

Partschins Waterfall

The Healing Power of Nature



Nestling in South Tyrol's largest nature park, surrounded by the three thousand metre-plus mountains of the Texel Group is where you will find Partschins, a picturesque village on the outskirts of Merano, which reaches from 500 metres to a mighty 3,337 metres above sea level, and has an amazing abundance of nature, sunshine and water.

In summer, thunderous streams and lush green Alpine pastures captivate, whilst in winter the agreeable stillness and views of the snow-bedecked summits entice visitors. Hikers obey the call of the mountains on the passes and follow a wide variety of trails to explore the Alpine-Mediterranean landscape. There is hardly anywhere else where the scenery and climate provide better conditions for an active yet restful holiday.

And then there's the waterfall! A waterfall with a drop height of 95 metres, a thunderous natural spectacle, over which, at peak times up to 10,000 litres of water flow every second, and which has a special microclimate with certified added value for health and wellbeing.

"Where clean water flows, the people are healthy." What the ancient Chinese knew millennia ago, has for a long time been no secret on home territory too. A recent study by the Technical University of Munich examined the water and air quality in the vicinity of Partschins Waterfall. The unequivocal result of the analyses and measurements carried out was that Partschins Waterfall boasts clean, germ-free water and excellent air quality.

Partschins Waterfall: a natural spectacle with clean air quality

Without a doubt Partschins Waterfall is among the loveliest in the Alpine region. It is situated in the Zieltal valley, north west of Partschins and, with a drop height of around 95 metres, plunges from 1,110 metres to 1,015 metres above sea level. The Zieltal and its tributary valleys and various three thousand metre-plus mountains stretch out over several kilometres to the north. To the south, the Zielbach stream flows through Salten, then past Partschins, finally joining the river Etsch between Rabland and Töll. The waterfall is at its most powerful during the thaw from May to June, or after heavy rainfall. At these times, up to 10,000 litres of water per second find their way down into the valley.

In summer 2015, as part of a research project commissioned by the tourist association, tents with technical equipment were set up close to the waterfall with the aim of shedding light on the water chemistry and air quality in the vicinity of Partschins Waterfall. The study, which was funded by the provincial and municipal authorities, was led by Professor Dr. Reinhard Niessner of the Institute of Hydrochemistry and Chemical Balneology at the Technical University of Munich. Subsequently, the results were presented in a medical climatological report by Professor Dr. Dr. Angela Schuh, head of the Department of Medical Climatology at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. The project involved ascertaining the health benefits of Partschins Waterfall and gauging the possibilities for health promotion, prevention of illness and provision of therapies.

The health effects of water had already been investigated in the past. The results of the studies conducted showed repeatedly that water and especially waterfalls with their special microclimates are a natural healing resource that offer sustainable health improvements for people.

The study by the Technical University of Munich certifies that Partschins Waterfall has clean and germ-free water, as defined by the European Drinking Water Directive. It has a low mineral content (positive ions: sodium, potassium, magnesium and calcium; negative ions: silicates, hydrogen carbonate, nitrate, sulphate and a little chloride) but has a noticeably high concentration of rubidium. Rubidium, which is also contained in low quantities in sea water and mineral / spa water, is a trace element and plays a part in the transmission of nerve impulses in the central nervous system. The use of rubidium as an anti-depressant substance is currently under discussion.

The measurements of the air quality in the immediate vicinity of the waterfall presented a similarly pleasing picture: the aerosol around the waterfall (up to 100 metres) is largely continental clean air with a very low particulate count. The air is especially clean on a morning before sunrise and late in the afternoon / evening after sunset as well as when the skies are cloudy. Then the particle concentration was measured at between 800 and 1200/cm³, which is approaching that of the world's most outstanding clean air areas over the north east Atlantic or the Arctic.

In view of these findings, exploiting the immediate vicinity of Partschins Waterfall for climatic healing treatments seems not just obvious but also essential.

Prevention and health aspects of the waterfall climate

The history of the natural and medical sciences demonstrates that at various times and in different cultures, pure air and clean water have always been considered to be health-promoting elements and have been used for therapeutic and curative purposes since time immemorial.

