

Styria



Styria (Steiermark) is Austria's best-kept secret. When you ask someone in Austria for advice on the best places to visit in their country, and they answer with the mountains of Tyrol, the lakes of Salzkammergut and the cultural joys of Vienna, they're just trying to keep you out of Styria.

Austria's second-largest province is a perfect combination of culture, architecture, rolling hills, vine-covered slopes and, of course, mountains. Its capital Graz, Austria's second-largest city and among its most attractive, has one of the highest standards of living in Europe. Head south from Graz and you're in wine country, dubbed the 'Styrian Tuscany' for its uncanny resemblance to that region of glorious wine and golden sun. This is also *Kürbiskernöl* (strong, dark pumpkin-seed oil ubiquitous in Styrian cooking) country.

The eastern stretch of Styria is dotted with rejuvenating thermal spas and centuries-old castles. If you're a fan of the former, Bad Blumau is a mandatory stop, not only to take the waters but also to appreciate its unusual architecture, created from the rich imagination of Friedensreich Hundertwasser. If you prefer the latter, Schloss Riegersburg stands head and shoulders above most castles, not only in Styria, but the entire country.

The landscape of Styria's northern and western reaches is an untamed region of cold, fast-flowing alpine rivers, towering mountains and carved valleys. Complementing the area's natural wonders is a handful of man-made gems, including Admont Abbey and the Erzberg open-cast mine.

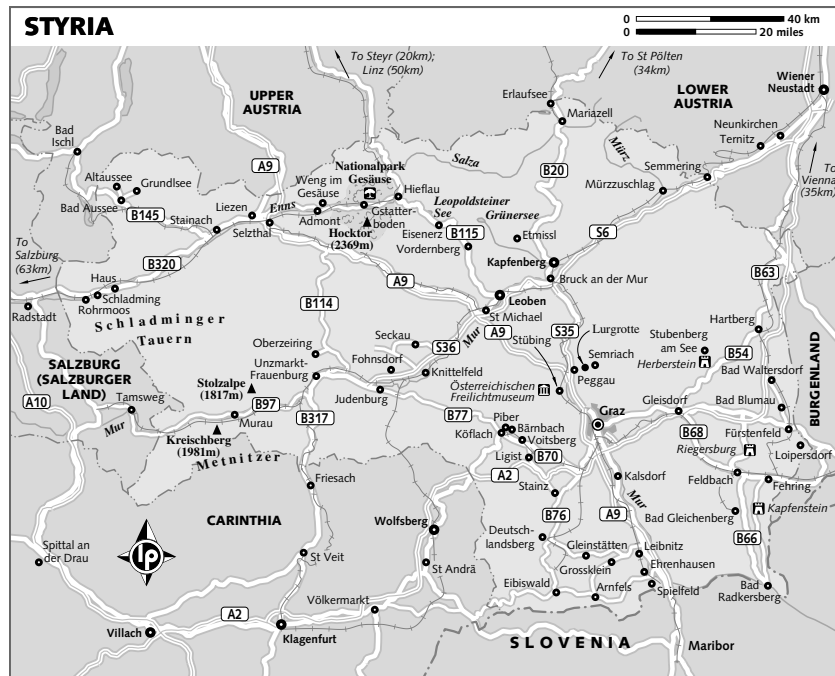
Note that the northwestern reaches of Styria stretch into Salzkammergut.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring Styria's capital **Graz** (p232) and its bars and clubs
- Catching one of the fascinating changing exhibitions at **MuseumsCenter Leoben** (p241)
- Visiting Admont's spectacular **abbey** (p243) and exploring its fascinating museums
- Tripping underground, or overground, at Eisenerz's **open-cast mine** (p242)
- Cruising the mountain bike trails around **Mariazell** (p238)



■ POPULATION: 1.2 MILLION ■ AREA: 16,392 SQ KM ■ HIGHEST ELEVATION: HOCHGOLLING 2862M



History

Habitation of Styria dates back to the Stone Age, and findings from the Bronze and Iron Ages are on display in Grossklein (p236). The Celts, then the Romans, followed by the Avars and Slavs, settled in the area, but it wasn't until the 11th century that Styria as a region gained its current name. At the time, Ottakar I, whose base was in the Upper Austrian town of Steyr, acquired the area through succession and stamped his seal *Marchia Styriae* (Styrian Mark) on the province. The name stuck.

When Duke Ottakar IV died without an heir in 1192, Styria passed to the Babenberg duke Leopold V. Control fell to King Ottakar II of Bohemia (see p30) and then finally, in 1276, into the hands of the Habsburgs. In the next century the population grew, but there followed two centuries of local conflicts and invasions by the Turks and Hungarians. The year 1480 was particularly dire; it was known as the year of the 'Plagues of God' – the Turks, the Black Death and locusts. Exactly 200 years later one-quarter of Graz's population was obliterated in another plague epidemic.

