

# Holiday on The Farm

Connect with nature while unplugging from city life... but leave enough time to milk the cows

BY PAUL MALONE



PHOTO: WALDIERTEL TOURISMUS, CHRISTOPHERSCHBAUM - WWW.ISHOOTPEOPLE.AT



The Waldviertel (Forest District) in Lower Austria offers radiant foliage in fall.

**W**e talk about our dream of country life, walking arm in arm down a quiet lane while cattle graze in a field nearby; crossing a babbling brook in the shade of a mighty oak, the aroma of freshly cut hay radiant in the afternoon sun...

To many people, few scenes are more charming or idyllic than an Austrian farmhouse in the fall, enfolded by meadows and the radiant oranges of the woods. Down on the farm, fond memories grow as abundantly as apples. So with a few days free on the Malone calendar, we packed the stroller and bikes and set off for the Waldviertel in Lower Austria, to holiday on the Bruckner family's organic farm.

Lucy, a friendly chocolate-coloured Labrador, greeted us at the entrance. With tail wagging, she led us past other guests settled at the campfire, grilling frankfurters on sticks, to meet the jovial farm matriarch, "Elfi" Bruckner.

"I speak a liddle biddle English," Elfi said as we shook hands.



"Your English is outstanding," I said. Elfi chuckled and showed us around the generous rooms in a honey-timbered finish, along with a wellness area to steam away any quarrelsome city thoughts. We crossed paths with her husband Martin, the village mayor, on his way out to the volunteer fire brigade festival. He tipped his hat and twiddled his lips, making baby talk with our daughter in her stroller. She stared up at him in mild astonishment.

"Just think," my wife said later, when I finally rested my head on the pillow, "we're now friends with the mayor."

"Incredible," I murmured, and drifted off.

#### RURAL VENTURES

Maybe calling Martin a friend was a stretch, but wherever one "farm holidays" in Austria, a vibrant community is there to be discovered – the farmer-mayor who hangs his official robes over his muddy boots; an uncle who plays the tuba and commands the volunteer fire brigade; an aunt who sits on the local planning board when she's not raising prize

Landscape near Rapottenstein Castle: never captured, it is one of the best preserved in the country.



PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: JOHANNES BEHN/PICTUREDESK.COM; WALDVIERTEL TOURISMUS; CHRISTOPH KERSCHBAUM - WWW.ISHOOTPEOPLE.AT; WALDVIERTEL TOURISMUS; ISHOOTPEOPLE.AT

roses. Everyone has a sideline. Whether its homemade chocolate, organic herbs, or handmade paper, behind the quaint facade and quietude of country life lies enough entrepreneurial spirit and gritty determination to make the most diligent Protestant raise a righteous brow.

Our country breakfast came with eggs from the Bruckner family chickens (they all had names), freshly baked bread, homemade apple juice and marmalade – all of it organic. I sampled it all while our son scooted out to the barn to join the other children at the adventure playground. Later we rode our bikes leisurely along a back road to a granite outcrop overlooking patchwork fields – some the vibrant yellow of ripe corn, others already fallow for the fall. A veil of rain caressed the far fields as a rainbow scythed the sky. Our son wondered about that "pot of gold" and my wife frowned at her mobile and said we'd better hurry back if we wanted to milk the cows. So much for a laid-back day – there was just so much more to do.

#### SPOILT FOR CHOICE

Wherever you farm holiday in Austria, you'll face a similar challenge: striking the balance between relaxing and exploring all the local sights and activities. With over 2,500 registered holiday farms in Austria, every region has its unique charms.

Our son did discover a pot of gold (of sorts) the next morning: a bustling bakery in Weitra, re-

nowned for its delicious poppyseed cakes (*Mohnzelten*) baked with potato flour. Cookie Monster had nothing on him as he gobbled them down.

On our final evening, Elfi made us a scrumptious dish: cooked beef, rolled around a filling (*Rindsrouladen*). Among the dinner guests was a Hungarian woman who played the *Koboz* (a central European lute). "I'm still learning," she told me as I eyed the *Koboz*'s sharply bent neck; it looked as if some listener (its sound was, well, an "acquired" taste) had tried to snap it in half.

Later at the campfire, we listened to her play Hungarian folk songs (these actually sounded lovely) and gazed at the sparks whirling into the starry night.

"Can't we stay another night?" my son asked, skewering another marshmallow.

"If only we could," my wife said, finishing with an all-good-things-come-to-an-end discourse that left us all feeling a little melancholic.

In the morning, Lucy the Labrador mooched about our car, hoping to snaffle one of those poppyseed cakes my son had set on the back seat for the drive home. As we pulled away, Elfi waved from the doorway. Martin nodded from his tractor as we passed on the lane.

A meandering country road led us back onto the motorway where I shifted into top gear and we settled in for the ride home. But my mind was already scouring the calendar for the next chance we might have to come back. 🍪

Farm stays are not only relaxing; they're also an excellent way to get city kids to connect with nature and animals.

#### FACTS

One of the best sites to find out more about farm holidays:

**FARMHOLIDAYS.COM**

Similar to hotel rankings, according to stars, farms that are registered with Farm Holidays are ranked according to flowers, from 1 for basic to the quite lavish 4.

**THE BRUCKNER**

**FAMILY FARM:**

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