

Safe Winter Tourism in Austria– Winter Rules

Vienna, 13 October 2020

Preliminary remarks

Tourism is part of the Austrian identity. In spite of COVID, summer holidays in Austria worked well. Our goal is now to have safe winter tourism. Skiing, enjoying food and drink, nature and hospitality, leisure-time activities and shopping—and not just in skiing areas, but also in cities. A wellness holiday or a culture trip in Austria—all of this will be possible in winter. However, there is one thing which will not be possible: après ski as we know it from the past: Packed umbrella bars, mountain huts or après ski pubs full of people and loud music. These are the classical infection sites which we really have to avoid this season.

Have fun skiing—but without the après ski!

The winter season plays a key role in Austrian tourism—at over 50 % we are the clear market leaders in winter sports holidays in Europe. In order to position Austria as a safe holiday destination and at the same time to realise the best possible protection against the pandemic, a uniform, strict and comprehensive approach is necessary.

Winter holidays in Austria are dominated by one activity: skiing. However, Christmas markets have also created a considerable demand for holidays in Austria in recent years. Around half of all overnight stays take place in the winter season—73 million in the winter of 2018/19, and million in the winter of 2019/20, the latter in spite of COVID-19. Against this background, suitable general conditions for winter tourism are essential in order to reduce the risk of infection with COVID-19 and at the same time to enable a holiday feeling and to allow businesses to survive.

It is not only about the accommodation and hospitality sector, but also about a large number of different businesses that depend directly or indirectly on tourism: the baker who delivers bread to the hotels, the small supermarket where holidaymakers shop, the sports store that sells and hires out equipment, the plumber who gets his orders from tourism businesses, or the tobacconist and other small stores in vacation resorts.

A lot is at stake: our health, our guests & businesses, our regions and the people who live there.

Key factors to get through the winter safely

Crowds of people, close contact and enclosed areas provide an ideal breeding ground for the COVID-19 virus and therefore need to be avoided. It is precisely here that the Austrian winter strategy comes into play. **The prerequisites for a safe and responsible winter holiday in Austria are on the one hand adherence to general basic principles, and on the other to winter rules which are specific to the tourism sector. In this way, the additional risks which arise due to the increasing shift of social life indoors can be minimised.**

Basic principles

1. Clear rules for businesses and holidaymakers

The most recent amendment of the COVID-19 Measures Regulation has in part already laid down the legal framework for winter tourism. The following are general rules:

- **Social distancing** of one metre
- **Face coverings in indoor customer areas**
- **Face coverings** for staff and customers in the **hotel, restaurant and catering sectors**
- **The consumption of food and drink in indoor areas only when seated; in future this will also apply outdoors**
- **Events** may only take place to a limited extent

These basic rules have to be adhered to—there will also be strict checks and sanctions for non-compliance.

2. Prevention concepts for customised solutions

In the winter, there will be an increased focus on prevention concepts for sensitive and system-relevant areas, particularly **cable cars** and **skiing schools**. Individual prevention concepts will also be set out for every **Advent and Christmas market**—in this way, regional differences and individual circumstances can be taken into account.

3. Testing

In July 2020, the federal government initiated the **Safe Hospitality Test Offer**. Employees working in **commercial tourist accommodation establishments** can choose to take voluntary tests on a regular basis. As of September, the test offer

was extended to **hospitality businesses, campsites** and **youth hostels**. An extension of this preventive screening programme is being prepared for the winter. This will focus on **skiing instructors and mountain guides** in particular. In this context, the professional handling of suspected and confirmed infections among staff and holidaymakers by the local health authorities is an important element. For more detailed information see: <http://www.sichere-gastfreundschaft.at>

Sector-specific winter rules

Hospitality sector

- For the hospitality sector, the **general rules laid down by the COVID-19 measures regulation** also apply in winter, in particular:
 - A maximum of 10 persons (plus children and young people under the age of 18) per group of visitors
 - Opening and closing hours of 5:00 and 01:00 of the following day respectively
 - More restrictive opening and closing hours can be set by the provinces
 - No consumption of food and drinks in the immediate vicinity of the place where they are prepared
 - The consumption of food and drinks in indoor areas where they are served is only allowed when customers are seated at a table
 - A minimum of 1 metre distance between points (e.g. tables) where food and drinks can be consumed, and one metre distance to customers from different groups of visitors
 - Face coverings are obligatory in indoor areas for staff and customers. This does not apply to customers when seated at tables where food and drinks are consumed.
- The rule that the consumption of food and drinks in restaurants, cafes and bars is only permitted when seated will be extended to cover outdoor areas **before the winter season begins**.
 - There will be exceptions, e.g. for stands or stalls serving food (here again, however, no consumption of food and drink is allowed in the immediate vicinity of the serving point)
- **Obligatory prevention/hygiene concept** for businesses with more than 200 seats, particularly with:
 1. The nomination of a COVID-19 officer¹
 2. Arrangements regarding the serving of food and drinks
 3. Arrangements for managing the movement of customers

