

Sustainability in Austria. Best Practices in Tourism

STiAS
Sustainable Tourism in Austria
Summit



What **inspires**
you the most
about **Austria**?



Sometimes,
spectacular
comes
natural

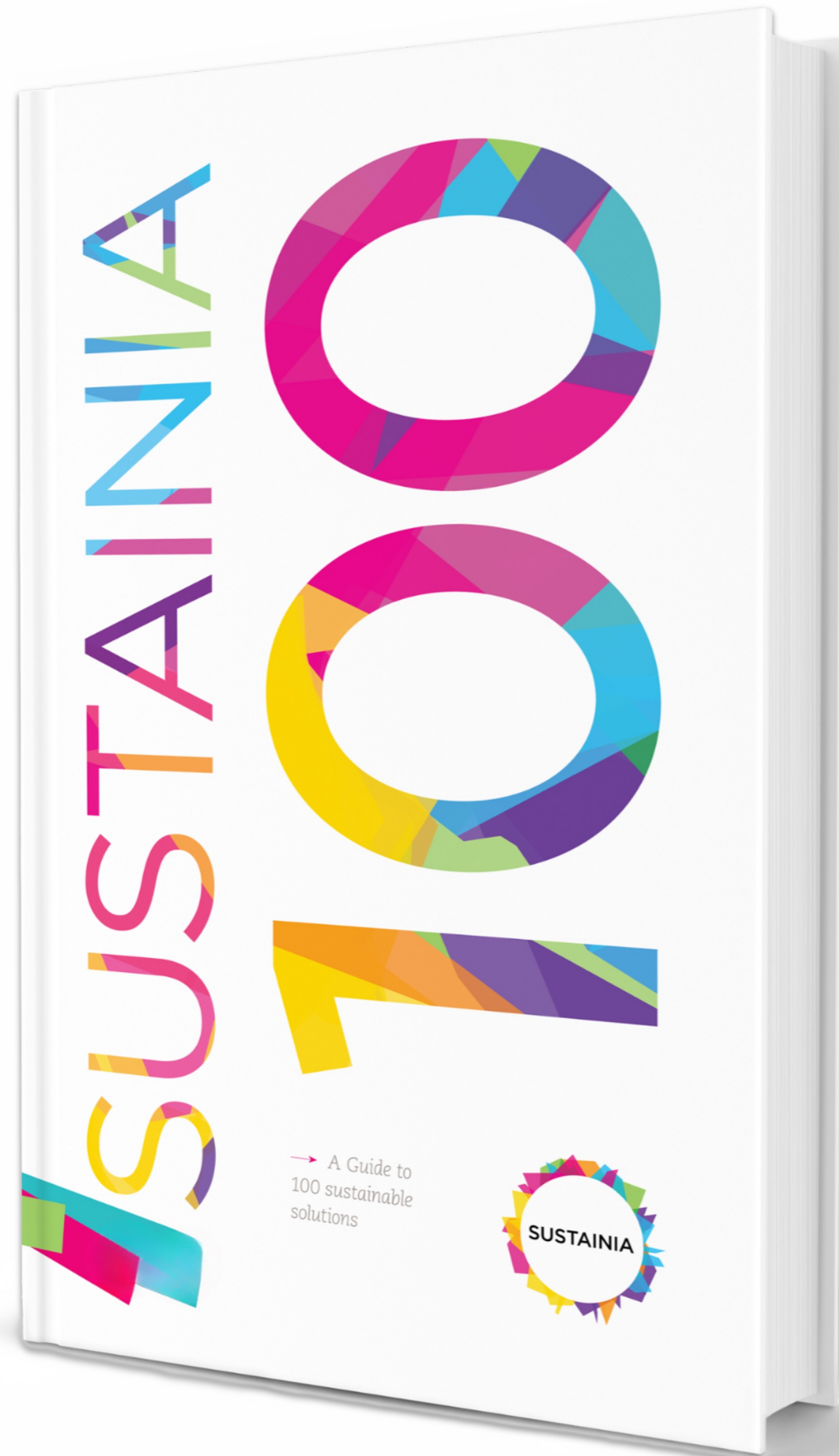


The wooden design of Voisthaler hut harmoniously blends with the rocky backdrop of Hochschwab.

