

The other must-do on our list for this area was Neuschwanstein Castle. Sunday was cloudy and a bit drizzly but we figured that would be OK for the castle (it had been just like that on our previous visit!). There wasn't much of a sleep in on Sunday as we were woken by very loud church bells at 7am. We didn't think we were staying too close to the church but it's amazing how the noise travels when all else is quiet. We could even hear quiet church bells every quarter hour from the next village!

Neuschwanstein Castle is actually in Germany, but less than 30km from where we are staying. We have been very lucky to avoid traffic jams on this trip so far, but there is a regular one right here on our doorstep. There is a major slip on the road about 10km away and the road is down to one lane. When we arrived yesterday the queue ended just before our village so we were very glad we got to turn off. We had to go that way to the castle today, but luckily the queue was fairly short when we went through.

The village of Hohenschwangau is the base for visiting the two King Ludwig castles. It is probably the most visited place in Germany with 1.3 million people visiting the castle every year. We weren't quite sure whether it was going to be a nightmare to get tickets, but the back up plan was to just view the castle from the outside. Fortunately it only took about 15 minutes to get the tickets and the tour time we were given was about 2.5 hours later. That suited us fine as I had some adventures planned on the way to the castle.

Neuschwanstein Castle is high on the hill above Hohenschwangau, overlooking a beautiful river valley (King Ludwig may have been mad, but he knew how to choose a beautiful setting for his dream castle). Most people walk, coach or horse & cart up the main road to the castle. I had discovered there was an alternative track up the Pollat River Gorge. By the time we set off the clouds were gone and we were enjoying beautiful sunshine. The gorge was gorgeous (ha ha) and there were not many people on the track. Half way up there was a great spot for relaxing with lovely views of the castle and up to the Marienbrücke (bridge). The best view was from the other side of the river so we braved the crossing through the icy water.









After a nice relax by the river, it was a steep climb up to the Marienbrücke. The bridge was packed (it must be strong!) but the views of the castle were lovely. The side of the castle that faces the village is covered in scaffolding (it reminded us of a leaky house all wrapped up!) so it was nice to see it from a different angle. We climbed a bit beyond the bridge for an even better view without the crowds.





By the time we had done all that, it was time for our castle tour. There is a tour leaving every 5 minutes, each one with up to 60 people. The tour was only 30 minutes, but in that time we saw all of the completed rooms of the castle. Only one third of the castle was ever completed as King Ludwig ran out of money. He only lived in the castle for 172 days before he was declared unfit to rule Bavaria. Soon after he drowned in a lake near Munich. The castle was never lived in again - it was opened to the public seven weeks after his death.





Andy and I hadn't gone inside the castle on our last visit. It was far more impressive than we had expected, but nothing like any other castle we've been in. The decor was very ornate, but unusual. The wood work in King Ludwig's bedroom was incredible - it took 14 carvers 4 years to complete! Sadly there are no photos for the blog as they were forbidden.

After the tour we found a quick cache, then treated the kids to a horse and cart ride back to the village. They has earned it with all the climbing they'd done.





On the way home we went in search of a supermarket as we still had nothing for dinner. Our search was not a success though, Sunday is not the day to buy groceries in Austria. The only solution was to eat out again. We went to a very cheap local restaurant in Lähn, two villages away from Bichlbach (found that restaurant on my bike ride yesterday). It was the best schnitzel we have had yet, served with homemade red currant jelly, and the helpings were enormous. The kids got the one "for the smaller" appetite and struggled to finish. There was definitely no room for dessert - it has been an icecream free day!