

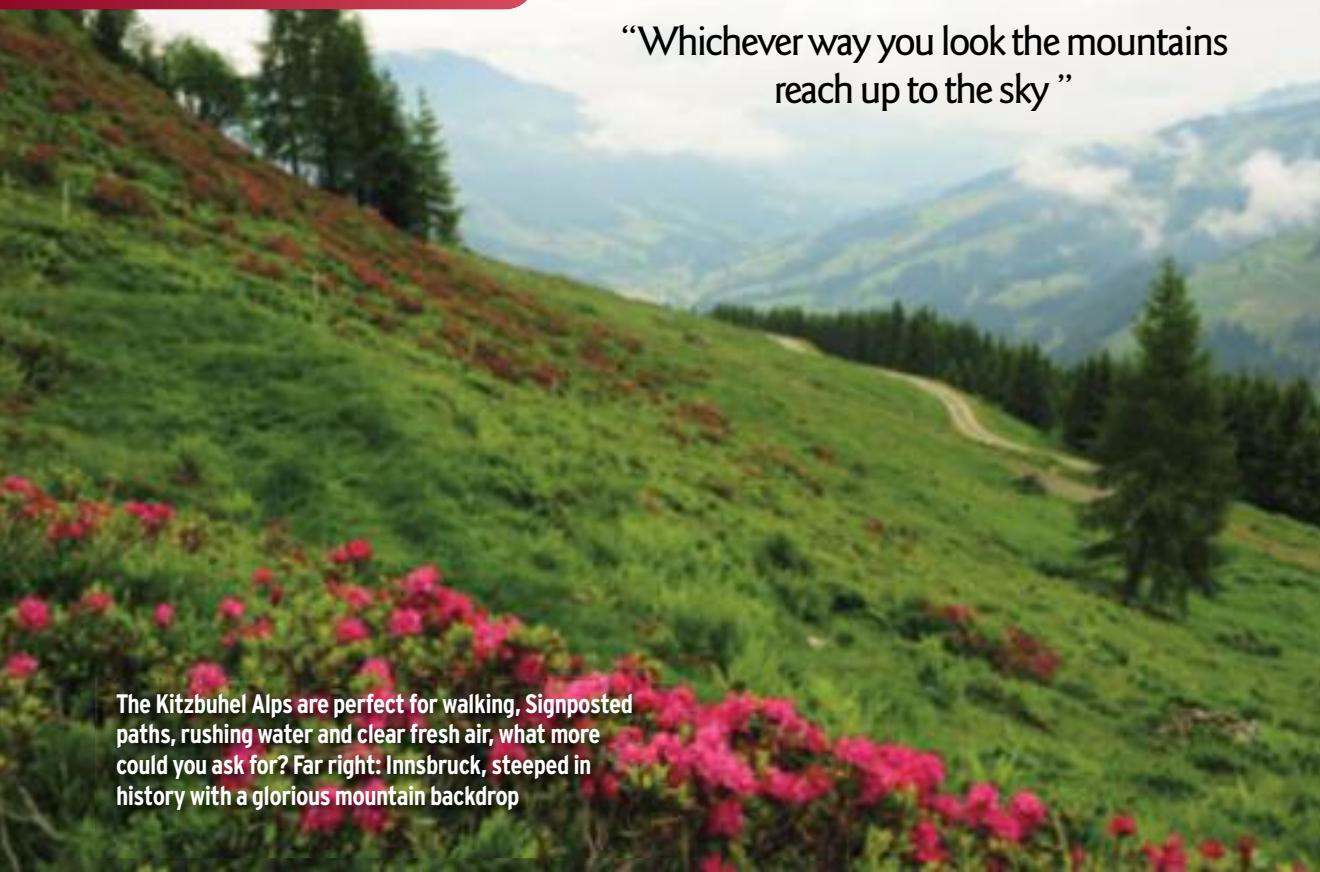
The Bergisel Ski jump provides a great view over beautiful Innsbruck