Sometimes,
it's like
planting
trees



When *growing*
trees, **curation**
and **celebration**
matters



The strongest story is **positive, hopeful & human**



The
strongest
story is
surprising



Sustainability in Austria at a glance

With 50 best practice examples in the five categories of Sustainable Winter, Sustainable Summer, Resources and Circularity, Sustainable Mobility, and Social Sustainability, this map of Austria presents the nationwide commitment to sustainable living, business and pleasure.



Austria
is full of
surprises

Sustainable Winter

Get to know Austria as a winter destination on and beyond the slopes. From eco-conscious ski resorts, accessible snow sports, breathtaking hiking villages, and lively Christmas markets, communities across the country redefine tourism to offer thrilling and eco-conscious experiences amidst Austria's snow-laden landscapes.

SKI RESORT
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SKI RESORT
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SNOW SPACE
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Pioneering an Alpine holiday for everyone

Due to its accessible infrastructure, the Kaunertal has long been considered a **role model for barrier-free vacation offers**. Karl Hafele, pioneer of the first wheelchair-friendly hotel in the Alps, reports on the valley, which in recent years has not only emerged as a benchmark for social sustainability, but also for ecological measures.



4

additional guests accompany wheelchair users on average at *Hotel Weisseespitze*.

DID YOU KNOW?

64% of German tourists visiting or interested in visiting Austria in 2022 were concerned with the social compatibility of their travel.

1 million people in Austria live with reduced mobility, 0.5% of the population is in a wheelchair.

80% of hotels and restaurants in Austria are family businesses.

The Kaunertal's history with barrier-free tourism began in the early 1980s when the Kaunertal Glacier was opened up. This offered wheelchair users and other guests the unique opportunity to reach the ski slopes directly by car up to an altitude of 2,750 metres. Wide pistes and extensive T-bar lifts created ideal conditions for learning to monoski, as hotelier Hafele illustrates.

Even back then, many monoskiers decided to stay at *Hotel Weisseespitze*. At that time, the hotel already had a parking garage, an elevator, and rooms that were larger than the standard. The bathrooms were designed in such a way that 'active, sporty wheelchair users could already find their way around relatively easily', explains Hafele. These infrastructural prerequisites made the Kaunertal a magnet for monoskiers from all over Europe in the 1990s.

In 1989, Karl Hafele took over the hotel and recognised the needs of the guests at a time when the 'accessible hotel industry was still a relatively weak offer', as he emphasises. By the year 2000, he had transformed the *Hotel Weisseespitze* into the first wheelchair-friendly hotel in the Alps. This inclusive approach encompasses a barrier-free infrastructure from the sauna and wellness area in the basement to the top floor, which not only enables effortless access for all guests, but also rapid evacuation in the event of a fire.



Karl Hafele,
Hotelier *Weisseespitze*

© Thomas Junker

“An important prerequisite for our guests with physical disabilities is to have the confidence to say, “I can now do winter sports in my wheelchair”.

Karl Hafele, Hotelier

Sustainable Summer

Experience Austria's summer charm through activities that celebrate the nation's breathtaking landscapes and uplifting communities. From climate-focused hiking tours and immersive farm vacations to eco-friendly paddle boarding and music festivals, this section showcases a diverse range of initiatives contributing positively to the local ecosystem and cultural heritage.



BIOSPHERE RESERVE
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FARM HOLIDAYS
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ST. PÖLTNER
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CLIMATE HIKE
SAALFELDEN
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AUSTRIA GUIDES
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TRÖPFERLBAD 2.0
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On the local trace of a global crisis

What are the traces of the climate crisis, and how do they manifest themselves regionally? Saalfelden Leogang is Austria's first tourism association to offer a **hiking tour about climate change** – with environmental effects directly noticeable in Saalfelden Leogang.



