

TRAVEL

Town Continues Passion Play Tradition

NewsUSA

(NU) - We all engage in little traditions, but we usually do so on a family-basis – rarely does the whole town get involved. And yet, that’s exactly what happens in the village of Oberammergau in Bavaria, Germany, where townspeople come together every 10 years to put on a huge Passion Play, involving over a thousand actors.

How did the tradition start? In 1633, the plague was taking a harsh toll on Oberammergau’s inhabitants. To save their town, the villagers promised God that they would perform a Passion Play – the story of the last days, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – every tenth year. From that day on, the plague deaths stopped. And so the villagers have kept their promise for the last 375 years.

It truly takes a village to put on the show. Participants must either be native to Oberammergau or have lived there for 20 years or more. Of the village’s 5,300 inhabitants, about 2,500 will be involved in the production, whether they be actors, ushers, stage hands, seamstresses or musicians. No wigmakers are allowed – on the Ash Wednesday the year before the play, women start growing out their hair, and men begin growing out their hair and beards for an authentic look.

The performers, both on stage and in the orchestra, are not professionals, but they undergo rigorous training and rehearsals. For example, the 55-piece orchestra will begin weekly rehearsals al-



Every 10 years, half the citizens of Oberammergau, Germany work together to put on a Passion Play.

most a year before they’re required to perform. By opening night, the actors and musicians can put on a professional-quality performance.

The play is performed against the backdrop of the Ammergau Alps in a custom-designed theater. The actors – there are up to a thousand on stage in the mass scenes – are exposed to the elements, but the symphony-sized orchestra and audience stay dry in case of inclement weather. The theater can accommodate 4,700 audience members.

The next Passion Play will take place in 2010, with performances lasting from May 15th to October 3rd. The production will see a revised text, new stage designs and music, and new costumes. In 2000 more than 150,000 Americans travelled to Oberammergau. For more information, visit www.oberammergau-passion.com.