

Zugspitze -- The Height of Germany's Alpine Glory

What is now, at 2,964 meters/9727 feet of sheer, unyielding rock and ice on the German/Austrian border was, over 200 million years ago, a natural feature of an entirely different sort. Germany's Zugspitze mountain looms where there was once an enormous coral reef in the prehistoric Tethys Ocean.

The world then was a very different place, with dinosaurs roaming the supercontinents of Laurasia, where Europe now sits, and Gondwana, which has been transformed to Africa. The two eventually collided, as supercontinents do, forcing the floor of the Tethys Ocean upward and forming the Alps, which were further sculpted over millions of years by glaciers.

Zugspitze's unforgivingly steep and exposed profile requires of those who dare to scale it a one-to-two-day climb, but for the rest of us there is a quick and comfy alternative.

When Germany won the right to host the 1936 Winter Olympics for Germany, [Adolf Hitler](#) ordered the ancient Bavarian villages of Garmisch and Partenkirchen, at the foot of the Zugspitze, to unite. [Garmisch-Partenkirchen](#)'s rack-and-pinion *Zugspitzbahn* railway soon followed, and still operates today ferrying eager but less daring tourists to the summit.

They might be joined by other tourists who made the hair-raising ascent even more quickly, in one of the glass-bottomed cable cars of the Eibsee Aerial Tramway at Grainau. This ride is not advised for those with a fear of heights, because they will be exposed to the sight of the Zugspitze's sheer slopes flashing beneath!

Fortunately, the destination is worth the trip. For those who still have the nerve to reach it, the "true" summit of the Zugspitze is marked by a gold cross and accessible with a climb along some steel cables sunk into the bedrock, but surrounded by steep drop-offs.

More timid souls can relax at the visitors' center, with its bilingual displays (German and English), or find sustenance at the highest restaurant in all of Germany! Unparalleled photo ops of the Alps await at the observation deck.

Back at the base of the Zugspitze, the town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen attracts winter sports enthusiasts from around the globe. Its five ski resorts are blessed with snow eight months of the year, from October to May, and its forty ski lifts mean that nobody has to wait long to hit the more than 70km/44miles of trails!

While drastic measures, including the use of enormous protective tarps, are being taken to slow the melting of the mountain's glacier, Lake Eibsee at its base is thriving from the additional melt. Here you can enjoy the Alpine scenery from an entirely different perspective, by renting a canoe, kayak, or paddleboat, and exploring the 2.5 sq. km (1.5 sq. mi) reaches of its deeply sapphire, deeply cold

waters!

A most charming side trip during a visit to the Zugspitze would be to the mountain village of Farchant, which could have been used as the movie set for Shirley Temple's 1937 film *Heidi*. Just 4.5km/3 miles northeast of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, but an entire lifestyle away, Farchant has everything you'd expect from a Bavarian mountain hamlet.

Its farmhouses date back to the 17th and 18th centuries, and its lederhosened farmer still herd their cattle along the cobbled streets. See them as you follow the well-marked *Walderlebnispfad* (woodland path) for about 45 minutes to the *Kuhflucht Wasserfälle*. This is actually a series of three waterfalls, with a total height of 270 meters (885 feet), formed by the Kuhflucht Creek.

Finally, if all the Alpine climbing and fresh air have honed your appetite, the 4-star Eibsee Hotel is waiting with four different restaurants, and dishes which include trout and char caught right from the lake! The salmon with rosemary clam sauce at Joseph-Naus-Stub'n, in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, is worth your attention too!