A topping time in Tirol

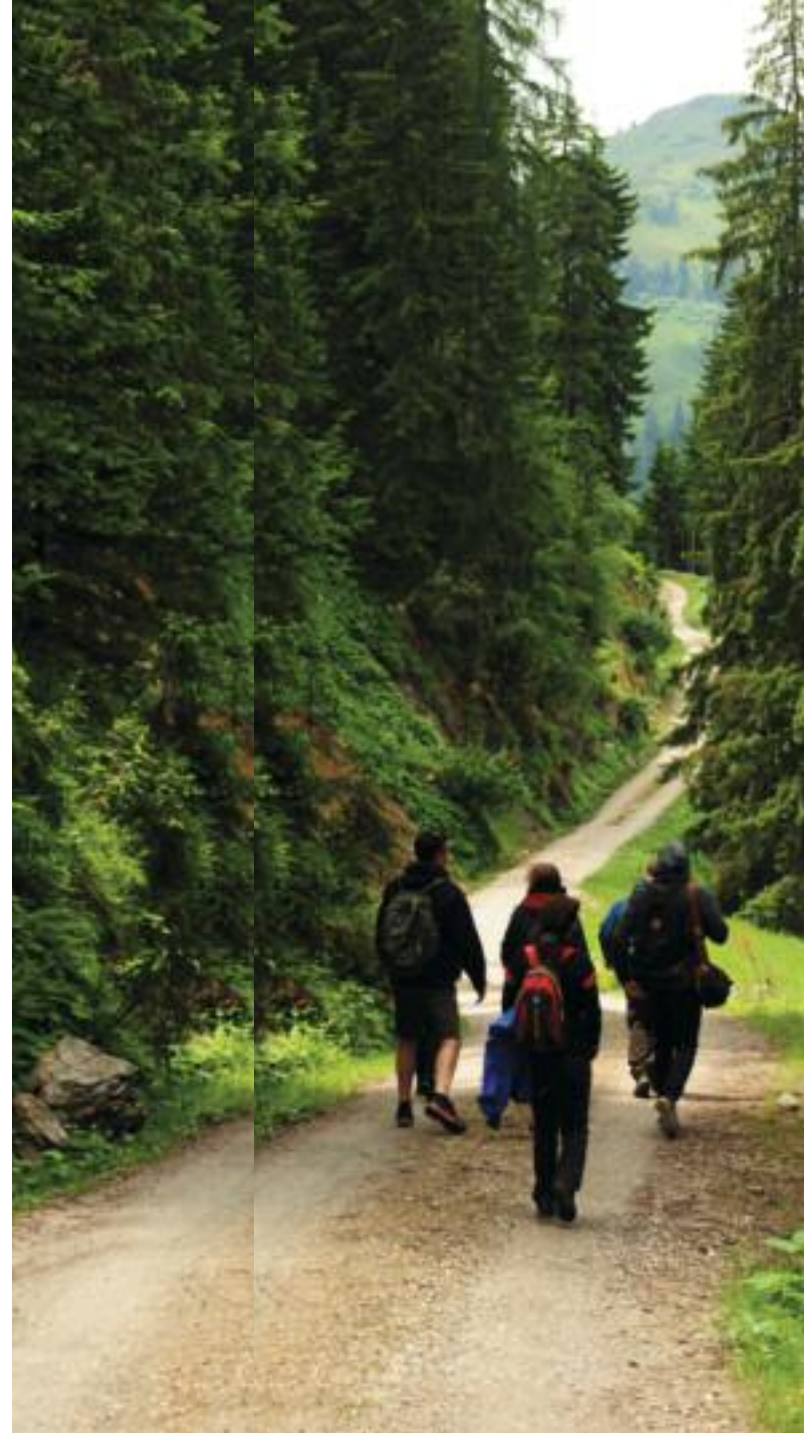
Leave the ski jumping to the professionals, advises **Clive Nicholls** – but he still has a tip-top time in the Austrian Tirol

PHOTOGRAPHY: CLIVE NICHOLLS

“Whichever way you look the mountains reach up to the sky”



The Kitzbuhel Alps are perfect for walking, signposted paths, rushing water and clear fresh air, what more could you ask for? Far right: Innsbruck, steeped in history with a glorious mountain backdrop



THE VIEW from the top of the ski jump is mesmerising. The whole of Innsbruck is spread out before me and the Austrian Alps form a dramatic backdrop to this beautiful, historic city. The take-off slope looks unbelievably steep and I must admit I'm in awe of the sportsmen (and women) who have the bottle to launch themselves down the hill at 60mph, fly 200 yards and then crash-land into packed ice before the safety fence stops them injuring the spectators. I can imagine that if I got to the top, skis

on, and the call came out “Nicholls, you're up next” I would politely decline: “No thanks, the view is too good to miss.” Britain's own, much-loved, Eddie the Eagle came to grief here with a bone-breaking crash and a visit to the local hospital. Enjoy the view and leave the skiing to someone else – that's my advice. Innsbruck is fairly compact and with a good pair of shoes and a hearty breakfast you can cover most of it on foot. Taking the lift down from the ski jump, after a short walk across the park the next stop is the Tirol Panorama. This is a huge

