

By Angie Trask

A friend in the UK recently inspired me with great photos of her young children gleefully exploring their new campervan, 'Jim-Jim'. I remember staying in caravans during summers in Cornwall, and have positive childhood memories of camping with my family and with school. My husband also grew up camping, and his parents are still keen campers (pre-COVID they toured Europe every year).

After some research I found Flying Dog, a company in Bratislava that hires out luxury campervans. Owned by camping enthusiasts who know their stuff, their services were reasonably priced, and they offered a comprehensive explanation of the vehicle, lots of accessories, advice about camping places and apps to use and the possibility of renting extra camping and safety equipment from them. So we decided it was time to take our two little ones on their first camping trip.

With so many beautiful places to visit in Austria and the surrounding countries, the question was where to go? Most people are aware of the beautiful lakes in Salzburg and Neusiedl, of course, but there are also stunning lakes in Kärnten in the South of Austria. With the weather threatening to turn cool and rainy in most places at the end of summer, we decided to head south, but to stay within Austria in case of any sudden border issues.

Kärnten boasts some of the bluest, warmest lakes in the country, which remain an inviting 25°C from May to the end of September (see box for more details). We found a lovely campsite on Faakersee, the most southern lake in the region with clear, turquoise waters, and set off!

The campervan was a big change from our usual vehicle: it was heavy (three and a half tonnes to be precise), seven metres long with a bike rack on the rear end. When turning, the vehicle would swing out about two metres! The campervan had great pickup and soon we became more comfortable driving it. There were a few moments during prolonged roadworks where the lanes narrowed, but generally other drivers respected our size and got out of the way. It's not the kind of vehicle that makes you feel like you have to rush, so we found it quite relaxing to drive.

Camp Anderwald is a lovely family-friendly campsite with many facilities and activities for children as well as adults. It's set within a forested ground with direct lake access, which felt like natural, wild camping but with security and plenty of clean facilities (including a lovely restaurant and bakery/shop). Our camping platz was only about 6 metres from the lake, so the kids spent lots of time running around and swimming. Boat hire, paddle boarding and canoeing were all available from nearby companies, and there were lots of cycle routes around the lake, to Villach, and surrounding towns. The campsite also ran orienteering and climbing courses. In terms of

food, the on-site restaurant was great for a meal or just coffee and homemade cake.

Staying in a campervan was very exciting for the children, and it definitely helped that they are still small as everything in there is compact. The children slept in single beds at the back, which converted into one large bed, too. Mum and Dad slept on the 'magic' bed, positioned on the ceiling until needed, and then moved into place by a simple

button. When it came to cooking, we mainly used an outdoor grill and kept the food very simple. The fridge inside the campervan was a really generous size, and the hob cooker and sink all folded neatly away under the glass work surface. We used the communal dishwashing facilities at the main campsite building most of the time.

I admit I hadn't realised how much stuff we would need until I was halfway through the packing. I was conscious of taking too much, but also of not taking enough for the mixed weather. Luckily the van was equipped with a huge

storage space at the back.

We had a wonderful time camping and would definitely recommend it as a family-friendly adventure. Whether you want to check in to a campsite or hotel, the beautiful lakes of Karnten have something for everyone.

www.flying-dog.eu / www.campinganderwald.at

WHAT TO SEE AT THE SEES

Woerthersee - Between Klagenfurt and Villach. Stunning lakeside villas and restaurants, and nearby attractions such as the Werzer's bathhouse (dating back to 1895), Schiffswandern (hiking/boat trips) and Pyramidenkogel (a 71m spiral wood viewing tower).

Klopeinersee - Summer temperatures of 28°C, all-ages attractions such as panoramic trails, dripstone caves, cycle tours through old mines, and fossil hunting at the Karavankas geopark.

Millstättersee - Marketed as a lover's paradise. Intimate camping for two, row on a lake, picnic under the stars, hike the Love Trail.

Ossiachersee - A watersports destination, due to the natural thermal lift and wind. Plenty of challenging hiking and cycling trails, waterfalls, castle ruins and Ossiach Abbey.

Weissensee - Austria's highest swimming lake in the Alps. Perfect for those wishing to get back-to-nature, with Nordic walking routes and wildlife tours on hybrid-propelled leisure rafts.

Presseggersee - A family-friendly option due to its warm waters, adventure playgrounds, Hike World, cycling cross-border to Italy, and pram-accessible aqua trail.

Top Tip - Booking accommodation on the lakes entitles visitors to over 40 free activities via the ActivCard scheme - be sure to ask about it when you book!

