

Travel

Raising a glass to Bavaria

It's crystal clear why this part of Germany is such a hit, says **NATALIE CHALK**

FROM the summit of the world's longest Treetop Trail I can hear what sounds like waves lapping in the distance. Yet I am nowhere near an ocean – I am 144ft above the ground in Germany's Bavarian Forest.

The sound was the gentle rustle of leaves from a sea of trees. I'd just reached the top of a mile-long path which took me above the tree canopy. There I was rewarded with sensational 360-degree views.

Apart from the range of adventure activities on offer (walking, mountain biking and kayaking), there's another attraction in this south-eastern corner of Germany.

The Glass Road takes you into the world of what has been a thriving industry in the area since medieval times.

I checked into the family-run Hotel-Gasthof Kapfhammer in Zwiesel (known as the Glass City). In the centre of town is an unusual landmark. The largest glass pyramid in the world, is made up of 93,665 wine glasses. This impressive structure sits at the entrance to the glassmakers Zwiesel Kristallglas which offers daily factory tours.

Theresienthal, another factory founded in 1836, is still the only company to produce mouth-blown crystal. Its museum and gift shop are like stepping into a box of jewels. There are hundreds of pieces of fine cut-glass crystal, from tumblers and cocktail glasses to champagne flutes.

It's easy to explore the Glass Road as visitors who stay at least one night in any hotel within the forest are presented with a pass for free rail and bus travel.

Many choose to tour the 155-mile stretch by car, taking in traditional glass factories as well as the stunning Glass Forest which is made up of 25 coloured glass "firs" high



BRANCH OUT: The Treetop Trail takes visitors high above the Bavarian Forest. Left, the riverside town of Regen

on a hill in the town of Regen. I used my free passage for an easy day trip by train to Frauenau, known as the Glassmakers' Village.

It has an impressive Glass Museum, which houses a huge collection of crystal from around the world including pieces from the Great Exhibition of 1851 held at London's Crystal Palace.

At the Eisch factory I watched master glassblowers shaping the red-hot "honey" into crystal wine goblets.

They take up some of the molten glass from the furnace on a long pipe and then gently

blow the liquid into shape.

Eisch has created a range of glassware it claims makes wine taste as if it has already been decanted.

So right there in the gift shop I had a wine tasting using its Sensis Plus glass.

The wine tasted much smoother than in an ordinary wine glass. I made my purchases knowing that I'd bagged some gems.

The two glasses I bought cost me £40 but I know I'll be saving money in the long run as it will make any bottle taste like a smooth fine wine. I'll drink to that.

GETTING THERE:

Air Berlin (0871 500 0737/ www.airberlin.com) offers return flights from Gatwick to Nuremberg from £80. DB Bahn (0871 880 8066/www.bahn.com) offers return rail travel with Intercity Express from Nuremberg to Zwiesel from £77.

Hotel-Gasthof Kapfhammer (dialling from the UK: 0049 992 284 310/www.hotel-kapfhammer.de) offers doubles from £72 per night (two sharing), room only. Theresienthal glass factory (www.theresienthal.de) offers tours free of charge. Eisch glass factory (www.eisch.de) offers tours from £1. Bavarian Forest information: 941 585 390/www.bayerischer-wald.de German National Tourist Office: www.germany-tourism.co.uk



GOOD POINT: Zwiesel's world record pyramid of glasses

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