

EPIC HIKES: ALPINE CROSSING
STARTING POINT: GMÜND/BAVARIA
FINISH: STERZING/SOUTH TYROL



There are numerous ways on how to cross the Alps on foot. The mother of Alpine long-distance treks is the *Via Alpina* (see <http://www.via-alpina.org>), which offers five different trails topped by the monumental Red Trail: 161 stages covering 2400 km from Trieste in eastern Italy, via Slovenia and along the Alps to Monaco on the Mediterranean Sea. Though technically not challenging as it often circumvents higher peaks, this is serious, physically demanding stuff. There is also the highly popular and pilgrimage-like 'Dream Path' (or *Traumfad* in German) which starts in the centre of Munich and finishes 28 days later on Piazza San Marco in Venice; a total of 520 km (see: <https://www.tyrol.com/things-to-do/sports/hiking/hiking-tours/a-munich-venice-dream-path>); again, not a technical, but a robust physical challenge of endurance, offering the full gamut of mountain scenery. One must not omit the *Grande Traversata delle Alpi* (GTA); a whopping 900 km, 59-day schlep from the Novena Pass in Switzerland, through the cantons of Wallis/Valais and Ticino and into the Italian region of Piedmont, before finishing in Viocene, not far from the Mediterranean sea. The trail uses ancient mule and sheep tracks, and upon its inception in 1979 was designed to offer struggling and remote mountain communities a much needed financial boost. The trail itself is technically not difficult though the high altitude at times, and steep climbs and ascents make this trail a formidable physical endurance test. Those with less time on their hands ought to consider the classic short crossing along the *E5 hiking trail* from Oberstdorf in southern Germany across the Lechtal and the Ötztal Alps in Tyrol/Austria and into Meran in the German speaking part of Italy (for more info see: <https://www.tyrol.com/things-to-do/sports/hiking/hiking-tours/a-weitwanderweg-e5>). This is an ambitious, yet achievable 6-day tour of 180 km with a total vertical ascent of over 10,000 metres. Each daily stage lasts at least 6, sometimes 9 hours across high-alpine territory, so you have to be experienced and fit.



But I would like to highlight a far easier, less strenuous itinerary with the relatively new crossing from the Bavarian resort of Tegernsee, past Lake Achensee and Mayrhofen in Austria and into Sterzing (or Vipiteno in Italian) in South Tyrol. This long distance hike of 110 km can be completed in 7 days, using buses, trains, a rowing ferry (!) as well as a cable car to ease (and shorten) the journey. This makes it the most accessible of all Alpine crossings and is perfectly suited for the average and/or ageing hiker. (for more info see: <https://www.tyrol.com/things-to-do/sports/hiking/hiking-tours/a-trans-alpine-crossing>).



Keep in mind that the hiking season is short (roughly mid-June to mid-September) and when doing the 6 or 7 day crossings, it might be worth your while to book the hike with a tour operator. Not only will they organise all accommodation and haul your luggage to the next overnight stop, they also offer tour guides to help you along the way. Having said that, for those seeking a more solitary experience, the crossing from Tegernsee to Sterzing can easily be organised by scanning through the relevant websites (see above) and by arranging your accommodation through outfits such as www.booking.com (where I found plenty of options). It should save you at least 500 Euro.



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