does not have to come at the expense of a great holiday.

I am staying at Wood Ridge, a group of five new Canadian-style wooden chalets. Located above the town and hemmed in by mountains on three sides, each chalet offers superb panoramic views of the whole area, most impressively the jagged Brandstätter Riedel mountain ridge opposite. My chalet features two spacious bedrooms, two bathrooms, a log-burning fire in the living room, a fitted kitchen, and a balcony to take in those views. Wood Ridge is only a few metres from a gentle ski slope for children and a little further from a beginners' ski slope and ski school. A ski lift takes more adventurous visitors 1,834m up to Bischlinghöhe ridge for skiing or paragliding. With 25km of easy, medium and difficult slopes, skiing at Werfenweng is neither extensive nor particularly taxing. But many visitors are attracted here by the distinct lack of hustle and bustle associated with some more illustrious, overrun ski resorts in the Alps. I hand over my train ticket, the all-important evidence that my journey to Werfenweng was made by rail. In return, I receive the magic card that allows me into the world of soft mobility. My credit-card-sized pass opens the door to a world of cross-country skiing, snow-shoe wilderness walks through stunning countryside, and, best of all, a 6km toboggan run down an adjacent valley. All this, however, should not give the impression that Werfenweng is some kind of sustainability nirvana. The scheme is far from perfect, as Brandauer admits. Alpine Pearls work with Climate Partner to invest in projects to balance the inevitable carbon footprint of anyone wishing to take a carbon-neutral holiday. And some guests with overly high expectations express their disappointment that, for example, the town has "too many roads" and "too many cars". Most significantly, there is the immutable contradiction between winter sports (energy-gorging snow-making machines and ski lifts) and sustainable tourism.

Q. Write and learn the spellings of the underlined words from the text.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

Q. Write the meanings of the following words in the spaces provided.

a. cerulean _____

b. illustrious _____

c. immutable _____

d. panoramic _____

e. nirvana _____

f. manifest _____

Q. Answer the following questions based on the text 'Green Skiing in the Alps'.

a. Describe Werfenweng from the writer's perspective.

b. What is Werfenweng popular for? What do most people enjoy practising there?

c. What organization is Werfenweng a part of? Describe the organization and its principles.

d. What is the writer's opinion about his chalet?

e. Why are many people attracted specifically to Werfenweng?

f. Why does the writer say the scheme in Werfenweng is 'far from perfect'?
