

Charmed by the beauty of **LAKE CONSTANCE**

This lake is simply stunning surrounded as it is by mountains, enchanting villages and magnificent lakeside towns

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Helen Werin...

... is MMM's Travel Editor and loves nothing better than to follow in the tracks of readers who have inspired her with their motorhome travelling tales

We're enjoying the wonderful view from the harbour on the German shore of Lake Constance at Immenstaad towards the snow-capped mountains on the horizon.

I emphasise 'German shore' because the lake actually spans three countries: Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

It was exactly this geographical position that had lured us to visit Lake Constance as part of a lengthy summer tour with our teenage daughter, Sophie.

The ability to drift from one country to another around the lake also seems to reflect the pace and multiple facets of our trip across Europe so far. We'd covered over 800 miles since setting off from the Midlands, thus we thought Lake Constance the perfect place in which to relax for a few days before pushing on, via the awesome Austrian Tyrol, to Slovenia.

Throughout the journey we'd endured stifling heat, so relished the idea of jumping into the outdoor (heated) pool at Wirthshof Camping or into Bodensee itself from one of the lakeside beaches.

What we hadn't reckoned on in a place that advertises having more than 2,000 hours of sunshine a year, was these hopes being temporarily thwarted by a sudden and very dramatic change in the weather: terrific thunderstorms, the likes of which I have rarely seen before. And, yes, I know that we'd come here to rest a little after days of driving, but as we begin to realise once we've pitched up at Wirthshof, there's just so much to do, on site and in the locality.

We're overwhelmed; where do we start? Most noticeable of all – in fact, it's impossible to miss – is the airship that is almost constantly circling over our heads. Friedrichshafen (11km/seven miles away) is where Graf Ferdinand von Zeppelin developed and built his famous airships in

the early part of the last century and from where flights take off.

I'm fascinated by airships, but having just occupied some of the long journey by reading a newspaper article marking the eightieth anniversary of the Hindenburg disaster, there is no way anyone is going to get me up in one. The €360 (£310.34) per person cost of a 45-minute journey above Meersburg, Immenstaad and Hagnau might also have something to do with it!

If we want to learn more about airships we have to head to The Zeppelin Museum at Friedrichshafen. Meersburg, about 20 minutes from Wirthshof, has a smaller museum zeppelinmuseum.eu with a private collection of pictures and original Zeppelin parts.

We're utterly enchanted by Meersburg (which means 'sea castle' in English). It's a picturesque and characterful 'split-level' small town of remarkably colourful, higgledy-piggledy houses and a couple of imposing gateways. Many buildings are half-timbered and beautifully decorated with tiny attic windows, which spark our imaginations as to who lives in these ancient rooms.

Restaurants, museums and galleries line the pretty streets and squares. Souvenir shops are full of cuckoo clocks, some of them costing over €1,000 (£862.07)!

We park at Schützenstraße, just a couple of minutes' walk from the centre and follow signs for the scenic viewpoint at Mollplatz for a superb outlook over the rooftops to the Old Castle (Altes Schloss) and across the lake towards the Alps. Passing the much-photographed watermill we reach the Altes Schloss, which traces its origins to the seventh century.

I confess to being a bit castle mad so love the eerie dungeons, torture chamber and armoury – but it's the setting that's the ►

RIGHT Picturesque buildings in Meersburg



INFORMATION

Channel crossings
dfds.co.uk

Meersburg castles
neues-schloss-meersburg.de

burg-meersburg.de

Lake Constance ferries
stadtwerke-konstanz.de/en/ferry

Mainau island
mainau.de

star. The views from the garden and the tower are spectacular.

It's a weekend and busy, particularly in the Unterstadtstraße, which runs parallel to the Seepromenade and is packed with shops, cafés and tourists of every nationality.

What we've come down here for is the mind-boggling 'magic column' (Magische Säule) on the pier, adorned with gruesome and devilish horned creatures with animal-like faces, which crawl around and up the column's sides.

A very ugly (and naked) woman reaches out with her arms as if to jump off, whilst a man astride what appears to be a hobby horse rides out from another arm of the landmark. Equally bewildering is a round cage with men inside and a bewigged character holding what looks like a divining rod standing on top of it.

I spend ages studying the column whilst, around me, ferries constantly bustle back and forth. Getting a stiff neck from so much looking up, I sit down to admire the view. Meersburg's lake frontage has some very impressive buildings.

Above the splendid dusky-pinkish building by the harbour from which ferry tickets are sold and the yellow Hotel Seehof with its green shutters, I can see the Altes Schloss. There's the buttercup-yellow grand façade of the winemakers' association building (Staatsweingut Meersburg) and the orange-painted seminary, both fronted by rows of vines and overlooking the harbour where private boats jostle for space.

The lavish Neues Schloss (New Castle), built in 1710, is a Baroque stunner that stands out even among all the other

dazzling buildings with its candy pink paintwork.

Another afternoon of surprising weather follows the next day; this thunderstorm has sky-splitting bolts of lightning, which seem to shuttle back and forth above us, never dissipating. As luck would have it, we've hired bikes from Wirthshof Camping to cycle the 7km (4.34 miles) to Immenstaad, which one of the helpful site receptionists has described as her favourite place on the lake. How can we resist that?

Via cycle paths and with the aid of a far-too-fast-for-us local teenager extolling us to (try and) follow her when we manage to misread the maps given to us at the campsite, we eventually arrive in the charming little town right on the lake shores. We park our bikes in a pedestrian area close to the harbour and wander through shady gardens onto a finger of land jutting out into the sparkling lake.