¹ The COVID-19 officer is the contact person for the authorities and should be familiar with the operation of the hospitality business. This does not entail any consequences in terms of liability for this person. No special training is required for the role.

4. Specific hygiene measures
 5. Arrangements on action to be taken if a SARS-CoV-2 infection occurs
 6. Arrangements on the use of sanitary facilities
- Adherence to these rules will be enforced by increased inspections by health and public order officers. The amendment of the COVID-19 measures act provides for fines of up to €500 for customers and up to €3,600 for the companies in question. In the case of the violation of a ban on entering such establishments, higher sanctions are possible.

Tourist accommodation

- The applicable rules for tourist accommodation entities **proved themselves during the summer season and are also suitable and sufficient for the winter season:**
 - A minimum of 1 metre distance between customers from different groups;
 - the obligatory use of face coverings for staff with contact to customers as well as for customers when they enter generally accessible indoor areas;
 - 1.5 metres distance in dormitories to persons who do not live in the same household.
- The relevant local health authorities will make provisions to provide accommodation for tourists if there is an outbreak of the virus.

Cable cars

- 85 % of cable cars are open vehicles and the duration of travel is less than 15 minutes, so the risk of infection is low. Nevertheless, special cautionary measures are required here too.
- The **rules laid down in the COVID measures regulation** apply:
 - A minimum of 1 metre distance to persons who do not live in the same household (less than the minimum distance is only possible in exceptional cases)
 - Obligation to wear a face covering
- If necessary, the operating companies should enable customers to keep 1 metre distance to each other by limiting capacity, especially in the case of cable cars.
- 1 metre distance should be maintained during queuing
- A tailor-made manual for **cable car companies** needs to be created in order to address the situation of different systems: [Link to the manual for cable cars](#)
- The recommendations also include increasing the frequency of journeys (timetabling), permanent ventilation in gondola lifts or floor markings in cable cars

Skiing schools

- The **rules laid down in the COVID measures regulation** apply:
 - A minimum of 1 metre distance to persons who do not live in the same household, and
 - obligatory face coverings in the customer areas of the skiing school.
- In addition, the **Austrian Association of Skiing Schools (ÖSSV)** has created a practical manual for lessons given by skiing schools and snow sports instructors: [Link to the manual for skiing schools](#)
- The recommendations include:
 - Maximum group sizes of 10 persons
 - Keeping the same groups
 - COVID-19 tests for skiing instructors—to this end the federal government will include skiing instructors in the Safe Hospitality testing programme
 - Additional hygiene measures

Advent and Christmas markets

- Advent and Christmas markets are usually a **combination** of an outdoor market, catering, events and other leisure businesses (fairground attractions).
- For these markets, catering and leisure businesses, **social distancing** of at least 1 metre to people who do not live in the same household applies, and now face coverings are obligatory. For events there are additional requirements depending on the size and nature of the event, especially limitations on the number of persons allowed.
- Every Advent and Christmas market has to draw up and implement a **prevention/hygiene concept** which has to particularly include the following points:
 1. The nomination of a COVID-19 officer²
 2. Risk analysis (identification of time and space-related risk areas)
 3. The regulation of numbers of visitors (to ensure social distancing)
 4. Management of the flow of visitors (time zone model, stewards)
 5. Preventive measures (e.g. distances between stalls)
 6. Safety and hygiene measures for operators and staff
 7. Safety and hygiene measures for visitors

² The COVID-19 officer is the contact person for the authorities and should be familiar with the operation of Advent and Christmas market. This does not entail any consequences in terms of liability for this person. No special training is required for the role.

8. Rules on face coverings
9. Catering stalls - creation of sufficient space for safe eating and drinking
10. Communication (e.g. floor markings, pictograms)

Winter holidays in Austria can take place in spite of COVID, and be relaxing or full of action. This is dependent on each individual taking responsibility and adhering to these rules and recommendations for safe winter tourism.