painting (1000 square metres) covering the dramatic events in the history of the Tirol. It's a 360-degree scene that you walk around on an elevated platform and is painted in a way that makes it appear almost 3D. It's unusual and fascinating in equal measure – definitely worth a visit. Moving on, the Grassmayr family bell foundry is open to the public. It has been making bells for more than 400 years and this is part museum, part working bell foundry. The museum is interesting, but watching huge church bells being lifted from the

moulds they were cast in is a bit special. There's a shop and it's pretty tempting to take a bell home as a souvenir, but the bigger, tasty ones are too heavy for my baggage allowance... I'm only in Innsbruck for a short time (too short, as there is so much to see) but I can't miss the tomb of Emperor Maximilian in the Court Church. The cenotaph is impressive but the 28 larger-than-life statues that flank it are superb and dramatic, and for me they steal the show. There were originally meant to be 40



Clockwise: The larger than life statues stand guard for Emperor Maximilian; the Tirol Park Panorama - a 1000 sqm of artwork; the visitor centre at Sworkvoski - a work of art in it's own right; The Grassmayr Bell Foundry and fabulous food at Hotel Rosengarten



Passport to Tirol

■ This summer in the Austrian Tirol, Inghams has introduced city breaks in Innsbruck and added two new luxury properties to its portfolio, the five-star Relais & Chateaux Rosengarten in Kirchberg and the four-star Hotel aDlers in Innsbruck

■ Inghams - tel: 01483 791114, website: (www.inghams.co.uk) - offers seven nights at the Relais & Chateaux Rosengarten on half-board followed by a three-night city-break at the Hotel aDlers on B&B from £1439pp

■ Price includes return flights to Innsbruck and resort transfers. Regional flights are available from Bristol (+£69), Birmingham (+£49), Manchester (+£49), Leeds-Bradford (+£59) and Edinburgh (+£69)

■ For more information about Tirol, see the website: (www.visittirol.co.uk), for Innsbruck see: (www.innsbruck.info) and for the Kitzbüheler Alps region see: (www.kitzalps.com).

but even 28 let you know this is no ordinary memorial.

In the old town the Golden Roof (it's actually copper) covers a balcony where Maximilian could look out over the town square and watch the festivities. Completed in 1500, it adds drama and gravitas to his second-floor viewing platform.

The mountain backdrop that I saw from the ski jump provides another view of the city – and a great place for lunch. The Nordketten Cable Car whisks you up there in a matter of minutes.

It's 2000m high at the restaurant so on

a clear day the view from the terrace is amazing. Lunch or afternoon tea? Both are tempting.

Innsbruck is a beautiful city but Austria has wonderful countryside, too. Next stop is Kirchberg in the mountains.

In the winter it's a top skiing venue, but in early summer it's perfect for hiking.

A localised storm stops me putting on my walking shoes for a while but I'm staying in the five-star Hotel Rosengarten so it's no hardship – I'll enjoy a longer relaxing breakfast until the rain eases up. Kirchberg is in the

Kitzbühel Alps and the region is just so very beautiful.

When the rain stops, shoes on, I walk up the valley to Aschau. Mountain streams, waterfalls, clearly signposted walking trails – you couldn't wish for more.

Whichever way you look, the mountains reach up to the sky, and the soundtrack is of rushing mountain streams which, coupled with the tinkling of cowbells, toys with your senses; the air tastes so pure.

The other great thing about walking is

that you work up an appetite and, because of the calories you've just burned, you're free to indulge.

Just as well: Simon Taxacher, who runs the Rosengarten with Sandra Kobald, is one of Austria's top chefs. I'm tempted by the Tyrolean speciality 'Schulutzkröpfen' (cottage cheese ravioli with chive butter) and green salad eased down with some fine local wines. Hmm, I could get used to this...

I've visited a wonderful city, walked in beautiful mountains, stayed in two spectacular hotels, eaten fine local foods,

sampled Austrian wine – now there's just one more stop on the way back to the airport.

Austria is famous for crystal glass, including the world-leader, Swarovski.

Its visitor centre is a work of art, with dramatic themed halls, magnificent crystal gardens (600,000 crystals in its 'crystal cloud'), a maze and a superb children's play centre, where adults can have a go, too – what more can you ask?

I've enjoyed my time in Austria: winter or summer, it's a delight. It's easy (and tempting) to do too much, but allow time to relax – it's even better.