

Sleeping bag meets starry sky: HIGHLANDER takes off in Austria with its Kitzbühel premiere

Joint hikes, nights under sparkling stars, invigorating breathing sessions, meditation and yoga surrounded by unspoilt nature - this special experience drew the international hiking community to Kitzbühel.

HIGHLANDER is not a competition, but an adventure to be tackled individually. Participants decide for themselves on their pace and level of exertion, while the community grows. The event series, which began in Croatia, is now active in over 20 countries worldwide. HIGHLANDER also attaches great importance to 'Leave No Trace', local partners, zero-waste concepts and regional, organic catering - for a conscious and considerate outdoor experience.

HIGHLANDER is not a race, but a personal journey. Participants can choose between different stages, ranging from one day to five days in the great outdoors. Participants carry their own luggage and also take all their rubbish back down to the valley with them.

HIGHLANDER premiere in Kitzbühel

The HIGHLANDER Austria was the first event of its kind in Kitzbühel, offering a multi-day hiking experience. Around 100 participants from 13 countries celebrated the premiere of this outdoor hiking event. Each day, participants covered 15 to 25 kilometres - with backpacks, tents and their own equipment. They spent the night at four camps under the open sky, away from traditional campsites - and for the first time officially in Kitzbühel.

There were four different stages to choose from, ranging from 5 days, 4 camps and approx. 100 kilometres for experienced long-distance hikers to a get-to-know-you day for everyone.

Special attention was paid to the catering. The Bio-Kaisern, a community of regional organic farmers and producers from the Kitzbühel region, proved to be the perfect partner. With a deep-rooted connection to nature and a clear commitment to sustainability and regional identity, they carefully selected the food that would sustain the participants along the way. It was about more than just catering: it was the authentic taste of Tyrol - seasonal, local and full of character. A culinary experience shaped by tradition, community and the Alpine way of life.

The impressive supporting programme - yoga, meditation, breathwork sessions, ice bathing and even professional stargazing - strengthened the community spirit and awareness of the surrounding natural scenery.

The successful premiere delighted participants and proved that Kitzbühel - beyond the familiar clichés - can also be 'New Premium'.

Successful first edition

Kitzbühel Tourism Managing Director Dr. Viktoria Veider-Walser is enthusiastic about the innovative event format: "Hiking is a basic product for our tourism work. It is all the more difficult to differentiate ourselves here. With HIGHLANDER, we have brought a contemporary format to Kitzbühel, where you might not expect it at first glance. It is all the more wonderful to see how enthusiastic our participants were – about our regional products and partners, the wonderfully secluded landscape of the Kitzbühel South Mountains and a truly meaningful programme that leads you to yourself. We would like to express our sincere thanks to all our partners who supported such an unconventional concept, starting with the Kitzbühel district administration, led by District Administrator Dr Michael Berger, the municipalities of Kitzbühel and Mittersill, the communities of Aurach and Jochberg, the landowners of the camps, our hut operators, especially the Kelchalm and Bergbahn AG Kitzbühel for the alternative accommodation in case of bad weather, the Biokaisers for the brilliant regional catering, our team at Kitzbühel Tourism under Bernd Brandstätter, who did a great job, and our partner WWP under Tom Weirather for the great vision."

Initiator Thomas Weirather from WWP was there and is convinced of the product's merits: 'The first Highlander in Kitzbühel was a complete success. Many participants described it as the best Highlander worldwide. This shows how unique the Kitzbühel Alps are and how much of Tyrol's flavour can be experienced at all levels.'

The feedback from the nearly 100 participants was overwhelmingly enthusiastic: particular praise was given to the perfect organisation, the high-quality food and the atmospheric stops at the huts, which further enriched the hiking experience. The varied supporting programme also provided inspiration and lasting impressions.

The international HIGHLANDER community was particularly well represented: some have been participating for years – in some cases more than 20 times – and have experienced formats in Croatia, Slovenia, England and Dubai. For them, Kitzbühel was a special highlight and a new chapter in their personal HIGHLANDER story.

Many emphasised how valuable it was to be able to hike at their own pace – sometimes pushing themselves to their limits, sometimes pausing to reflect – while still being part of a strong community. Quite a few extended their stay to enjoy the region more intensively before and after the event.

The unanimous conclusion sums it up perfectly:

'We'll be back – and we'll share our experiences with others!'

Facts, figures and data

:: Nearly 100 participants from 13 countries

:: Top 3 countries of origin: Croatia (30.9%), Germany (28.4%) and Austria (23.5%)

:: Most popular format (38.3%) – 'Hercules' with 100 km in 5 days

:: 56.8% are first-timers to this type of event

:: Harmonious balance with 50.6% men and 49.4% women

The premiere showed that Kitzbühel offers the perfect stage for a hiking event that combines mindfulness, nature and community. A sequel is already in the works.