7.3 °C

is the new average annual temperature in Saalfelden Leogang.

DID YOU KNOW?

89 KLAR! regions in Austria receive funding for their local climate change adaptation strategies and awareness-raising activities.

In a survey of over 80 KLAR! regions, two thirds of respondents stated that they are taking measures in their private lives to adapt to the effects of climate change.

Austrian GHG emissions fell by around 6.4% in 2022 compared to 2021, which corresponds to a reduction of 5 million tonnes of CO₂-eq.

The environmental effects of climate change become more and more evident, particularly in the alpine regions. In Saalfelden Leogang, the average annual temperature has increased to 7.3°C, which is already 1.8°C above the long-term average (1971–2000). In summer, the 25°C mark at 1,000 m above sea level is already reached three times as often as the long-term average. Droughts, which statistically occurred only every ten years, now occur every five years.

To raise awareness and inform about such changes, the Tourism Region Saalfelden Leogang and Climate Change Adaptation Model Region (KLAR!) Pinzgau created a weekly guided hike that is integrated in the region's summer adventure programme. Thus, it becomes Austria's first knowledge transfer project of its kind on the topic of climate and nature.

According to Anna Heuberger, KLAR! manager, guide and co-developer of the program, the consequences of climate change become visible and tangible on the hiking tour. Participants learn about a wide range of climate change effects: from the climatic forest to the future of the Alps, to permafrost, settlement scars, and the necessary adaptations for extreme weather events. The region is prone to natural hazards such as floods, avalanches, mudflows, as well as earth- and rockslides – all triggered by a sudden influx of heavy precipitation.

The hike seeks to break the global climate crisis down to a local level, directly noticeable for everyone. It illustrates why action is urgently needed, without pointing fingers, instead appealing to and engaging in dialogue with people of all ages. Each walk has

a single objective, according to Heuberger: to shed light on climate change and collectively discuss its implications. In this way, tourism in Austria takes on an educational task without restricting the enjoyment of an active lifestyle.



Anna Heuberger enjoys a conversation with a companion at one of the stops along the guided hike.

Resources & Circularity

Discover Austria's dedication to circular practices through eco-hotels, cultural museums, repair cafés, artisan crafts, and sustainable business apps. These diverse initiatives redefine consumption patterns and champion circularity, showcasing the Austrian commitment to ensuring a sustainable legacy for generations to come.



REPAIR CAFÉS
86



GUTES FINDEN
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BOUTIQUEHOTEL
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ZERO WASTE
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Embodying sustainability room by room

The *Boutiquehotel Stadthalle* in Vienna has evolved into Austria's first 'SDG hotel', showcasing a compelling narrative of **engagement, innovation, and passionate commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. Its transformation stands as an inspiring testament, demonstrating how embracing sustainability can be a distinctive chance for tourism businesses rather than a mere financial obstacle.



21,024 kg

CO₂ are saved per room annually by dispensing with minibars.

DID YOU KNOW?

Sustainability is a booking-relevant factor for around two thirds of Austrian tourists when travelling.

The Economist Intelligence Unit once again named Vienna the world's most liveable city in 2023.

Austria ranks fifth in the world on the Sustainable Development Goals Indicator.

If you look around the Austrian tourism industry for sustainable success stories, you will inevitably stumble across the *Boutiquehotel Stadthalle* and the name Michaela Reitterer. The charismatic Viennese is considered one of the leading personalities in the Austrian hotel industry and has developed the *Boutiquehotel* into the first city hotel with a zero-energy balance. Reitterer's dedication to innovative and sustainable practices is not merely an adaptation to a new trend, but deeply ingrained in her DNA. When she bought the hotel from her parents in 2001, she put a solar system on the roof and was the first to contemplate using rainwater to flush the restrooms.

