Architecture Trails

For decades, Vorarlberg has been a trailblazer when it comes to architecture and crafts. Ten differently-themed architectours take visitors with an interest in architecture and design to hand-picked contemporary and traditional buildings.

Vorarlberg’s contemporary architecture has its roots in the 1960s, when a group of fledgling architects who wanted to break new ground formed. Calling themselves the “Vorarlberg Design Artists”, they cultivated an absolutely novel style, both in terms of architecture and in the way they cooperated with building authorities and builder owners. Their idea of architecture revolved around notions such as clear lines, minimalist forms, a sparing use of natural resources, blending in harmoniously with the surroundings, and – above all – affordability. This new thinking soon caught on and attracted international attention. Today, virtually all municipal buildings and many private homes as well as reconstructions and adaptations of traditional buildings in Vorarlberg are architect-designed. Indigenous timber has been the building material of choice since time immemorial. Energy-efficient design is common standard. In this respect as well, Vorarlberg’s architects are genuine pioneers.

Compiled by the Vorarlberg Architecture Institute (vai) and the Vorarlberg State Tourist Board, 10 full-day and half-day tours shed light on the regional architecture. They take visitors to urban and rural regions and are accessible by private car or public transport. The tours allow for plenty of time to take a walk, visit a museum or other public buildings, and for culinary breaks.

Orientation & Organisation

The presented tours can be easily fit into your own plans. Containing a description of the various tours and objects in detail, the free Vorarlberg app “Urlaub und Freizeit” (“Holidays and Leisure”, in German only) helps you find your bearings. To find out more about this app, see overleaf!

The team of Bodensee-Vorarlberg Tourismus will happily compile an extensive programme for groups of 12 persons on request, including e.g. accommodation, inns and restaurants, guided themed tours and other visits. Your contacts for professional excursions, also private groups, are the Vorarlberg Architecture Institute (vai) and the Energy Institute Vorarlberg (EIV). You will be accompanied by specially trained multi-lingual (German, English, French) guides. We can also organise talks and lectures on sustainable building or regional development, and arrange for meetings with architects, craftspeople or builder-owners.

For contact data, check out our website www.vorarlberg.travel/architecture

Getting Things Done

An itinerant exhibition titled “Getting Things Done” is dedicated to architecture in Vorarlberg. First on show in 2014 at the Werkraum Bregenzerwald, it now travels the Culture Forums which the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosts at 32 venues around the world. Curator Wolfgang Fiel has put together an exhibition which highlights the eminent significance of local craftsmanship and the exceptional cooperation of all stakeholders who contribute to the development of the built environment in Vorarlberg.

For more information see www.gettingthingsdone.or.at

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Village Spaces

In many rural regions, contemporary architecture re-invents around one individual object. In Vorarlberg, however, a genuine culture of design competitions for public buildings evolved in the 1990s when integrated squares and village spaces were envisioned. Village centres, neighbourhoods, and even commercial parks, have transformed into showpieces of high-quality contemporary design.

The state of Vorarlberg supports this development as well as the preservation of distinctive structures by regional planning and sponsoring policies. At local level, a number of advisory boards have been designated to ensure coherent village spaces.

This full-day tour starts in the Rhine valley and heads to the Bregenzerwald. The half-day tour starts in the Rhine valley and heads to the Grosses Walsertal biosphere park.

Art & Culture

Vorarlberg’s cultural buildings epitomise its cultural heritage, ranging from Roman excavations to rural and artisanal achievements and a still visible industrial history. Social developments such as the award-winning Islamic cemetery have set new architectural standards.

The state capital of Bregenz has become a hub for culture and art institutions. The opening of the vorarlberg museum in 2014 completed the project featuring a “cultural mile” and a new town centre. At a more general level, however, Vorarlberg subscribes to decentralism. The number of cultural buildings in Vorarlberg epitomises its cultural essence, which revolves around one individual object. In many rural regions, contemporary architecture combines natural beauty with age-old building traditions.

Craftsmanship is one of the main pillars of building culture in Vorarlberg. The selection and processing of materials has even become the basis for an architectural language and aesthetics in its own right. Clear lines and a radical reduction of form derive attention to the surfaces in particular. The materials used, and their ability to age, are a hallmark of traditional buildings. Their fine textures, but also their ability to seamlessly with nature and the natural landscape, which is always challenging. In the one hand, they must offer strength and stability to resist the forces of nature, on the other they must blend in with natural spaces and the surroundings.

In the mid-1970s, it was mainly ambitious designers and builders who, against massive resistance, fought for the preservation of historic structures. Interest in the mostly rural heritage was always directed towards building structures which have rich artistic potential and which are fitted to today. In Vorarlberg, however, a genuine culture of craftsmanship has also spurred a revival of craftsmanship and the use of new solutions are adopted (e.g. traditional costumes atelier in Rieflingen).

This tour takes visitors to the Bregenzerwald.

Nature & Landscape

Traditional buildings such as bridges, harbours, sports grounds on cableways require interference with nature and the natural landscape, which is always challenging. In the one hand, they must offer strength and stability to resist the forces of nature, on the other they must blend into the landscape with natural spaces and the surroundings.

Vorarlberg’s architects have shown ambition without losing their ambition. Whether it be a graceful form, a bold new object or a transport connection - the facilities and buildings you will visit on this tour are all Vorarlberg masterful masterpieces of architecture present all while interacting harmoniously with their surroundings.

You will find more details on this tour on the website of the Vorarlberg travel/Architecture network.

Information & Orientation

Where to locate a site/What do the buildings look like? The interactive map at www.vorarlberg.travel/Architecture makes planning your stay and finding your bearings easy.

The free Vorarlberg app "Wandl und Freizeit" ("Holiday and leisure") comes in handy when out and about. Under "Design" the heading of Architectures it describes the different routes and sites in detail. Also sites are linked to the Austrian architecture data base nextroom. Moreover, the app suggests accommodation, restaurants, recreation facilities, sites worth seeing and a lot more. The app is free for download at: www.vorarlberg.travel/apps (in German only).

Timber & Material

The development of architecture in Vorarlberg has also spurred a revival of craftsmanship and timber construction. Today’s prevalent sustainable aesthetics which is marked by uncoloured structures, minimalist forms and unprocessed surfaces has formed in several phases by the interaction of artists, technically adept designers and innovative craftpeople. Here old and new blends naturally, and is in remarkable with age-old building traditions.

Timber constructions combine economy, ecology and craftsmanship and require most accurate planning. The white fir which is used for facades and interior construction is characteristic of Vorarlberg.

This day tour starts in Dornbirn, Vorarlberg’s largest town, heading for the Bregenzerwald. The half-day tour highlights examples in the Rhine valley and in the Grosses Walsertal biosphere park.

Route 1 (full day)
Dornbirn (LCT One – Life Cycle Tower) – Bödele – Rankweil-Brederis (open-air museum Villa Dr. Leo Herburger, villa Guntram Hämmerle) – Andelsbuch (villa Krahmer, village square) – Feldkirch (factory building of the Lot carpentry). The tour starts in Bregenz, heading for the Bregenzerwald. Route 2 starts in Dornbirn, heading for the Walserland (Schliersee and Nenzing).

Route 2 (1 day)
Dornbirn (municipal post/Dornbirn, Karlhau nature discovery show/Dornbirn, vaDOMA) – Lochau (village square) – Lochau village centre – Lochau (Artenne Nenzing).