

## **Benedict Trail -- The Pope Might Live In Rome, But This Is Home!**

Within the Catholic Community there's a widespread belief that only Popes are infallible. So, it's not far-fetched then that the creators of the Benedict Trail (or, *Benediktweg* in German) created this scenic route with a flaw.

How can this be? A tourist route totally dedicated to this 21st century German pope is wrong?

Wait, let me explain first...

The Benedict Trail is a 248km circular cycling route through [Upper Bavaria](#), taking you to Benedict XVI's hometown, the town where he spent his days in the seminary, and to churches, abbeys, and monasteries that were here centuries before.

Technically the route starts in [Altötting](#), a pilgrimage town for the last 1200 years. This magnificent town should be the LAST town you visit. But, in all fairness I'll start the Benedict Trail here and you can make your own judgement to whether you want to save this place until the end.

Over a million visitors come to Altötting a year, even having received some papal visitors as well — think Pius VI (18th century) and John Paul II (20th century). Benedict XVI came here when he was just plain old Joseph Ratzinger with his father.

Everyone and anyone comes to see Chapel Altötting with its Black Madonna and hears the legend of a local woman bringing her drowned son in front of the Madonna, who was revived — back in 1489. Also within the Chapel Altötting are the hearts of [Bavarian](#) rulers, including the hearts of Ludwig II, his father and grandfather.

Centuries before the Chapel Altötting, Monastery Altötting, and the Abbey Church were built Altötting was a Celtic & Roman settlement town. At the Diaorama Show you can get an interactive look at 5,000 years of Altötting's history. That's a lot of history, religion, and culture all in one place!

The next town on the Benedict Trail is [Neuötting](#). Unlike most [German towns](#) this old, you're not going to find a large number of timber-framed houses on the Marktplatz. Here in Neuötting they're mostly designed in the Inn-Salzach architectural style.

The Gothic Town Church of St. Nicolas and the Burghauser & Landshuter City Gates make great photos to remember your trip. Plus, don't leave without visiting the Town Museum and St. Anna Church (b. 1511).

Marktl am Inn seems to be the right place to start the Benedict Trail. Why? Because Joseph Ratzinger or Pope Benedict XVI was born in Marktl am Inn on April 16, 1927. He was baptized at the 15th century St. Nicolas Church, no one knowing then he would grow up to be Pope. Young Joseph lived here until 1929 — but, the lookout point over by the 16th century Church of St. Sebastian was here long before he was though. Marktl also has a nature reserve area and a local history museum to visit while you're here.

Before making your way off to [Burghausen](#), stop at the Gothic St. Nicolas Church in Hohenwart. Its winged alter is a fantastic example of medieval artwork.

Burghausen has one of the longest fortresses in all of Germany, the [Burghausen Castle](#). It also has six courtyards and a chapel. Besides having a Local History Museum, a Photo Museum, many timber framed houses, the 14th century Church of the Holy Spirit, and an early 16th century St. Jacob Church — Burghausen has a nature reserve area with a beach, so you can totally let your hair down!

In 1929 young Joseph moved to [Tittmoning](#), but before you arrive here you'll pass through Raitenhaslach and Marienberg.

Over in Raitenhaslach there's an extensive Cistercian Abbey complex (built 1146) with more Baroque art treasures than you can imagine. The 18th century Pilgrimage Church Maria Himmelfahrt is done in a Rococo style that'll send you into sensory overload. Your eyes won't know what to focus on first — the gold details, the cherubs, or the marble!

Tittmoning wasn't always Bavarian — it was ruled by Salzburg in the 13th century. This is a pretty interesting town with a historic *Rathaus* (Town Hall), a *Heimatmuseum* (Local History Museum), and a Tanning Museum (and not the kind filled with sunning beds!).

The Parish & Abbey Church of St. Lorenz is also a frequently visited site — and shouldn't be missed! The last time Pope Benedict was here in 1983, when he was known as Cardinal Ratzinger, for the church's 300th birthday.

Passing through [Waging am See](#), you'll be tempted to just keep wandering around all the half-timbered buildings on the Marktplatz and the 17th century St. Martin Church. That's not even including the Bavarian Museum with all sorts of archaeological finds — but, you'll be doing yourself an injustice if you don't take a dip in one of Bavaria's warmest lakes! Ahhhh, refreshing!