It's a fabulously sunny day at this point and we're enjoying Immenstaad immensely. Lunch is hearty pasta under the canopy of Restaurant Schiff and we're looking forward to an ice cream later...

Our return ride is memorable; having taken refuge in a bus shelter for more than an hour whilst the road in front of us becomes a torrent we realise that time is running out and we have to return the bikes. It's comfortably warm and we're lightly dressed so there's nothing for us to do but bite the bullet and pedal furiously back.

There are a few difficult moments, which add to the drowned-rat feeling; a puddle-pocked lane on an industrial estate, which throws us off our bearings and my



“A Baroque **stunner** that stands out even among all the other **dazzling** buildings with its **candy pink** paintwork”



ABOVE Meersburg Castle and Lake Constance

BELOW Cycling towards stormy weather near Immenstaad

FAR LEFT A detail of Peter Lenk's Magische Säule sculpture at Meersburg harbour

meagre German not being nearly enough to understand simple road signs or the gesticulations through the raging storm of another local cyclist trying to be helpful. Yes, all very confusing.

At last, we recognise a roundabout and whiz furiously back to site, soggy, squelching – but relieved. Are we glad that Wirthshof Camping has a laundry with dryers just yards from our pitch!

That relief is soon quashed when we

realise that, very stupidly, we'd left Roly's roof vents open. It had been a cloudless sky when we left, but we've learned a valuable lesson for the future. I don't know what's worse; squelchy carpets, sodden seat covers or a wet patch on a mattress.

That night we have another bad thunderstorm; Roly shakes with each quake and we fear for Sophie in her little tent alongside us. Sophie – and her tent – stand up to the onslaught, as apparently do the hardy campers who eat an al fresco breakfast next morning wearing their raincoats and plastering smiles to their faces under wet hair. It's hot and humid, so we open the windows for the breeze, only to get a 'waterfall' running down the Perspex.

Konstanz is the largest city on Lake Constance and Sophie's keen to visit because it's just a couple of hundred metres to walk from the ferry dock into Switzerland. The boat trip here is the highlight and our ticket to a 'paradise'; the hour-long journey sails via the garden island of Mainau where we wander through a glorious riot of colourful blooms (there are around 250 different types of dahlia here alone), passing impressive flower sculptures, a sensational Italian rose garden ➤



Trip summary

OUR MOTORHOME

2002 five-berth Roller Team Auto-Roller 41 with Fiat 2.3-litre diesel engine. 'Roly' has lots of lockers and storage space, which soon fills up when travelling with a teenage daughter



THE JOURNEY

At the end of June, we drove from Staffordshire to overnight at Folkestone before our Channel crossing, then travelled via Tournai, Esch-sur-Sûre, Baerenthal and Wolfach to spend four nights at Lake Constance before continuing to Austria

THE COSTS

Fuel average 26mpg (€225).....	£193.96	(€76.60).....	£66.03
Ferry DFDS Dover-Dunkerque.....	£101	Public transport two adults, one child:	
Site fees (€240).....	£206.89	boat trip via Mainau to Konstanz,	
Attractions two adults, one child;		bike hire.....	£48.63
Mainau, Meersburg old castle			

2002 Roller Team Auto-Roller 41

671 miles

Total £616.51



and an Italian-inspired cascade fringed with beautiful borders.

In the butterfly house we spend ages trying to tempt the exotic critters from Africa, Asia, Central and South America, to land on us. It's no wonder Mainau is known as Germany's Garden of Eden; I can't conjure up a better description than that.

As we cruise in to Konstanz's harbour we pass the head-turning statue (literally and figuratively; it revolves) of an Amazonian woman with her arms held aloft supporting two small naked male figures. This is the famous Imperia Statue (after a short story by Balzac) and the 'men' in her hands are Pope Martin V and Emperor Sigismund.

The first thing that hits us at Konstanz is how busy it feels, even after a weekend in Meersburg. The façades of buildings are decorated with murals and frescoes, but what many people seem to come here for are the shops. For anyone thus inclined it is probably heaven.


We've come for the fantastic view of Konstanz and the Bodensee from the top of the cathedral tower. There's nothing like being above the crowds and getting an utterly different perspective of a bustling city.

Sophie and I leave her dad, Robin, relaxing in the attractive gardens nudging the lake on the German side to walk

TOP TIPS

German supermarkets offer excellent value and superb choice and quality; we were impressed. But we found many of them were shut on Sundays

There's a good network of cycle paths, including the 273km (170 mile) Lake Constance cycle route, which circumnavigates the lake through Germany, Austria and Switzerland and which is mostly flat

 bodensee.eu

eastwards to stand astride the barely perceptible German/Swiss border.



Our return boat reverses from the jetty at Konstanz past a marina full of pleasure craft. As we near Meersburg, we get the best views of the town's grandiose buildings.


Our return to Wirthshof is via backroads passing fields of corn and with gorgeous views across the lake.


We may remember some of our time on Lake Constance as stormy, but it added to the excitement. What really stays in our minds are the gorgeous vistas over a shimmering lake from our boat trip, the dazzling decoration of magnificent buildings, the quaint winding streets, the ever-circling airship and that curious column at Meersburg. Yes, Lake Constance has worked its magic on me. www

WE STAYED AT

Wirthshof Camping & Hotel, Steibensteg
10, 88677 Markdorf, Germany

 0049 754 496270  wirthshof.de

 15 January - 14 December

 Two adults, pitch and electric: From €26.50 (£22.84)

ABOVE CLOCKWISE Carved wooden door of Konstanz Cathedral; the medieval district of Niederburg, Konstanz; Konstanz Cathedral