



## GREEN CARE TOURISM

### case study

# WALDNESS

WALDNESS® is a trademark meaning retreat, relaxation and recharging your batteries. WALDNESS® enables a holiday with extensive activities in the forest - quality-checked, with specially developed WALDNESS® experiences and under the guidance of coaches.

*"Forest air is a healing drink to breathe in! We owe this to invisible, bioactive substances and messenger substances - called terpenes. Scientific studies from Japan and Austria prove the beneficial effects of a conscious stay in the forest. Plants communicate with our immune system and directly strengthen our resistance. The terpenes also activate the body's own killer cells and reduce the stress hormone cortisol. They alleviate depression and anxiety, strengthen the autonomic nervous system and lower blood sugar levels and blood pressure."*

Fritz Wolf

## MODEL IN A NUTSHELL

- **Website**  
[www.waldness.info](http://www.waldness.info)  
[www.waldness.at](http://www.waldness.at)
- **Social channels**  
[facebook.com/waldness.traunsee.almtal](https://facebook.com/waldness.traunsee.almtal)
- **Country**  
Austria
- **Main sector**  
Public-private
- **Specific sector**  
Healthcare,  
Forestry,  
Tourism, Local Development.
- **Stage of development**  
Prototype and incorporated
- **Our work in SDGs**



## TRAUNSEE-ALMTAL salzkammergut

## FROM FEW TO MANY

The driving force and main founders of WALDNESS are **Fritz Wolf**, a **forest educator**, one of the first to educate other forest educators in Austria, together with **Hermann Hühmayr**, the **owner of a hotel** in Grünau im Almtal, the hotel Hochberghaus. **Stefan Schimpl** (working for the **tourist office** Traunsee-Almtal-Salzkammergut) was there since the beginning and has been working with Herman for a long time to develop a nature-based tourist product. **Christa Öhlinger-Brandner** of the Bundesforschungs- und Ausbildungszentrum für Wald, Naturgefahren und Landschaft (BFW) joined later: she carried out **field research** on what was available in the area on this topic and what products could be developed. There was also a collaboration with the **Konrad Lorenz Facility** of the University of Vienna which was carrying out **behavioural research** on a related topic. We also partner with the **Curhaus Marienschwestern GmbH**, a well-known Center for Traditional European Medicine (TEM).

Our main goal from the beginning was to **develop touristic products** to attract tourists in the area, involving local companies and landlords in the offer. These products were to add value for everyone, restaurants and landlords of forests, agriculture companies running small farms or having a forest too. We try to **include all the local stakeholders** and **promote use of local products**. It was a kind of destination management through a collaboration driving these forest products and services. From this collaboration, we registered **WALDNESS®** trademark to represent the uniqueness of this new offer. ARGE WALDNESS is the for-profit legal entity and holder of the trademark; it is responsible for public relations, it brings new partners in, it promotes the use of this product. It promotes networking with other projects dealing with natural and sustainable tourism in the area. ARGE WALDNESS is supported by the Tourist board Traunsee-Almtal with the local touristic office of Almtal area, who help organise holiday packages for tourists. It is working as incoming travel agency.

Most of our clients are local or **foreign tourists**, they come mainly **from the German speaking area** (Austria, Germany, Switzerland). They are interested in nature and want to have a time-out. They come for their **wellbeing** and to get **closer to nature**, for stress relief.

## FROM IDEA TO ACTION

Our project started in **2017**. Our idea was to use Shinrin yoku/forest bathing as our approach and to develop it in Austria, in the Almtal area, **offering something beyond forest bathing**. We thought we had the same possibilities here in Europe: we have forests and knowledge about how to be in forests, we know what impact the forest has on us. For this reason, we developed it into a **touristic product**.

We wanted to use our knowledge and the things we already had in the area to develop a touristic product without investing too much in infrastructure. With a small budget, we wanted to make something that would foster local development and economic growth and bring added value to the local area in a sustainable way. We have forests and people who know forests and we tried to bring all these things together to design a valid touristic offer, to attract tourists. In short, we are the **WALDNESS®**. Destination organizers that offer the **WALDNESS®**. destinations and our selected hotels offer holidays with extensive activities in the forest. These activities (**WALDNESS®**. Experiences) allow the client to **experience the breath-taking effect of the forest** - quality-tested and with specially developed accompanied by **WALDNESS®** Coaches (experienced in our range forest bathing activities). We work to develop the whole **WALDNESS®** product to be a better and more sustainable nature experience. In addition to the stays at our destination hotels, the experience is based on the activities of our main tourist offer;