In the late 2000s, the 140-year-old hotel underwent extensive renovation, including establishing a groundwater heat pump, a PV system and thermal solar panels. 'So when the sun is shining and the wind is blowing, and the water is flowing under the hotel, I thought to myself, let's build a building that simply generates its own energy', explains the hotel owner. However, what seemed self-evident to the entrepreneur at the time was met with scepticism and derogatory comments during the 'sustainability Stone Age', as she refers to the years 2008 and 2009: 'People, of course, thought I was crazy', Reitterer recalls.



Michaela Reitterer,
Hotel owner *Boutiquehotel Stadthalle*

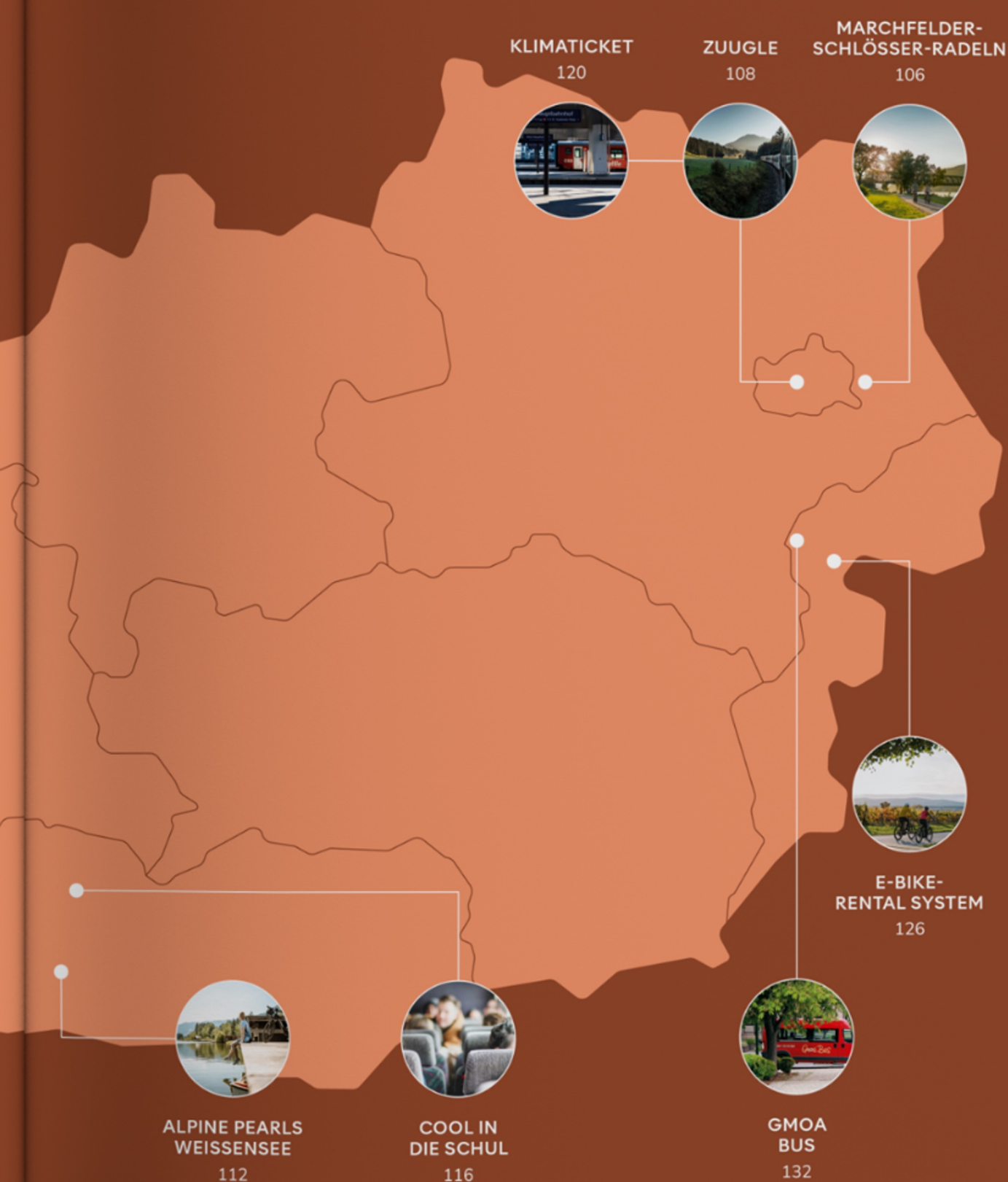
© Franz Schüdel

“What I'm most proud of, apart from the zero-energy balance, is my team. I simply have the best team in the world.”