The combination of these two natural elements is especially impressive in the vicinity of waterfalls. Close to their impact, waterfalls generate a finely atomised, highly concentrated aerosol, which is created by the combination of negatively charged ions in the air and the tiniest floating water particles. Due to their small size, these so-called waterfall aerosols penetrate deep in the airways where their cleansing and immunoregulatory effect unfolds. The water particles at Partschins Waterfall are in the submicron range and thus are able to penetrate right to the deepest levels of the respiratory tract, where they release stuck mucus and free the airways of dirt and dust particles.

In her medical climatological report, Professor Dr. Dr. Angela Schuh looks extensively at the health promoting aspects of Partschins Waterfall, and states that “staying in the immediate proximity of Partschins Waterfall is ideally suited to the prevention of respiratory diseases.”

But not only those who frequently suffer from respiratory infections, asthma or COPD, or those who are subjected to everyday lives with high air pollution, would benefit to lasting effect from the curative climate around the waterfall. Partschins and environs, and especially the area around the waterfall, are also ideal for the prevention of functional disorders of the cardiovascular system, often brought about by a lack of conditioning. In treating the lack of conditioning and its possible side effects - exhaustion, tiredness, inability to concentrate, sleep problems, and sensitivity to the weather - sport-oriented endurance training and simultaneous vascular training (therapy to increase resistance) is the method of choice. Both can be carried out extremely successfully through climate therapy treatments, especially as part of a climatic terrain cure. The health-promoting effect of the terrain cure results from the interaction of physical training in the form of regulated walking exercises and the beneficial impacts of the local climate. Due to its altitude, and the refreshing yet mild mountain climate, with over 300 days of sunshine per year, Partschins offers the ideal environment for gentle endurance training in combination with fresh air, cold water (e.g. Kneipp treatments by the waterfall) and high sun intensity as a source of vitamin D as well as an intensive experience of the landscape. So-called fresh air rest cure units - in the form of slight exposure to cold whilst lying peacefully in the fresh air - entail additional resistance strengthening effects and enhance the result of the climatic terrain cure. Whole body training in natural surroundings strengthens the heart and circulation, demonstrably increases performance and leads to enhanced wellbeing. In this regard, the latter is in no way to be understood as a purely physical condition, but one that in the holistic sense also includes the soul and the spirit. This leads on to the third, no less important prevention aspect of Partschins Waterfall, namely that of mental “slow down” and the prevention of psycho-social or spiritual stress.

Slowing down and stress reduction

Stress and overwork are among the most common complaints in modern society. Life, work and even our leisure time are subjected to ever more complex stresses and demands, so that there is no longer any time for peace and recovery. This mental stress has negative effects on the immune system, puts a strain on the heart and circulatory system and adversely affects sleep patterns. If stress becomes a permanent state, depression and burnout threaten.

People who suffer from chronic stress will find that nature is an effective healing resource. Find peace in a pristine landscape. Breathe fresh mountain air. Gather strength by the waterfall. In Partschins. As discussed in the report by Professor Dr. Dr. Angela Schuh: "Partschins, and in particular spending time by the waterfall and its environs, is perfect for slowing down and reducing stress: the feeling of security from the narrow valley, the beautiful, largely untouched landscape, the impressive falling water, the even and calming roar of the waterfall (...), the play of colours in the water, the babbling of the Zielbach stream, the rocks lying on the edge, etc."

Regeneration and recuperation in a healing climate: climatic therapy

Climatic therapy involves the therapeutic use of climatic environmental stimuli. Put simply, climatic therapy is therapy to increase resistance for the promotion of health and acts primarily to prevent cardiovascular disorders (metabolic syndrome), stress-related complaints and non-organic sleep problems. The healing climate around Partschins Waterfall, with its mixture of stimulating and protective factors, and the attested clean air quality and high air humidity, is excellently suited to climatic therapy applications. That this potential should not remain unexploited is underscored by Professor Dr. Dr. Schuh in her recommendations for the use of Partschins Waterfall for health treatment reasons.

The resources provided by nature, the location on the edge of the Texel Group Nature Park, the opportunities for hiking at three different elevations with a total of 240 km of signed hiking trails, 13 three thousand metre-plus mountains and last but not least the unique feature of the waterfall itself are virtually predestined for the creation of a naturopathic outdoor destination.

