

Lake Constance, Switzerland: A Tale of Three Countries

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Lake Constance (or Bodensee to give it its other name) is not somewhere that sounds instantly familiar. It wasn't somewhere that I'd heard of, but that was before I started to develop an itinerary for our road trip to Switzerland. The lake is part of the Rhine River, and is the third-largest freshwater lake in Central Europe.

I soon discovered that Lake Constance is located in the northeast of Switzerland and in fact is bordered by three countries, all of which we'd be driving through on our trip. The south side of the lake lies in Swiss territory, while the eastern end is bordered by Austria. Head around to the north side of the lake and you'll find yourself in Germany. It's an odd arrangement, particularly as there are border crossing points whenever you enter or leave Switzerland, as it's not part of the European Union. However, you can drive freely between Germany and Austria, and in fact, you barely notice when you move from one country to the next, with just a simple sign to tell you that you've now crossed the border.

Our exploration of Lake Constance started in the town that gave its name to this piece of water, Konstanz, which includes the only bit of German territory found on the south shore of the lake, though most of the municipality occupies a peninsula that extends into the lake from the northwest. The two parts of the town are separated by a narrow stretch of water - either part of the lake, or a bit of the Rhine River, depending on how you look at the map. We stayed the night here in a lakeside hotel that offered stunning views of the body of water than we'd be circling for the next 24 hours.

It was while there that we bought a guidebook to the area, and discovered that, just a few miles away off the peninsula's north shore was a place called Mainau Island, that's otherwise known as the Island of Flowers. This seemed like a good place to start our exploration and were amongst the first visitors to arrive for the day.

Mainau Island gained its reputation as a place for flowers, mainly because of its location. It's shielded from chill winds by nearby hills, while the lake warms up the island, meaning tropical plants can flourish here. It was back in the 1930s that the then owner decided to turn the place into a "little garden of paradise," and such was his success that this thriving business today has more than 300 paid employees. You only have to walk around the island to see why it needs to employ so many people. It's 110 acres in total, which I had no idea about when we

first came here. My goodness, we did some walking that day, but it was all worth it.

Sadly, we were probably a week or two early to see all the spring flowers in full bloom, but despite that, we were still treated to some pretty special sights. In particular, the brilliant vibrant colours of the orchids in the greenhouses here will forever stick in my memory, as will the sea of crocuses that greeted us outside the Baroque palace. The major flower year on Mainau runs from April to October, including breathtaking displays of tulips, hyacinths, roses, snapdragons, dahlias and chrysanthemums. The island is open from sunrise to sunset daily from March to November, with admission costing €15 for adults, with discounted rates of €8 for students and children, and free admission for children aged 11 and under.

Once we had finished our explorations of Mainau Island, we headed south through Konstanz into Switzerland, to the neighboring town of Kreuzlingen. One can barely tell where Konstanz ends and Kreuzlingen picks up, the border seeming to cut one town almost in two, something which fascinated me. With each country using a different currency (Euros in Germany and francs in Switzerland), it means along the same road, there are two different currencies in use in two different countries, with a border crossing dissecting the road.

Continuing east along the south border of Lake Constance, our next stop was Romanshorn, where you can pick up a ferry that takes you across the lake to Friedrichshafen, Germany. As a result, Romanshorn is quite a transport hub, although many people merely use it to head on elsewhere, as opposed to staying there.

Before leaving Switzerland, we couldn't resist another stop, this time in Rorschach, which was formerly the port for the St. Gallen monastery. Today, it's notable for some stunning views across the lake and some beautiful buildings nearby.

From there, it was across the border into Austria. The main town here is Bregenz, which has a history dating back to Roman times. It's a popular place for holidaymakers and understandably so when you look at it. It's been built up around a graceful curve in the lakeshore, making for some picture postcard views. Add in the fact that facilities here include an indoor swimming pool, marinas, nature reserve, festival opera, and congress house, with a large, outdoor stage over the water (centerpiece of the annual summer arts festival) and you can see there's plenty to keep visitors occupied.

From here, you're soon into Germany and the first town you come

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across almost immediately is Lindau, which is set on its own island. It's home to so many historic buildings that the whole area has been declared a historic monument and, when you arrive here, you can immediately see why. We parked up and explored the pedestrianised town centre, and literally every turn we made, we saw yet more beautiful buildings, dating from previous centuries.

Many of the properties along the main Maximilianstrasse date from the Middle Ages, but the grandest of them all, suitably enough, is the Old Town Hall. Built in the 15th century, today it's full of colourful frescos, showing the arrival of Philipp the Handsome into Lindau. Fascinatingly, although they look hundreds of years old, the frescos were only recently applied to the building, using 19th century stencils. The harbour here is also well worth visiting, offering some beautiful views over the lake beyond.

Heading west along the lake's north shore, the next place you come to is Wasserburg, with a charming church, making it understandably one of the most photographed sights in the area. The next stop along the north coastline of the lake is Friedrichshafen, the destination for the ferry from Switzerland, and here you can explore the Zeppelin-Museum, as this is where the first Zeppelin airships were tested in 1900.

Our tour nearly over, as we reached the top northwest corner of Lake Constance, there was time for one final stop in Meersburg, a beautiful old town, with the 16th century Old Castle towering over it. From there, we got a few more glimpses of Lake Constance and then we were on our way, leaving it behind.

There's certainly a lot to offer visitors here, from stunning views to fascinating places to visit, and all of these across three beautiful countries. There aren't many places in the world that you can say that about.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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