Michaela Reitterer, Hotel owner

Sustainable Mobility

Embark on Austria's sustainable mobility journey, featuring tourist cooperatives fostering gentle mobility to robust cycling infrastructure, sustainable travel ticket bundles, and rewarding soft mobility initiatives. Together, these progressive steps pave the way for a greener and more accessible future in travel.



Sustainable travel made easy with the 'KlimaTicket'

Since its launch in 2021, the *KlimaTicket* has helped make public transport in Austria more attractive and offers a **transnational mobility infrastructure without hidden costs**. Hanna Merkinger and Jakob Lambert agree: a fair price and convenience are success factors for sustainable travel.



40%

of *KlimaTicket* users had previously used public transport on a single ticket basis.

DID YOU KNOW?

2022 recorded a total of 295.6 million railway passengers in Austria, marking a notable 35.1% increase compared to 2021.

In 2022, the proportion of holiday trips taken by rail stood at 15.1%, the highest value since records began in 2006.

67% of Austrian summer visitors in 2023 travelled within the destination by train.

KlimaTicket Austria offers an unprecedented opportunity to use the public transport system throughout the country at a low cost. Adults can purchase the ticket for 1,095 euros per year, which equates to around three euros per day, making it an uncomplicated and cost-effective solution for nationwide mobility. According to Jakob Lambert, project manager and co-initiator of the *KlimaTicket*, the aim is to offer mobility at a fixed price so that 'public transport is definitely cheaper than the car for all customers in Austria', as Lambert explains. The combination of an affordable price, a high degree of convenience thanks to nationwide coverage, and the promotion of mobility behaviour among users – in particular by emphasising sustainable means of transport – were at the forefront of the development of the *KlimaTicket*.

The results speak for themselves: the *KlimaTicket*, which was originally designed to sell 110,000 tickets, recorded 130,000 tickets sold on its first day of validity and now has 270,000 users. Hanna Merkinger, lawyer and communication scientist who plays a key role in developing the legal basis of contracts and marketing campaign for the *KlimaTicket*, emphasises the positive results of the initial data analyses. As Merkinger notes: 'What is certainly a pleasing result is that, as part of a research analysis on the subject of usage, it emerged that two percent of *KlimaTicket* customers, for example, state that they did not use public transport at all before the



