

# EUROPEAN HIGHLIGHTS

Edelweiss Bike Travel's Best of Europe tour promises an unrivalled riding experience, covering five countries and nearly 1000 miles

Words and pictures Christopher P. Baker

Halfway round, the tour runs past Santis Peak in Switzerland



**“The pace quickened considerably as we headed into France”**

**T**ROP D'ACCIDENTS. RALENTIR. (Too many accidents. Slow down.) The warning sign for motorcyclists screamed ‘fun ahead’ as we sped past vineyards, glistening with dew in the late-September sunlight. This was day four of an Edelweiss Bike Travel nine-day ‘Best of Europe’ five-country tour – looping through the Black Forest, Alsace, northern Switzerland, Liechtenstein, the Austrian Tyrol, and Bavaria – and the pace had quickened considerably as we headed into France’s Vosges Mountains. Sweeping bends tightened into whiplash-sharp coils as the road steepened exponentially.

Tour guide Björn Greibig, on a BMW R nineT, tore through the mountains like Marc Márquez, with two Americans hot on his heels. Colorado resident Perry Cogburn, on a Ducati Multistrada, stayed glued to his tail and I was right behind him on a BMW R1200GS Adventure. It was exhilarating and I was still grinning inanely five fun-filled hours later as we augered down through the hairpins to Ribeauvillé, with its half-timbered 14th-century buildings leaning drunkenly over meandering cobbled streets resembling a Hollywood set. “If we knew

WHAT IT IS

**EDELWEISS BIKE TRAVEL BEST OF EUROPE TOUR**

**Where** Germany, France, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria

**How long** 965 miles / 9 days (7 riding)

**Who’s it for** Intermediate to advanced

**More info** [www.edelweissbike.com](http://www.edelweissbike.com)



Writer Christopher P. Baker and ‘his’ GS-A

our kids were riding like this, we’d take away their keys,” said Perry, as we dined on mushroom soup and lamb stew washed down with a hearty Alsatian Sylvaner.

We’d started off sedately, allowing our three guides to assess our individual riding preferences and skills. Each day, we split into two groups that set off five minutes apart. By the end of day one our party of 15 riders and three pillions had sorted itself into a lead group of advanced riders, with the steadier riders behind.

The first day’s easy, undulating terrain through hoplands proved ideal for familiarising ourselves with our hired bikes after departing our hotel in Erding, north-east of Munich. After lunch in the 14th-century Willibaldsburg castle beer garden,

above Eichstätt, we dipped through forested hills to join the scenic ‘Romantic Road’, unfurling through a fairytale Germany of Middle-Ages villages pinpointed by church steeples topped by pomegranate-shaped domes. “Wowww!” I exclaimed, as we rode into Rothenburg – Germany’s largest walled city and a time warp of iconic medieval cuteness – at the end of our day’s 180-mile ride. Our thoroughly modernised 12th-century lodging packed a thousand years of history under its eaves.

From Rothenburg we headed west through Baden-Württemberg and corkscrewed into the valley of the River Jagst on the L1025, scrolling in broad arcs past a chequerboard of fields farmed with Teutonic efficiency. Chilly autumnal →



Plenty of hairpins climbing the Tyrolean Alps in Austria



## What I learnt

At home in America I ride a 2009 R1200GS Adventure but for this trip I was on a 2017 GS-A with keyless ignition. This was my first time on a liquid-cooled GS and the difference left me slack-jawed. Not simply the far more precise gearbox

(thanks to the quickshifter) and the 25% increase in ponies. The bike was infinitely more refined and responsive. Superbly balanced, the GS-A displayed athletic credentials as it powered effortlessly uphill on the switchbacks. I'm a conservative rider and the fast pace of our mountain riding

surprised me. The tour was split into two groups, so less-experienced riders could tackle the hairpins and twisties at a more cautious pace. My confidence level was boosted immensely during eight days of sometimes-intense and challenging mountain riding, often in rain.

showers interspersed with moments of sunshine, so I kept switching the traction control between Dynamic and Rain modes. We lunched at Kloster Schöntal, a palatial Cistercian monastery and extravagant Baroque cathedral, before an afternoon following the bends of the River Neckar.

Edelweiss operates a strict no-bottles-and-throttles policy, so I enviously eyed a tourist knocking back a foamy Erdinger Urweisse at the hilltop castle-hotel above Hirschhorn, where we stopped for the sensational view. Soon enough we arrived in Heidelberg (after just 115 miles, our shortest day) where, this being Oktoberfest, the town's plazas were full of beer-swilling celebrants served by Dirndl-clad wenches.

