

SUMMER HIKING AND MOUNTAIN BIKING VS. SKIING IN AUSTRIA



Austria is embracing the shift from winter tourism to summer activities, particularly mountain biking. The country promotes alpine mountain biking as a key summer attraction when the snow melts.

Summer tourism now contributes more to the economy than winter tourism, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic. From May to October, the summer season, they generated 15 out of 29.5 billion euros in annual revenue last year. **This significant economic boost is a testament to the growing popularity of summer activities in Austria.** A recent government survey revealed that over a quarter of tourists visit Austria in the summer specifically for cycling, following hiking as the top summer activity. As a result, bike sales in the country have soared, with over 500,000 bicycles sold in 2022, nearly half of which were mountain bikes, representing a 15% increase since 2019.

A National "Mountain Bike Plan"

In Leogang-Saalbach, the same cable car cabins and ski lifts transport bikes to the top of the 90 kilometers of slopes. At the beginning of the year, the government initiated a "mountain bike plan" to help resorts expand the number of trails exclusively for cyclists by increasing contracts with landowners who currently limit access. Although there are more than twenty suitable parks, the supply of trails is inadequate compared to the demand.

"Tourism professionals need to rethink their activities and adapt to new trends in response to increasingly shorter ski seasons caused by a lack of snow due to climate change," explains Martin Schnitzer, a sports economist at the University of Innsbruck. Vienna is now taking a serious look at this issue.

The 1975 law on forests allows walkers to use them, but it only provides cycling if written authorization is obtained from the owner. This is seen as a radical exclusion of a sport, with other Alpine countries not having such strict regulations. Offenders risk a hefty fine of 730 euros for "violation of property," which can sometimes amount to several thousand euros.

Conflicts between Hikers and Cyclists

Hikers are not used to sharing the terrain, which leads to numerous potential conflicts. As a pioneer, Leogang Park has found solutions to diversify since its creation in 2001, signing agreements to defuse disputes. This success has paid off: in ten years, the number of new summer visitors has increased by 70%, reaching 260,000 last year. The number of overnight stays now exceeds the winter season. This success story is a beacon of hope, showing that with the right approach, conflicts can be resolved, and all can enjoy the beauty of the Austrian landscape.

However, cohabitation between locals, walkers, and go-getters remains difficult. **Nature lovers seeking peace and quiet sometimes clash, and hunters fear these new visitors in their colorful outfits will scare away their game.**

Experts insist that ensuring peaceful coexistence between the different parties should be the government's priority. This effort is worth it, as it ensures that all can enjoy the beauty of the Austrian landscape.

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