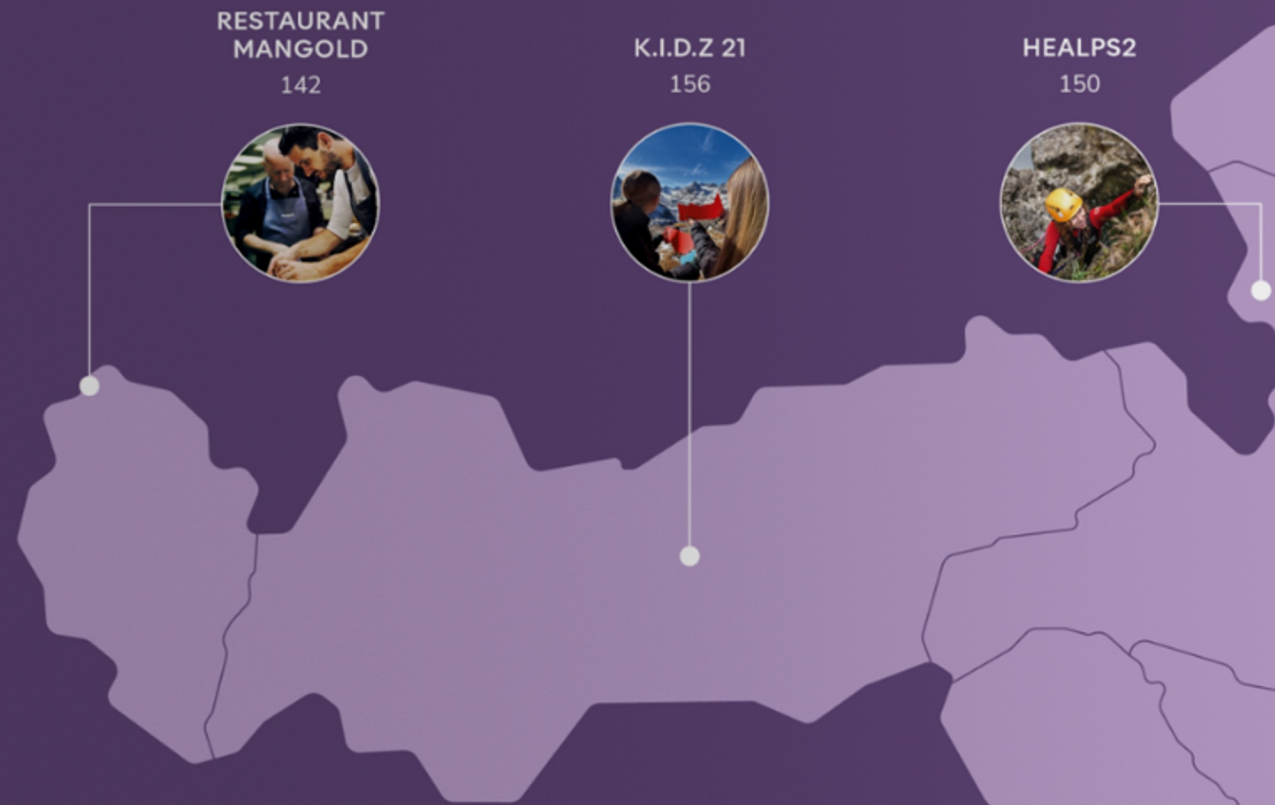
Hanna Merkinger, responsible for sales, legal and communications realisation and Jakob Lambert, project manager of the *KlimaTicket*

“ We want public transport to be cheaper than the car for all customers in Austria.

Jakob Lambert, project manager

Social Sustainability

Step into Austria's social fabric of sustainability, where initiatives like social business hotels, vibrant art and culture festivals, and cafés empowering seniors foster meaningful connections. Embracing cultural preservation, fair employment, and community engagement, they shape a tourism environment that goes beyond sightseeing to create lasting societal benefits.



Coffee, cake and community

In Vienna, the *Vollpension Generationencafé* has emerged as more than just a culinary destination; it has become a haven addressing the pressing issues of old-age poverty and loneliness. Since opening its doors in 2015, this establishment, affectionately known as 'Granny's public living room', goes beyond serving delicious cakes to serving a greater purpose.



118,000

single pensioners live in Vienna (state 2020).

DID YOU KNOW?

The age group of 65+ year olds in Austria will be an estimated 27.9% of the population in 2050, marking an 8.4 percentage-point increase compared to 2022.

74.4% of very old senior citizens in Austria state that they are satisfied with their social relationships with their families.

In Austria, 36.2% of very old senior citizens maintain contact with more than six individuals outside their family.

Old-age poverty is a prevalent issue affecting many, especially female pensioners, and it often leads to social isolation. In urban spaces, the lack of social meeting points for the elderly and younger generations can often add to this stigmatisation. Beyond offering delightful pastries and aromatic coffees, *Vollpension Generationencafé* envisions itself as a genuine intergenerational meeting place. The underlying philosophy is clear: combat loneliness in old age through active participation, replace poverty with meaningful activity, and foster an ongoing dialogue between generations.