The real fun began south of Baden-Baden on day three as the B500 – Germany's oldest panoramic highway – coiled sharply into the Black Forest. The writhing snake of a road required hyper-attention and a non-stop interplay of throttle and brakes. There was no need to keep up with anyone, so riders were able to enjoy the road at their own pace, as the guides always stopped whenever they reached a junction. A couple of less-confident riders in my group fell back while another rider, pushing too hard on an R1200RS, misjudged a bend and went down. He was shaken but unharmed, his BMW sustaining only minor damage.

On-and-off drizzle couldn't dampen this dopamine day. Neither could dense fog shrouding the gunmetal-grey Mummelsee

– a lake at 1036m and the literal high point of the Schwarzwaldhochstraße (Black Forest High Road). After lunch, we scrolled down through tight hairpins to the Rhine and followed Route du Vin to Ribeauvillé, where we stayed for two nights.

Edelweiss classified day four as a rest day. The ladies opted for spa treatments and shopping. The lads voted for our adrenaline-fuelled loop through the Vosges Mountains, which topped out at the emotionally wrenching, ridgetop Musée Mémorial du Linge WWI battle site.

Next morning we recrossed the Rhine and were soon climbing again through the Black Forest (slick with fresh-fallen leaves) on a tortuous mountain switchback that delivered us atop the windswept 1242m Kandel Pass. Then we spiralled down at an

exhilarating Daytona-esque pace to Hexenlochmühle for cappuccinos and Black Forest gateau in an old mill-restaurant festooned with cuckoo clocks. After a delicious picnic lunch – the only one of the tour – we entered Switzerland. A scenic afternoon ended with a pause at Rheinfall, the largest waterfall in Europe, a stone's throw from our Schaffhausen hotel.

Day six was all sunshine and blue skies. I switched to the slower group, which provided greater opportunities to stop and photograph the other riders. Reaching Lake Constance, we turned south through archetypal Swiss landscapes, the distant Alps urging us on. Beyond Urnäsch we spiralled up into the Alpstein for a leisurely lunch beneath Säntis peak – at 2501m, the highest mountain in eastern Switzerland. We continued east through the pipsqueak principality of Liechtenstein (blink and you'll miss it) and into Austria. From here, the grandeur built like a Mozart concerto as we clawed our way into the Tyrolean Alps. The sky was thick with dark clouds as we arrived, exhilarated, at the Wanderhotel Jägeralpe, hunkered beneath the Hochtannbergpass, separating the mighty Rhine and Danube rivers.

We awoke to find our ski resort buried beneath fresh snow. The GS-A's

temperature gauge displayed 4°C as we cautiously descended the switchback to Warth and the Lechtal Valley. I was glad I'd brought winter gear; the Harley riders in their jeans and chaps must have been freezing! A stop at Schloss Linderhof was more than welcome. Here Edelweiss had included a guided tour of the baroque palace – the smallest of three built by 'Mad' King Ludwig II of Bavaria. We sped on through Bavaria, weaving a convoluted route between storms to arrive back in Erding at the end of a spectacular tour. **R**

### ABOUT THE TOUR

Edelweiss Bike Travel has been offering motorcycle and scooter tours since 1980 and today has trips all year round on five continents. We were welcomed in Erding (north-east of Munich) by tour leader Axel Allgeier and guides Björn Griebig and Mike Woltering. All spoke fluent English and took turns driving the company's purpose-built support van.

Our group was a mix of Americans and Canadians, with one Australian. The lead group – on BMWs, Ducatis and Triumph Tigers – rode as a pack. The slower group (mostly on Harley-Davidsons) comprised individuals riding at their own speed. A thorough briefing on our first night was followed by a daily briefing before riding. This was a top-end tour, with no expense spared for top-notch hotels and fine dining. The price – from £2843 for 2018 – includes bike rental, hotels and most meals.

For more information see [www.edelweissbike.com](http://www.edelweissbike.com)



Arriving in Ribeauvillé. Mind out for the cobblestones



Above left: Leaving Ribeauvillé

Top: Heading into the Vosges Mountains in France

Above: Guides Mike Woltering, Axel Allgeier & Björn Griebig



Riders travel at their own pace through the Tyrolean Alps

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