

# Hooked on fishing, hiking in the Austrian Alps



Fischteich Lech is a convenient stop along the 78-mile Lechweg hiking trail that starts in Austria and ends in Germany. (Michaela Urban)

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**I** imagine angling for fresh trout in a mountain lake at the base of the towering Austrian Alps, catching one within seconds and then having it cooked and served alongside a crisp, fresh mug of Fohrenburger beer.

I don't know about you, but my usual fishing experience is casting for a couple of hours with no bites, getting bored and ordering takeout.

The fish are a little more eager to please at Fischteich Lech, a small Alpine pond in the Austrian state of Vorarlberg. It doesn't hurt that the lake is stocked with trout and char that will pretty much bite at anything. Add to that the fact that you're using real bait in the form of local worms, and it's your classic "fish in a barrel" scenario.

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The restaurant that owns this private pond is also called Fischteich Lech, and both are located in the

tiny village of Zug near Lech, Austria.

Tables and benches are situated by the pond for alfresco dining, or you can eat inside the restaurant, which has a very informal and relaxed atmosphere. Members of the restaurant's staff will give you a lesson beforehand on how to kill the fish quickly and humanely to minimize suffering. (They even do it for you if you'd rather take a more hands-off approach.) They'll also supply you with all the gear you need, since most of us don't travel with rods and reels.

Just inside the main door is a very cute Alpine-style restaurant — think wood, wood and more wood. It's not uncommon to feel you're stepping back in time here, as nothing changes much, appearance-wise, in these mountain villages. A larger room is reminiscent of a beer hall with long tables. Because there was a hot soccer match on TV, we followed the locals and ate there. The Austrians might not have the greatest soccer team, but like all Europeans, they love the sport.

Fischteich Lech can be found on the first stage of the famous Lechweg, a long-distance hike that follows the River Lech from its source, a spring near Formarinsee lake in Vorarlberg, to the Lech waterfall in Fussen, Germany. The 78-mile trek is divided into 15 stages. Some of it can be strenuous, but this first stage is a fairly easy 9-mile stroll through some of the most beautiful mountain scenery you can imagine.

The people who call this part of the world home take good care of the land. You won't see a collection of rusted washing machines or old cars clogging up the yards. Even the woodpiles are attractive and stylish.

Completing the scene is a picturesque collection of old churches, cows with big brass bells hung on heavy leather halters, and ornate wooden houses that look straight off the set of "The Sound of Music." Soaring mountain peaks unmarred by development make up the stunning backdrop. As the trail follows the river, there are numerous little ponds and marshes, exploding with rich green grasses and delicate mountain flowers. You get the picture. It's amazingly beautiful here.

Fischteich Lech is fairly close to the end of that first 9-mile stage of the Lechweg, so it makes for a nice stop for lunch or dinner, depending on when you start your journey. It also gives you great incentive to reach your destination, although I enjoyed every bit of the hike along the way.

If fishing for your meal isn't your thing, the restaurant also serves pre-caught fish, as well as a wide variety of local cheese and meat. Fish is served fried, marinated or smoked. I recommend the smoked option. They use a special wood-chip mix and spices and serve it hot. They also sell vacuum-packed smoked trout if you're on the go.

Like most businesses in this region, Fischteich Lech is locally owned and operated. If you've never experienced Alpine Austrian hospitality, be prepared for some very nice people. When we entered the restaurant, I felt as if I were going into someone's home rather than a place of business. People here

come from a long line of farmers and have a laid-back, comfortable manner that's infectious.

Fishing season runs from late June to early October. If you haven't yet experienced the Austrian Alps in the summer, all I can say is: What are you waiting for? As these mountains are best known for skiing, you'll find good deals on lodging and not a lot of crowds during the warmer months.

While Fischteich Lech has the best gimmick with its eat-your-catch offering, pretty much all the restaurants we visited in the region had great food. The clean mountain air and fresh Alpine grasses produce some of the best meats and cheeses I've had anywhere.

My favorite dish is Kasespatzle, an Austrian spin on mac and cheese. Each version tastes different, depending on the type of local cheese. My advice: Try them all.

*Eric Vohr is a freelance writer.*

If you go

Fischteich Lech website (in German): [www.fischteich-lech.at/startseite.php](http://www.fischteich-lech.at/startseite.php)

Lechweg hike: [www.lechzuers.com/lechweg](http://www.lechzuers.com/lechweg)

Lodging: Pension Daniel ([www.pension-daniel.at/en](http://www.pension-daniel.at/en)) and Hotel Roggal ([www.roggal.com/en](http://www.roggal.com/en))

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