

TRAVEL

The History of the Oberammergau Passion Play

by Jean Brown
Jean Brown Travel

Passion Plays are being performed all over the world, including several areas in the United States as well as in Europe. Without question, the most remarkable reenactment of Christ's life and death is brought to stage at Oberammergau. During the thirty year war (1618-48) the BLACK PLAGUE ravaged throughout Europe literally killing one-third of the population. Cities, towns, and villages tried to seal themselves off from the rest of the world — without success. Oberammergau was one of those villages. Several woodcarvers returning home (and infected with the Black Plague) managed to "sneak" into the village. Fearing the worst, the townspeople of Oberammergau made a VOW that if

they were spared, they would reenact CHRIST's Life and Death every ten years. Miraculously, in 1634 they were spared — and thus was born the most famous PASSION PLAY in the world.

The play portrays the Passion of Christ from his entry into Jerusalem to the Resurrection. It starts in the morning, ends in the evening, and has a two-hour lunch break. Villagers consider it an honor to be chosen for speaking parts — so much so that a rule that married women may not appear on stage usually results in weddings being postponed until the end of the Passion Play season. No make-up is allowed. Most men grow beards; clean-shaven men appear as Romans. The cast of about 600 actors, and a chorus and orchestra of 100, start rehearsing a year in advance.

For the Oberammergauers the Play is a labor of love. The hundreds of actors, children as well as adults, receive no reimbursement for their time and devotion to the exhausting performances. Their vow is still the most important thing in their lives, and with great pride they are now preparing the presentation for 1990 of the Oberammergau Passion Play.

The music for the Passion Play was written in 1815 by the Oberammergau school teacher Rochus Dedler.

The text of the Passion Play was adapted between 1850 and 1860 by the parish priest Alois Daisenberger from Oberammergau.

The structure of the play with its living pictures from the Old Testament and the acted scenes from the New Testament have been retained.

Early this century a PASSION PLAY-HOUSE was constructed, seating 5,000 spectators. While the stage is under open air, framed by magnificent Alpine scenery, the auditorium is covered.

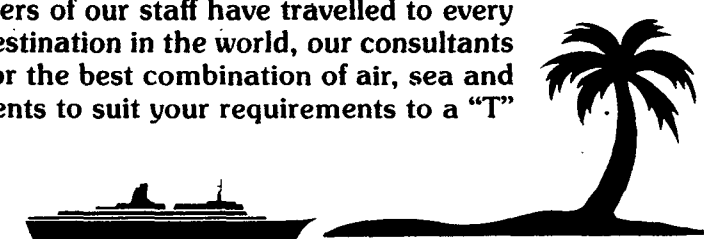
Oberammergau is situated in one of the most beautiful parts of the BAVARIAN ALPS in Germany, about 1 1/2 hours from Munich.

Be assured it is not too soon to reserve space for one of the many programs offered to Europe including the Passion Play. These tours run from May through late September and because of their popularity, space is extremely limited.

For more information about the tours visiting Oberammergau, call or write Jean Brown Travel, 716/889-9090; 3220 Chili Ave., Rochester, NY 14624.

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