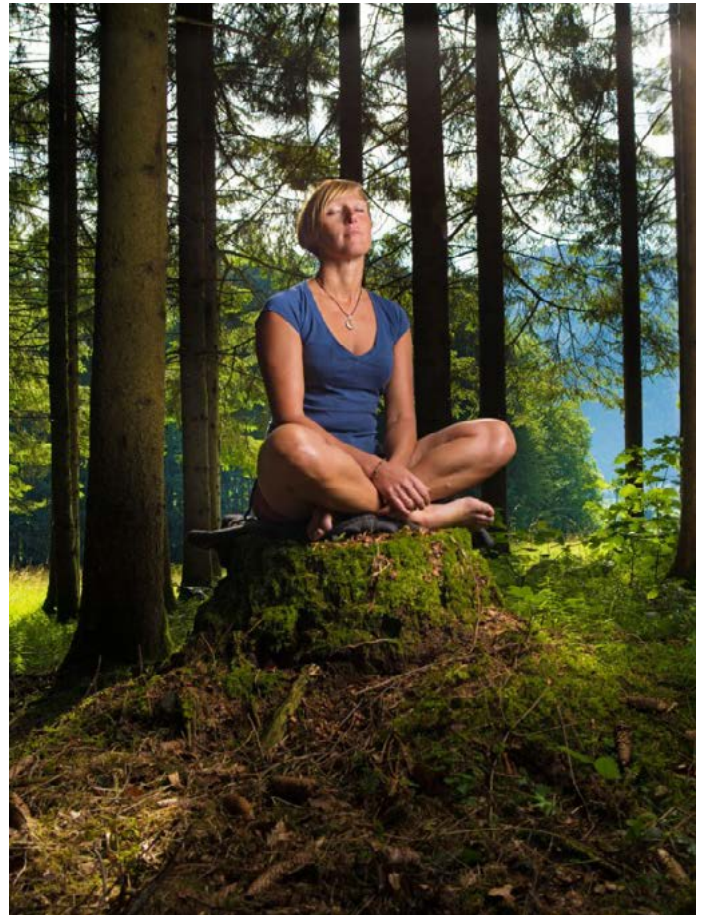
- a. Wald baden: **Bathing in the forest air** for everyone: walking, lying, floating.
- b. Wald Paedagogik (forest Pedagogy): **Understanding the forest and its ecosystem**. Guided and explained by real forest experts!
- c. Wald Schmecken (**Forest tasting**)
- d. Wald kneippen: **Kneipp cure** from TEM surrounded by healthy forest air
- e. Wald Wyda: **The European Yoga of the Celts** in the healthy atmosphere of the forest and at the same time an essential part of TEM
- f. Wald.Ruhe.Oasen: **Relax** in peace and quiet, in the middle of the forest
- g. Wald.Sauna: The original **sauna** experience in the healthy environment of the forest!
- h. Wald Genuessmoebel: Hanging chairs, hammocks, **WALDNESS®.rest.stands: Special furniture for the forest** and in the forest for everyone, available also to buy.
- i. Wald Massagen: Wellness **treatment and healing techniques** in and around the forest with oils from the respective trees.

Our business model, for the most part is financed by our own business activity as a travel agency (about 25%), and the rest from a mixture of tourist taxes paid to the Upper Austria Tourist Board where about 90% of which comes back to us as a local tourist board also. We also participate in grant aid for projects from, for example, Leader and Interreg projects and funding. The quantifiable impact of our initiative can be described by the number of overnight stays and participants taking advantage of **WALDNESS** offers.

## FROM OLD TO NEW

The word "WALDNESS" is derived from connecting the words Wald (Forest) and wellness. We are the first WALDNESS destination in Europe, this is what makes us innovative. WALDNESS is more than "Waldbathing" (Shinrin-yoku). We bring parts from the TEM together with nature tourism in a beautiful scenery with well-educated coaches. Connecting these approaches gives our activities and destination the possibility to offer something really different.

We believe that **our approaches promote natural and sustainable tourism and acts as a kind of education activity for people, teaching them how to behave in nature**: we wanted to bring together all these issues in one product.



## FROM NOW TO THEN

We want to further develop our project, which is very important for the local sustainable development of our valley. We need to build a network of local stakeholders, to develop further the touristic spirit in the area. Our goal is not profit, but our sustainable local development.

Our current needs for the initiative are resources for marketing, good educated trainers offering high quality services; people with teamworking skills, awareness about benefits of nature, and interests in regional development. We are trying to have more cooperation with local forest schools and universities (Waldcampus). Our idea is to have a WALDNESS academy in cooperation with partners in our area (mainly agriculture and forest schools).

The challenges we face are mainly brought on by environmental pollution and climate change which are affecting the forests in the area. Another challenge for us is the overregulation of activities that sometimes limit operations.