

A Pictorial of Our Edelweiss High Alpine Tour, 2011

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As did the main characters in the movie *The Bucket List*, I am also making a list of things that I want to do in life—and one of the items on my list was to motorcycle in Europe, especially in the Alps!

To that end—and with a friend of mine named Andy Stewart in tow—I did just that. And I must say it was the best ride of my life so far. So let me tell you a bit about it...

The Plans

After much research, and based on their experience and reputation, I chose Edelweiss Bike Travel and proceeded to book our trip. The trip included all accommodations, all breakfasts, three picnic lunches in the Alps and all dinners. Also included was transportation of our luggage in a van every day to our next hotel so that it was waiting for us in our rooms. (How nice that was, since then all we had to carry was what we needed for the day.)

The Trip Before the Ride

We flew to Munich, Germany two days early in order to get rid of our jet lag and to take the Alps riding training school, which was very beneficial since we were first-time Alps riders.

In it, we had a classroom session, parking lot with pylons session, and an afternoon of local riding in the countryside to familiarize ourselves with our bikes. This was worth the extra cost; we ride Gold Wings back home, but for this trip we wanted a smaller and lighter bike, so we chose the BMW F650 GS Twin and really liked them. For riding one-up, they were ideal—with no lack of power in the steep and twisty turns we encountered in the passes.

The Ride

Our first hotel was the Hotel Henry in Erding, Germany. After breakfast, we left for Chiemsee (*aka* The Bavarian Sea) for a coffee break and then headed on to the Grossglockner Pass in Austria. Soon, we started to experience winding curves and even snow, with 0.5 deg Celsius at the top. (It wound up being our coldest day on the whole trip, but it was worth it to see the beauty.)

Then we went down the other side to our second night's stay in Hotel Traube in Lienz, Austria. This hotel, as were all the others, was not a five-star hotel; however, it was clean, comfortable and a very friendly place to stay.

The next morning, we were on our way through the Italian Alps and the famous Dolomites for our subsequent destination. While riding, we encountered one alpine pass after another with sharp, 180-degree switchbacks.

The roads are narrower than at home, and the scenery was beyond anything we had expected. We stopped many times to take pictures and to just gather in all the beauty. And in this way, Edelweiss was very accommodating. Since there were 19 bikes, we split the groups into two and they always had a tour guide for each group. However, as long as there were at least two bikes riding together, we could do our own thing—which we did—they simply told us where the next hotel was and how to get there and to call their cell phones if we really got lost.

Thankfully, we didn't get very lost (even though we strayed from the group many times). Every evening we ended up in our hotel. In this particular instance, it was the Parkhotel Luna Mondschein in Bolzano, Italy. Here, we had a "rest day", so we headed back into the Dolomites for some more of the beauty of this area.



The Hotel Traube in Lienz, Austria.

Our Ride Continues

Leaving Bolzano, we then headed for an Italian city where time stood still, called Glurns. Afterward, we headed for "the mother of all roads in Europe", the Passo del Stelvio in the Italian Alps—with 39 switchbacks to go up and 43 switchbacks to go down the other side. What an intense, but marvelous, ride (as you can see in the picture on the next page)!



Some of our group atop the Austrian Grossglockner Pass!

At the top, in Bormio, we had one of our picnic lunches and rested for the descent toward our next night's accommodations at the Schweizerhof Hotel in Pontresina, Switzerland. What a beautiful little town where we, unfortunately, ran into some rain—unpleasant, but still rideable. (There were some times on the trip that we had stopped under some gas station roofs, as the hail was heavy and no fun. But luckily they had lasted only a short time, and we had then proceeded on our way.)

The next day, we set out toward Lichtenstein—the smallest, yet richest (by GDP per capita) German-speaking country in the world—with its capital of Vaduz. Here we had lunch and then headed onward toward Warth, Austria.

Our hotel, the Jageralpe Hotel, was right in the middle of a small pass with mountains on both sides. We arrived early so, after checking in, some of us headed out and went back to take pictures of the unusual turn heading up to this hotel. It was almost a bridge, curving around the side of a hillside!

Our last day, returning to Erding, Germany, encompassed a side trip to Linderhof Castle and some of the astonishing homes in

Oberammergau, the town that hosts the "Passion Play" every ten years. (By the way, the next one will be in 2020.)

Summation

Overall, this trip was one of the most exciting and intense riding experiences that I have ever had. I'm very impressed with the way it was conducted and the flexibility it provided.

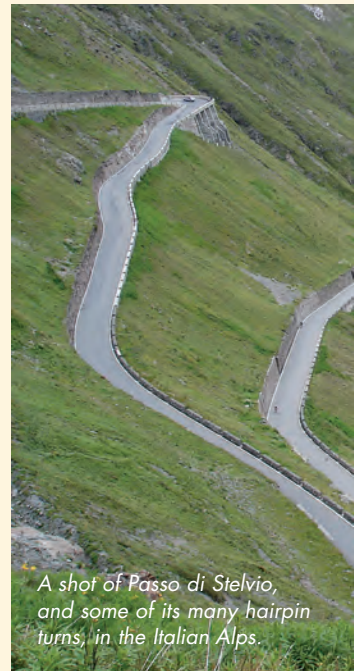
As for our typical picnic lunch breaks by the side of the road provided by our tour guides, they were very nice and much-needed for rest stops. One possible drawback for some riders, however, was that there were seldom washrooms and, in some secluded areas, only the forest all around—which some people might find awkward.

But I learned, saw, and experienced, so much that I am sure I will go back to Europe again and do another tour with Edelweiss. The guides were exceptional, knowledgeable and very accommodating for our entire group and its members' various desires.

Well done, Edelweiss! ●



The Parkhotel Luna Mondschein in Bolzano, Italy.



A shot of Passo di Stelvio, and some of its many hairpin turns, in the Italian Alps.



A landscape shot of charming Pontresina, Switzerland.



An ornate building in Oberammergau, Germany.

A view on the way to Warth, Austria.



One of our typical, price-inclusive lunch breaks at the side of the road.



A beautiful roadside restaurant in Canazei, Italy.



The whole gang—our motorcycling group of Canadians, Americans, Australians and Brazilians!