



Austrian Lakes

Text and photos by Marco Daturi

— *Grübl See & Grüner See*



Controlled feeding of fish such as trout and char (left) is a fun activity that is allowed; In in Grübl See; In between dives, one can enjoy the magnificent scenery around the lake (above)

ing for food that is normally found along the shore. There is a ban on fishing but controlled feeding is allowed.

On the seabed of Grübl See, there were a number of statues put in place, but they were of no interest to us, as we focused on enjoying the frenzy of fish,

which was a bit unusual. There was movement everywhere. Trout and char darted in and out, and just as quickly, disappeared into the green of the lake—the typical shade of cold mountain waters.

The diving was fun, but the surface was also a pleasure. Air temperatures topside around Grübl See, at 1,160m in the mountains, are nice and crisp. Here, one can enjoy

total relaxation, thanks to a comfortable dive center, Grüblsee Alpenaquarium—the highest in Europe. The owners, Sabine Hausner and Robert Marschnig, are fantastic, friendly

Austria offers divine diving at high altitudes in freshwater lakes. Marco Daturi takes us to two beautiful lakes found in the mountains of Styria—one that continues to enthrall and one which has recently been closed for conservation and protection.

Grübl See At a depth of 9m, the water is clear and remains so, as divers gently descend. Even from the surface, you can see many curious fish, which show up as soon as you begin your dive. They approach fearlessly and swim among your bubbles, while search-



Grüblsee Alpenaquarium is the highest dive center in Europe





A frenzy of fearless friendly fish greet divers in Gröbl See

and welcoming, ready to receive dozens of guests for summer weekends. In addition to scuba diving, one can definitely appreciate the magnificent scenery, relaxed atmosphere and delicious Austrian dishes cooked by Sabine and accompanied by excellent Austrian beer.

There is always more to learn and surprises in store for the curious at Gröbl See. This artificial lake, in itself, may not have much interest, but you take home an unusual experience—and certainly an experience that will remain in one's memories rather than just in one's logbook.

A top destination for all diving and mountain lovers, a trip to Gröbl See was something that would have been combined with a trip to Grüner See, the "famous" green lake about an hour away. But diving Grüner See has recently been banned by

local tourism authorities, in order to conserve its clarity and natural green state. We were lucky to be some of the last few who dived this now protected lake.

Grüner See — the green lake

For a short dive trip that was a little "different," we planned something unusual, far away from mass tourism. We were in the mountains of Styria, Austria, at the foot of the Hochschwab—the highest mountain range in the area, rising to 2,278m above sea level. A picturesque landscape here hides a very particular natural phenomenon that makes the Grüner See a very interesting location, not only for divers.

During the first warm days of spring, ice and snow of the surrounding snow-capped mountains begin to melt. The thaw sends icy waters racing down

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into the valley where the water level of the lake rises several meters, submerging everything: lawns, paths, trees, dens, roads, flowers, bushes, bridges and benches. In just a few days, everything is immersed in crystal clear water.

This temporary lake, the Grüner See, is named after the color that comes from the submerged vegetation and green lawns. It is a time-limited phenomenon, which lasts just a few weeks. By the summer, the water evaporates, and the lake's water levels fall, dropping steadily until they return to winter levels. This cycle is repeated every year, which in the past before the dive ban, allowed a few weeks of interesting diving, with the best time limited, in fact, to May through June.

The water of Grüner See was incredibly crystal clear, with underwater visibility of over 50m, at least where there



were not hundreds of people underwater, which unfortunately happened almost every weekend in previous

years. The lake was, in fact, targeted by fans from all over Europe and, when the concentration of tourists was



THIS PAGE: We were lucky to be some of the last few divers to enjoy the crystal clear waters of Grüner See before diving was banned in 2017





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Divers enjoy refreshing meltwater in Grüner See, which could only be dived May through June

too high, you ended up losing the purity that characterizes it in the first place.

Diving. Once underwater, the first impression was that it was very refreshing, with the water temperatures around 6°C. The green water was continuous and faded into blue in some areas of the lake where large formations of chalky rock on the seabed affected different shades.

The underwater scenery was definitely out of the norm, with daisies and other flowers swaying on the seabed and fish swimming along paths, which would normally be used

by land animals for passage. Holes and crevices were completely flooded.

The lake was about 200m long, and one dive was not enough to explore it all. It was much better to avoid getting unnecessarily tired by dividing the exploration of the lake into stages.

Diving the lake was rejuvenating, and I imagine it would appeal to experienced divers looking for diversity, or underwater photographers, but also divers who wanted to escape and relax in a very picturesque setting. There was something for everyone, as long as one was appropriately equipped



Austrian Lakes

Marco Daturi, who emerged from the warm waters of a nursery in 1972—a restriction prescribed by an inclement, authoritarian doctor—was always very close to the sea and the underwater world, which he continues to explore with a passion whenever he can. Having survived the attack of a Ligurian porter crab, the false attentions of Indonesian nudibranchs, an underwater wedding, and insistent invitations to get into technical diving, Daturi continues to enjoy the passion that is diving, which culminated in 2003 with the creation of ScubaPortal.it. A certified divemaster, Daturi also holds a doctorate in economics, and two masters in marketing and sports management. For more information, visit: ScubaPortal.it or email: info@scubaportal.it.



Grüner See is certainly a rare sight and diving in the lake itself was a unique experience that would leave one completely satisfied if done in the right way, at the right time, and possibly during the week when there are fewer people visiting. On weekends, more and more people came to dive the Grüner See, so it was inevitable that visibility would worsen during these busy times.

Since the lake is not, however, around the corner for Italians like me, and we have 7,500km of sea coasts to explore in our own backyard, we would probably think of a trip to the Grüner See as an option only after having accumulated

and clad, because the cold was still a factor to take into serious consideration.

During the dive, we had to be extra careful with buoyancy and finning technique. The seabed was indeed delicate and one wrong kick would send up silt that ruined the otherwise clear visibility of the lake.

Topside. Above the water, it is a fairy-tale landscape to which no one can remain indifferent. Especially on sunny days, the incredible colors of the water are beautiful and its crystalline transparency allows you to see the seabed.

many other experiences. It would then be a treat to add the Grüner See experience to a store of good memories collected over a lifetime of diving. Alas, diving in the lake is now prohibited. So let's not limit our discussion to the underwater realm, as one could think of a trip to Grüner See as an opportunity for a nice family vacation, which includes some diving in other lakes nearby. ■

Please note that swimming and diving in Grüner See has recently been banned by local tourism authorities in a bid to conserve and protect the lake.



Picturesque view of Grüner See (above); Author with wife and son (left)—the lakes make a nice family getaway

