



Lake Chiemsee

Story by Eric Vohr, photos by Michaela Urban

One thing I have always found a bit odd about sailing is how often sailors like to motor. If the wind is too strong or too light, or the point of sail is not ideal, down go the sails and on goes the engine.

I'm guilty as well. Sure, when I first bought my boat, I was much more of a purist. I'd try to squeak a couple of knots of boat speed out of a mere hint of wind, just because it was "sailing." However, over the years, I fell prey to the urgency for speed that we all experience when sailing the Bay in light air (especially in August when the flies are biting).



■ Fraueninsel, where there is a 1000-year-old church.

■ Fishing boats on Fraueninsel on Lake Chiemsee.

There's a lot that makes sailing Chiemsee special, not the least of which is how clean it is. Fed by crystal clear water that trickles down from the Alps, this lake is highly protected by both locals and law. Powerboats of any kind (except electric) are more or less banned on the lake. The only exceptions are working boats that use fossil fuel engines and large sailboats that may use their engine to enter or leave their anchorage/harbor and for emergencies. The rest of the time, you have to depend on the wind.

Aside from being a pretty lake, Lake Chiemsee has two amazing islands. On one of these sits a famous German palace, and on the other, a 1000-year old church and monastery. Both of these historic sites were on the day's sailing agenda. The only problem was, there was barely a whisper of wind, which left me wondering how I was going to make it work.

Truth be told, it's relatively small at 31 square miles. It has a rich and healthy sailing tradition that goes back many years. The Chiemsee YC has been around since 1913, and Bavaria Yachts, a popular European charter vessel, was first conceived, designed, and built on this lake.

At least that was until I sailed on Lake Chiemsee. Located in the southeast corner of Germany near the Austrian border and Salzburg, Chiemsee is Bavaria's largest lake (referred to as the "Bavarian Sea").

Back on the Chesapeake Bay where I keep my boat, there's no question this would have been a motoring day. On Lake Chiemsee, it was not an option. I shouldn't have been so concerned, as people have been sailing without engines for centuries. It's just that, as I said, I had grown so dependent on motors. I'd forgotten the simple joy of sailing.

As one would expect, little puffs of wind came and went, and we moved right along. Even better, instead of worrying about where we were going and when we would get there, I just enjoyed the ride and the time out on the water, especially as I was spared the noisy growl of the engine and the smell of diesel exhaust.

Before I knew it we were closing in on the dock on Herreninsel or "Man Island." The largest island on the lake, Herreninsel is home to New Palace. This "replica" of French King Louis XIV's Versailles was built in the 19th century by the same crazy Bavarian King Ludwig II who built Neuschwanstein Castle in Schwangau (the one for which Disneyland modeled its castle).

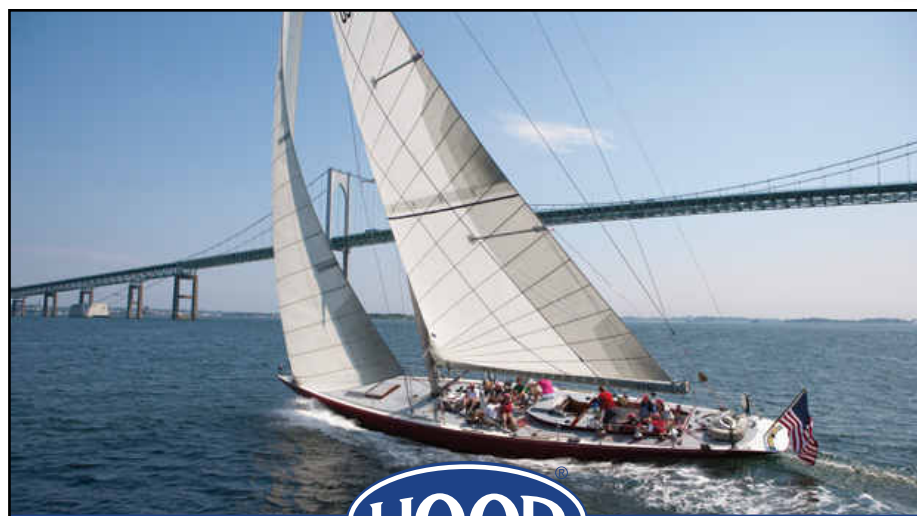
After an hour or so of touring the castle and grounds we headed back out on the lake, searching for more little puffs of wind to carry us over to the much smaller Fraueninsel "Woman Island." Here we toured a 1000-year-old, operational church and convent. So many worshipers have passed through the doors of this church that the stone threshold is worn down several inches.

The island is also home to a small fishing village where we grabbed a quick lunch of Lake Chiemsee smoked trout on a semmel (roll).

Instead of bobbing around like a cork, our peaceful day sailing took us to all the sites we wanted to visit, including a couple of the lake's sandy swimming beaches. The only time I thought we might have an issue was when we were heading back, and the wind completely died. The only concern was that we had to return the boat. That being said, on Lake Chiemsee, when the wind is light, everyone has to wait. Before I really even started to sweat it, I saw a little movement on the lake's glassy surface. My sails filled, and we gently rolled into the harbor.



Artist community Fraueninsel on Lake Chiemsee.



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I have to admit, when I started this day, I would have loved to have about eight to 10 knots of breeze so that I could really move around. Looking back, I wouldn't change a thing.

In many ways we were lucky, as the wind can really honk on this lake (due to the close proximity of the Alps), and heavy air can make for a stressful day.

As my dad likes to say, "Sailing is 90 percent calm bliss and 10 percent sheer terror."

Sailing in light air was not only a great way to enjoy this historic lake, but it also opened my eyes to a joy of sailing that I had forgotten over the years. What's the point of owning a sailboat if you're going to run the motor all the time?

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