Reinforced by the results of the commissioned studies and analyses, Partschins' tourism directors have recently introduced several programmes and initiatives to advance the development of the resort as a health-promoting destination.

Building on the four pillars of nature, exercise, consciousness and nutrition, a holistic concept has been developed that is aimed both at holidaymakers and locals wishing to shape their lives mindfully and more consciously.

Experiencing the landscape up close, enjoying movement and silence, kicking back and finding inner balance: these are the aims that the Partschins Waterfall health project is pursuing. In cooperation with hiking guides, climatic therapists, wellness trainers and medical doctors, a comprehensive and varied programme of activities has been devised, that makes it possible to feel and experience the healing power of the waterfall and the benefits of Partschins' natural surroundings.

Healing forest baths and night-time walks

The natural surroundings of Partschins offer a virtually inexhaustible source of peace, deceleration and power. With relaxation, mindfulness exercises and different experiences that give one a deep insight into nature, everyday life recedes into the distance, space is created for new perspectives, and reserves of strength are replenished.

And so “forest bathing” is primarily about meditative hiking and the conscious experiencing of nature. Anyone who spends time in the forest reduces stress and strengthens the psyche and the heart. Something that has long been an officially recognised method of enhancing health in Japan can now also be experienced in the forests of Partschins in a guided form.

The night-time walk to Partschins Waterfall is also a special experience for the senses. Under the promising motto “the intoxication of the senses”, the latter are honed whilst hiking in the dark, producing a special blend of tension and relaxation. A spiritual experience that is down-to-earth and authentic, and that brings relaxation and a sense of slowing down with it.

The power of the water and its healing effects are, in contrast, the core aspect of Kneipp walks, which lead at an easy pace along idyllic water courses and in the process deliver insights, guidance and practical tips on all things related to the age-old teachings of Father Kneipp.

Alongside water, (cool) air, wind and sun are the most important health-promoting weather and climatic elements. Fresh mountain air and the calming sounds of the waterfall contribute to the balance of physical and mental wellbeing. This experience is especially impressive as part of climatic therapy. Led and supported by an experienced climatic therapist, climatic therapy at Partschins Waterfall helps with chronic diseases of the skin and respiratory tract, metabolic problems, seasonal depression and cardiovascular pathologies.

Conscious nutrition as a treat for the taste buds and senses

Of course nutrition also plays a vital role in the prevention of diseases and preserving one’s state of health. A balanced and varied diet is the key to a long and healthy life, and one aspect that was taken into account accordingly when devising the Partschins health programme.

Slow food, the shift in awareness towards regionalism, sustainably produced food and slow enjoyment - this trend has been part of the everyday culture in Partschins since time immemorial and is celebrated accordingly in the traditional restaurants, inns and wine taverns of the locality. Local produce, ancestral recipes and the special blend of Alpine ingredients and Mediterranean accents leaves plenty of scope when it comes to preparing light, healthy meals that are both the basis for one’s own wellbeing and a source of new inspiration.

The quality of the local food is excellent. Farms, vineyards and dairies offer the possibility of purchasing their products on site, organise guided tours, and let visitors look over their shoulders as they manufacture their products.

Part of the local health offering is also the guided hikes on the subject of wild and medicinal herbs. On tasty trips through the meadows and forests around Partschins, experts on herbs pass on interesting and unusual facts about the healing power of wild plants, which are not only a genuine asset in culinary terms, but can also have a positive impact on our health.

Health from nature - available without prescription and free from side effects

In addition to the activities offered, it is also possible to undergo a medical check-up that provides information on one's personal state of health. Alongside a medical history, laboratory diagnostics and function tests, the health check, which is available either as a basic or premium package, also includes the creation of an individual hiking and training programme, with a well-crafted blend of nature, exercise and relaxation.

Visitors and locals are invited to discover the varied health programme of the Partschins resort for themselves and to draw on the unique, plentiful resources of sunshine and climatically-blessed natural surroundings. With its natural resources, an imposing waterfall with a curative climate and the variety of possibilities for people seeking activity and recreation, Partschins has set up a pioneering project that not only makes health promotion and prevention of disease possible, but also brings demonstrable benefits for our physical and mental wellbeing.

