

It's not too early for Passion Play planning

By [Felicity Long](#) / March 20, 2018

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If it seems a little early to be talking about the 2020 Oberammergau Passion Play in Germany, consider this: the event typically attracts about 450,000 international spectators, a quarter-million of whom are from North America. Consider also that the production takes place in a Bavarian village of just over 5,000 inhabitants, and you get the idea: tickets and accommodations are at a premium. In short, this is a trip that requires some serious advance planning.

The production is staged just once every 10 years and comprises more than 2,000 actors, most of whom are locals, depicting the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection to an audience of 4,500 people at a time on what is billed as the largest open-air stage in the world. The performance runs about five hours over the course of an entire day, and to accommodate as many spectators as possible, the play is performed roughly 100 times. The 2020 Passion Play is scheduled for May 16 to Oct. 4.

Part of the appeal of the play is that it has been around awhile; about 400 years, in fact. The tradition began in 1634 when the population of Europe was being decimated by the Black Plague. In desperation, the Oberammergau villagers decided to perform the play every 10 years in the hopes that the spectacle would somehow ward off the next pandemic. The tradition has carried on to this day, and the story goes that the village has been spared from the plague ever since.

Because of the enormous popularity of the event, tour operators like [Tauck](#), [Trafalgar](#) and [Collette](#) are among those already offering itineraries that include performances of the Passion Play. Cruise companies like [CroisiEurope](#) and [Avalon Waterways](#) also are offering itineraries that include a performance of the play.

It stands to reason that faith-based travelers will be especially targeted for these tours, but there are plenty of other things to do in the Ammergau Alps region, about 60 miles from Munich, for those who see the Passion Play as a cultural event they want to combine with other activities.

Neuschwanstein Castle, for example, said to be the inspiration for Disney's famous castles, is less than an hour from Oberammergau, and Linderhof Palace, once the home of Ludwig II, also is nearby.

The monks at the [Benedictine Abbey of Ettal](#), founded in 1330, create their own liquors from ancient recipes, which visitors can sample at the Ettal Abbey Distillery and at the Ettal Brewery and Distillery Museum.

For refreshment of a different sort, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, a resort town less than a half-hour from Oberammergau, is known for its hiking trails at the Partnachklamm Gorge.

Mount Zugspitze, Germany's highest peak, also is nearby and is accessible via cog railway from Lake Eibsee or on the new [Zugspitze Cable Car](#).