

Seeing the Alps on camel

> Travellers can now enjoy an Alpine panorama on the back of a camel, thanks to a farmer who is offering camel caravan tours in southern Germany

THE unusual opportunity of travelling through the Alps on camel is now possible, thanks to local farmer Christine Sieber. The former office worker decided to follow her dreams of opening up a camel farm some years ago and is now offering camel caravan tours through the Ostallgaeu district of Bavaria in southern Germany.

"This isn't exactly how I planned things but now I couldn't imagine doing anything else. It's a dream to be working with animals," explains the 39-year-old as she strokes a camel called Dabian on the bridge of its nose. Dabian was brought from the warmer climes of Dubai but together with the other 30 camels on Sieber's farm in the village of Seeg, seems completely at home in the snowy Alpine conditions. "Camels are such beautiful animals. They're intelligent, proud, social and loveable," says Sieber. "Unfortunately most people only associate them with tourist attractions while on holiday."

Sieber believes what makes camels so special is that each animal has its own unique personality. "Camels are basically huge cuddly creatures, but they are also single-minded, dominant and very strong. If they are treated incorrectly then their handling behaviour can change."

Sieber's interest in camels began over 20 years ago and now she couldn't imagine her life without them. "Back then I had a single horse and as a rider was fascinated by these creatures," she says.

Sieber bought her first

camel from a circus in the middle of the 1990s and she slowly began to collect more and more animals. Her life changed totally around 10 years ago when Sieber received an invite from the United Arab Emirates to participate in a desert camel race.

The resultant media headlines put Sieber's farm on the map and her phone didn't stop ringing. "Suddenly I was getting requests from people who wanted to come and ride our camels," she explains.

Initially, Sieber offered the occasional guided tour but the interest from locals and tourists alike meant she had to increase the number of trips on offer. "At one point I was bringing guests on tours virtually every day," she says. Sieber lives with her husband and two sons on a working farm where she also looks after llamas, horses, donkeys, yaks, sheep, goats, apes, parakeets,



reptiles, guinea pigs, rabbits, cats and a dog. Her husband continues with his career, meaning the mother of two is responsible seven days a week for looking after and training



Sieber feeding her camels.

"We don't take the camels out when it's slippery or icy. They have very broad and soft feet, a bit like flat plates. They slip quite easily and could injure themselves," explains Sieber.

Firm deep snow, by contrast, is no problem for camels, which are also well able to cope with the cold German winter temperatures. After all, night temperatures in the desert can also drop well below zero.

"It's amazing how well

camels adapt to different situations. They are at home in temperatures between minus 40 and plus 40 degrees Celsius. They are comfortable in our milder temperatures," says Sieber.

Although the locals have gotten used to seeing camel caravans making their way through the area, the farm remains a unique experience.

"There are normally cows or horses on farms in the Allgaeu," says Seeg's Mayor Manfred Rinderle, who thinks

the farm is a real boon for the local community. "It helps differentiate us from other places and is a real attraction for families."

Sieber's passion for animals has seen her develop a name for herself far beyond the Allgaeu region. Journalists from all over the world, including Japanese and Argentine television reporters, have reported on her unusual camel farm, which is close to the famous Neuschwanstein castle. - dpa

the animals on the farm.

The farm is open to visitors between April and October, while camel-riding tours are offered all year round - weather permitting.