

By Dan Friesen

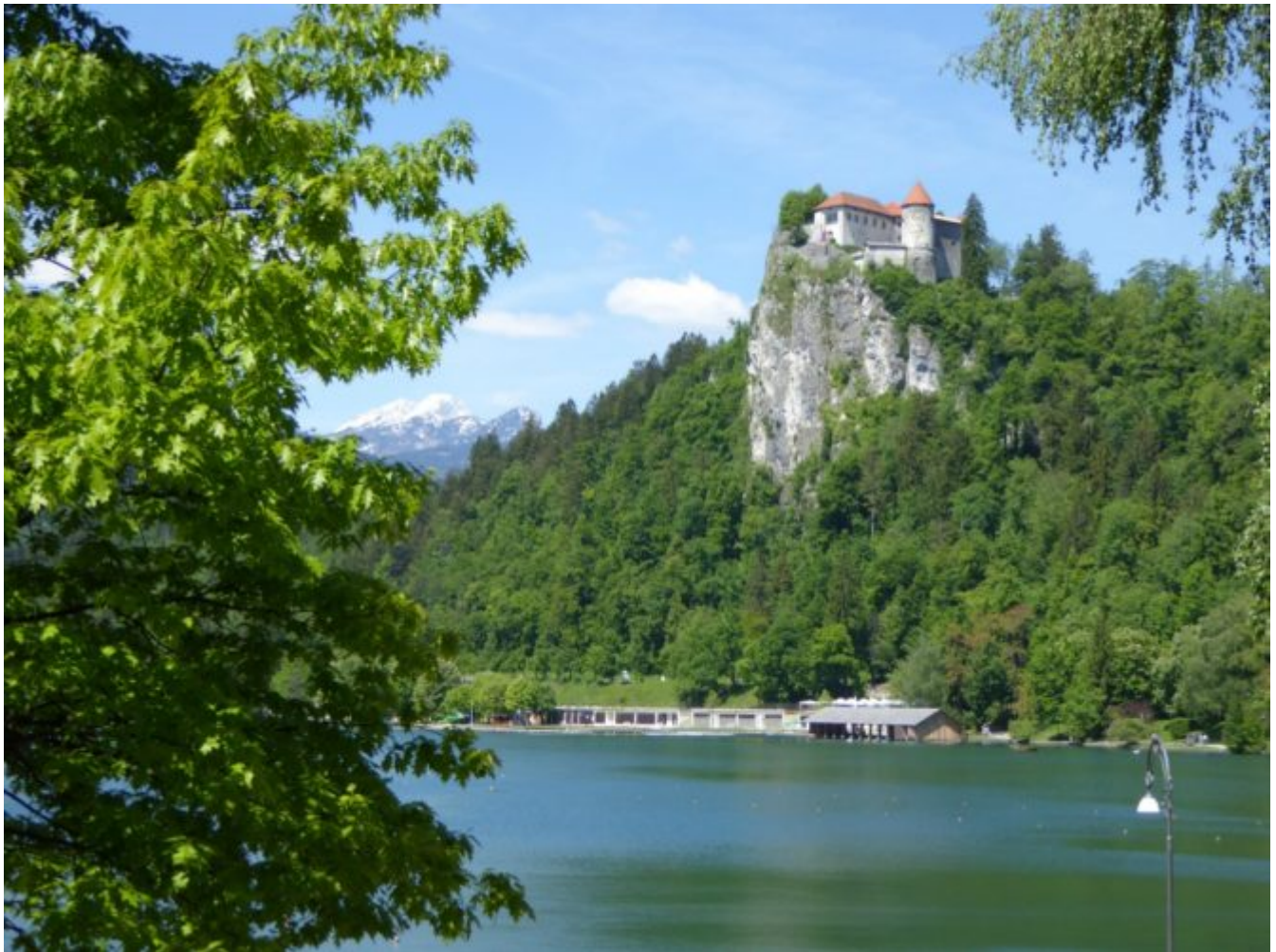
One of my favorite aspects of Alpine Mountain Magic is our stay in small towns.

All five towns where we overnight on tour are small rural communities in beautiful locales. In addition to the cultural connections we make here, each community has a story of its own to tell.



Lake Bled

**Bled, Slovenia** is a delightful lakeside town of about 6000 in population, in the shadow of the Julian Alps, easternmost of the Alpine ranges.



Lake Bled

**Gardena Valley** hosts several small villages that traditionally have made their living from woodcarving, and now from skiing and summer tourism as well. They sit nestled in Italy's Dolomite Mountains, southernmost range of the Alps.



## Gardena Valley

Linguistically this area is unique as a guardian of the Ladin language, a Romance language left behind by the Romans. It's a protected language in Italy, but the villagers are all trilingual, learning both German and Italian as they go through the school system, in addition to their mother tongue of Ladin.





Gardena Valley

**Guarda, Switzerland** is the smallest village we stay in, with only about 200 in population. We book a lovely family hotel that sits directly on the edge of a bench of the valley overlooking the Engadin, a long high valley in southeastern Switzerland in the Romansch-speaking (another Latin-based language) part of the country.



## Engadin Valley

This tiny berg is the start point for my favorite walk of the trip, a trail that threads its way through villages and across high alpine meadows, through flocks of sheep (be sure to close the gate!), and finishes at another Swiss village for lunch. The descriptive term - non-stop panoramas - is not an exaggeration in referring to this walk!





## Engadin Valley

**Kitzbühel** is a ski resort community in the Austrian Alps that has produced a number of famous world-class skiers. Population is about 8,000. We use the ski lifts to access mountain trails high above the town, with stunning views of the surrounding peaks, in particular the Wild Emperor Mountains.



Kitzbuhel

**Prien am Chiemsee**, our last stop, is on the shores of Bavaria's largest lake, Lake Chiemsee. We're out of the Alps here, and spend a day cruising this placid lake and enjoying the spectacular palace Herrenchiemsee, a creation of King Ludwig II of Bavaria. It's the largest of our host towns, at just over 10,000 in population.



Herrenchiemsee Palace

To view the full itinerary for this tour, check out [Alpine Mountain Magic](#).