Onwards to [Traunstein](#)! This is where brothers Georg & Joseph Ratzinger said their first mass together at St. Oswalds; and where Joseph went to Seminary. Joseph returned here to Traunstein after serving time in a POW camp and his parents old farmhouse is located on Eichenweg 19. Pope Benedict has always felt an affinity towards the Traunstein Seminary — often returning throughout the years to take the pilgrimage to Maria Eck, some 10km away.

Today, just as they did about 60 years ago in Benedict's time everyone loves to swim, sail, and surf in Chieming. When you're waterlogged enough, come back to dry land and visit Castle Neuenchieming. You don't have to go too far as it's right on the edge of the lake!

When arriving in Seeon-Seebruck, I know what you'll be thinking... What does this old Roman town have to do with the Benedict Trail? Not all that much, really, its just that its 15th century St. Thomas Church and Roman Museum are historical and educational.

I kind of like the Benedictine Monastery in Seeon, personally. Well, it's not a monastery (quite famous for medieval book illustrating) anymore — it's a convention center now and still located right out on an island in the middle of the lake is pretty cool.

Oh sure, what can you do in Gstadt am Chiemsee after you've visited the Church of Sts. Peter & Paul? Oh, how about a boat ride to Frauenchiemsee and it's 8th century convent; or to Herrenchiemsee with its 17th century church & 12th century [Herrenchiemsee castle](#). Sounds good, right?

Another castle can be found at Amerang, this one from the 16th century; and it has a castle museum! We Germans love our [cars](#), so the Automobile Museum is a good idea!

At the bend along the [Inn River](#) is [Wasserburg am Inn](#), a place that retains its medieval feel. The paintings in the 14th century *Frauenkirche* are just divine and there are many framework homes from the 15th and 16th centuries! Other artwork can be found along the Sculpture Trail — and [German beer](#) is the highlight at the Beer Cellar Museum.

Oh, what? Because this is the Benedict Trail — I can't mention beer? Benedict might be pope and now living in Rome — but Joseph Ratzinger is a Bavarian — so dollars to donuts, I'm sure he still appreciates a good brew ;-)

All right, enough about beer for now — it's time to get back to the churches and monasteries that highlight this route. Good thing there's a gorgeous one in the town of Gars am Inn. Only one this old (8th century) could possibly distract you from the beer, of course ;-)

Kloster Au isn't nearly as old — this one wasn't built until the year 1000. It used to house the relics of St. Felicitas and her seven sons. The convent buildings are still used by Franciscan nuns — the same order of nuns that taught Pope Benedict music lessons. I'm sure they didn't let him or his sister (who went to school here) drink at the courtyard biergarten. Then again, maybe they did?

We're almost at the end of our Benedict Trail — and Joseph lived here in Aschau am Inn from 1932-1937 on Hauptstrasse 21. Aschau is a real look at a real Bavarian rural town, which Benedict wrote about in his autobiography.

Long before becoming Pope (or even Cardinal for that matter), Joseph used to be an alter server at the St. Maria Himmelfahrt Church. While you're at it, come see the 13th century Church of St. Peter, too.

[Mühldorf am Inn](#) might have been a Roman town, but its the Middle Ages and the Renaissance that have really shaped it here!

You'll also find that the Marktplatz is done in the Inn-Salzach architectural style — but, the Renaissance Town Hall and the medieval Smokehouse are what really gives this town its flavor! Yeah, I know — bad pun!

Because this is your second to last town on the Benedict Trail, take your time here — you'll be glad you did. Mühldorf has many beautiful churches, including the 14th century St. Johanneskapelle which is right next door to the very early 14th century St. Nicolas Church.

If you want to explore the countryside, Mühldorf has a nature reserve area with many walking paths — and a public transportation system that can take you just about anywhere in Upper Bavaria (and Germany)!

Don't leave yet, though! You got one more town on the *Benediktweg*! Tüßling might be last, but it's certainly not least — and you're only about 7km from Altötting, where you started (or not). Visitors come to Tüßling to see its 14th century Pilgrimage Church Heilingenstatt (relics included), its 18th century *Marktkirche* St. Georg, and Schloss Tüßling (built 1583).

Tüßling also has a Brewery Museum. ;-)

Oh, wait a minute! You know how I said that maybe you might want to end your journey on the Benedict Trail in the town of Altötting. I think I take that back... You've come this far on such a religious and devotional route, why not end it with a fine beer? As I said before Joseph Ratzinger is a Bavarian — he'd appreciate one, too (if no one's lookin'!) ;-)