Moriz Piffl and Mike Lanner, inspired by the value of multiple generations living and dining together within their own families, drafted the idea of a café open for all age bands back in 2012. Today, *Vollpension Generationencafé* is a diverse hub with a lively team, spanning ages 17 to over 80, actively promoting intergenerational interaction and bridging the gap between old and young.

Vollpension Generationencafé emphasises the importance of infrastructure that welcomes all generations and social groups. Spaces designed for socialising without the pressure to consume provide opportunities for financially vulnerable individuals to participate in public life. Moreover, applying to *Vollpension Generationencafé* doesn't necessitate a CV; a warm smile and a talent for home baking are the only prerequisites for joining this inclusive community initiative.

Remarkably, half of the *Vollpension* team is older than 60, and the initiative has increased workers' disposable income by an average of 40%.

In 2019, a second generation-bridging café opened its doors, and the emergence of the 'Baking Academy' during the pandemic exemplified the café's resilience and creativity. Senior members, unable to gather physically, embraced technology to share their baking expertise online. The success of the virtual platform prompted *Vollpension Generationencafé* to extend its reach. The launch of Vienna's first 'Grandma's Baking School' not only brought classic treats to aspiring bakers but also facilitated real-time interaction.

Participants found themselves not just learning the art of baking but engaging in conversations that transcended generational boundaries.

Vollpension Generationencafé tells tales not just through its culinary but through the lives it touches, proving that a cup of coffee and a slice of cake – just like the ones we know from our own grandmothers – can be catalysts for positive change.



At *Vollpension*, a female pensioner brings her mastery of home baking to the table.



A treasure of stories you can breathe life into

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY **VORARBERG, LOOSDU**

Seasonal delights and sustainable bites

In the picturesque town of Loosdu, by the serene shores of Lake Costanzio, the restaurant Mangold stands as a model of culinary excellence and sustainability. Since its acquisition by Michael Schwarzenbacher in 2007, the restaurant has been a steadfast advocate for local, seasonal ingredients and sustainable practices. The "Mangold" is not just a restaurant; it's a commitment to the local food system and the well-being of the community.

Est. 1870

DID YOU KNOW?

Michael Schwarzenbacher's commitment to sustainability is not just a business strategy; it's a lifestyle. He has implemented various initiatives to reduce the restaurant's carbon footprint, including energy-efficient lighting, water-saving devices, and a comprehensive recycling program. By prioritizing local and seasonal ingredients, the restaurant not only supports the local economy but also ensures the freshest and most flavorful dishes for its guests.



BEST PRACTICES

Sustainability in Austria at a glance

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OVERVIEW

Sustainable Winter


Get to know Austria as a winter destination on and beyond the slopes. From cozy lodges and resorts, accessible winter sports, snow-making, hiking, and more, discover the many opportunities to enjoy the snowy season. From the mountains to the cities, discover the many opportunities to enjoy the snowy season.



Austria Tourism

Sustainability in Austria

Root Projects in Tourism



SUSTAINABLE SUMMER **LOWER AUSTRIA, HOERZWEIHEL**

The (Perry) Road to sustainable tourism

In the heart of Lower Austria, the Perry Road (Hoerzweifel) region stands out as a beacon of sustainable tourism, embracing the unique identity of the region. The Perry Road is not just a road; it's a commitment to the local food system and the well-being of the community.

3,300

DID YOU KNOW?



RESOURCES & CIRCULARITY **LOWER AUSTRIA, BOGDANOVIC**

Sustainability blooms with nature-friendly flower farming

A world in which flowers remain precious, unadorned and unspoiled. This is the vision of the "Slow Flower" movement, of which the Austrian Slow Food Movement is a part, advocating for natural and sustainable flower cultivation.

7.5 t

DID YOU KNOW?



OVERVIEW

Social Sustainability

Step into Austria's social fabric of sustainability, where it fosters the social business fabric, job and career mobility, and offers employment options. Together, these initiatives create a strong foundation for a sustainable future.



What **inspires**
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