In the 16th and 17th centuries Reformation and Counter-Reformation wracked the province, with the Habsburg army running riot and burning anything Protestant it could find. Once religious peace returned, and the Turkish threat was removed after 1683, the region prospered. Then, in 1779, and again in 1805 and 1809, it was the turn of the French to invade. After the Nazi occupation of WWII, the first Allied troops to liberate the area were from the Soviet Union, followed by the British, who occupied Graz until 1955.

Climate

Styria is a tale of two climes; southern Styria enjoys a relatively kind climate, influenced by the Pannonian (west Hungarian) plain to the east, while much of northern Styria is subject to alpine climatic conditions.

Getting There & Away

The A2, from Vienna to Villach in Klagenfurt, runs through southern Styria, passing just below Graz, while the A9 runs an almost north-south course through the middle of Styria, making it straightforward to travel

from Linz and Salzburg to Graz. The A9 also connects Graz with Slovenia, 40km to the south.

Styria's train lines are relatively sparse; the main line between Carinthia and Vienna passes well north of Graz through the region's main railhead, Bruck an der Mur. For Linz and Salzburg, a change is usually required at St Michael, 25km southwest of Bruck.

Getting Around

Regional and city transport (☎ 0316-82 06 06; www.verbundlinie.at) is based on a system of zones and time tickets. Tickets can be bought from machines for one to 22 zones, and the price rises from a single trip in one zone (€1.70, valid for one hour), to 24-hour passes for one (€3.70) or multiple zones (€55.80 for 22 zones and all of Styria). Weekly and monthly passes are also available.

In Graz, **Mobilzentral** (Map p224; ☎ 0316-82 06 06; www.mobilzentral.at, in German; Jakoministrasse 1; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) is a useful store of information on Styrian regional buses. It also sells international train tickets. The website www.busbahnim.at has timetable and price information.

GRAZ

☎ 0316 / pop 287,700

Austria's second-largest city is possibly Austria's most relaxed, and after Vienna it is also Austria's liveliest for after-hours pursuits. It's an attractive place with bristling green parkland, red rooftops and a small, fast-flowing river gushing through its centre. Architecturally, it complements Renaissance courtyards and provincial baroque palaces with cutting-edge modern designs that fascinate, provoke or arouse curiosity.

The surrounding countryside, a mixture of vineyards, mountains, forested hills and thermal springs, is within easy striking distance, and Graz has a very beautiful bluff connected to the centre by steps, a funicular and a glass lift. Last but not least, a large student population (some 50,000 in four universities) helps propel the nightlife and vibrant arts scene, creating a pleasant, lively and liveable city.

History

Graz is a derivation of the Slav word *gradec*, meaning small fortress, and developed from a Bavarian settlement that was first documented in 1128. By 1189 Graz was a city, and in 1379

it became the seat of the Leopold line of the Habsburgs. Friedrich III, emperor of Austria and the Holy Roman Empire, resided here and left his famous motto, AEIOU (*Austria Est Imperare Orbi Universo*; Austria rules the world) inscribed all over town. In 1564, Graz became the administrative capital of Inner Austria, an area covering present-day Styria and Carinthia, plus the former possessions of Carniola, Gorizia and Istria. In 1784, with the Turks no longer a threat, Graz tore down its city walls.

Early in the 19th century Archduke Johann, benign brother of Franz I, founded the first museum in Austria, the Joanneum, in Graz. In the late 1990s the historic centre of Graz achieved the status of a Unesco World Heritage site.

Orientation

Schlossberg rises over the medieval town centre, the river Mur cuts a north-south path west of this bluff and the *Hauptbahnhof* (main train station) is 1km further west of here.

Trams 3 and 6 run from the *Hauptbahnhof* to Hauptplatz. Radiating from Hauptplatz is Sporgasse, an important shopping street, and Herrengasse, the main pedestrian thoroughfare. At the southern end of Herrengasse is Jakominiplatz, a major transport hub for local buses and trams.

MAPS

Graztourismus has an excellent free map of the central city, and also a great *city & environs* map; Freytag & Berndt's *Graz* (€3.95; scale 1:15,000) city map is also useful.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

English Bookshop (Map p224; ☎ 82 62 66; Tummelplatz 7; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Lots of English books, but at a price.

Freytag & Berndt (Map p224; ☎ 81 82 30; Sporgasse 29; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) The best source of maps and guidebooks.

INTERNET ACCESS

High Speed Internet-Selfstore (Map p224; ☎ 0650-89 16 900; Herrengasse 3; per hr €3; ☎ 7am-10pm) A coin-operated internet space inside the passage.

Speednet Cafe (Map p222; ☎ 228 412; www.speednet-cafe.com, in German; Europaplatz 4; per hr €5.80; ☎ 7am-10.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-10.30pm Sat & Sun) Located in the train station.