

Lower Austria



Surrounding Vienna on all sides, the fertile valleys and plains of Lower Austria are the 'cradle' of Austrian culture, and it has one of the country's richest cultural landscapes. The Viennese often come out here to paddle its rivers, sup its wines and scale its mountains, but the cultural aspect of Lower Austria is what stands out most.

The north is an often neglected region of rich pastures, forested glens and pretty vineyards set upon gentle, rolling hills. Poppy fields deliver one of the country's most interesting culinary aspects (foods brimming with poppy seed), while the town of Drosendorf near the Czech border is an isolated fortress town with Austria's only intact town wall. The south is sprinkled with mountains rising up to about 2000m on the doorstep of Vienna; here you also find the moderately interesting towns of Baden bei Wien and Wiener Neustadt, and one of the nicest ways to travel between Lower Austria and Styria – the Semmering Pass and spectacular *Semmeringbahn* (Semmering Railway). Carnuntum, a small region between Vienna and the Slovakian border, has some fascinating remnants of the Roman period in Austria, dating from about 15 BC.

Most famous of all regions in Lower Austria, however, is the Danube River (Donau) and its valley, a place of magnificent natural beauty and cultural achievement. The Wachau, which stretches from Melk to Krems an der Donau, is the prettiest section and is truly a European highlight for its wines, castles, abbeys and medieval villages. Elsewhere, towns such as St Pölten, Lower Austria's largest town and the provincial capital, and Tulln offer a feel for provincial urban texture, and both have a couple of good museums and art spaces.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hiking through the vineyards and forest around **Spitz** (p172) and exploring the historical **Danube Valley** (p164)
- Meandering through **Stift Melk** (p172), a magnificent baroque monastery on the banks of the Danube
- Indulging in the rustic pleasures of wine and *Wurst* (sausage) in one of the *Heurigen* (wine taverns) in **Krems an der Donau** (p169) or **Dürnstein** (p171)
- Riding the **Semmering railway** (p187), a remarkable engineering feat and Unesco World Heritage site
- Getting caught in the 'mother of all rain-storms' while hiking **Schneeberg** (p187), Lower Austria's highest peak



■ POPULATION: 1.5 MILLION ■ AREA: 19,178 SQ KM ■ HIGHEST ELEVATION: SCHNEEBERG 2076M



HISTORY

Settlement of Lower Austria can be traced back to prehistoric times; some of the earliest archaeological finds in Europe, such as the 25,000-year-old *Venus of Willendorf*, come from the region. The Romans had a strong presence here, particularly in the area south of the Danube, and built fortifications at Ybbs, Melk, Mautern and Carnuntum (p178).

Lower Austria's borders were drawn in the 13th century under Babenberg rule, but in 1278 the region fell to the Habsburgs. Lower Austria's flat plains to the north were a favourite of marauding foreigners; it was often overrun with Bohemian Hussites in the early 15th century, the Turks in the 16th

century and the Swedes during the Thirty Years' War.

Following WWII, the region was occupied – and plundered – by the Russians. With independence achieved in 1955, the situation improved, and in 1986 Lower Austria gained its own provincial capital, St Pölten (Vienna had played the role until then).

CLIMATE

Lower Austria has a mix of climates; to the north and east you'll find a Pannonian climate and to the south more alpine weather, with rapid changes in temperature common. The Danube Valley is marked by a continental climate.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Much of Lower Austria has great connections to the rest of the country. The A1 autobahn, running from Upper Austria to Vienna, splits the province into two unequal halves to the south of the Danube (which also connects Upper Austria and Vienna by boat). The A2 runs south from Vienna to Graz through its lower region; off this branches the A3 towards Eisenstadt and Hungary and the S6 to northern Styria. Passing through Lower Austria's eastern fringe is the A4, which links Vienna with northern Burgenland and eventually Budapest.

Shadowing most of the major roads is an extensive rail system.

GETTING AROUND

Train connections are some of the best in Austria, *Postbus* (Post Bus) services are also good on weekdays, and well-maintained autobahn and *Bundesstrasse* (alternative routes) make it simple and safe to explore the entire region by car.

THE DANUBE VALLEY

The Danube, which enters Lower Austria from the west near Ybbs and exits in the east near Bratislava, Slovakia's capital, carves a winding path through the province's hills and fields. The dramatic stretch of river between Krems an der Donau and Melk is known as the Wachau and is Austria's most spectacular section of the Danube. Here the landscape is characterised by vineyards, forested slopes, wine-producing villages and imposing fortresses at nearly every bend. In 2000 the Wachau became a Unesco World Heritage site due to its harmonious blend of natural and cultural beauty.

Tourismusverband Wachau-Nibelungengau (☎ 02713-300 60 60; www.wachau.at; Schlossgasse 3, Spitz an der Donau; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-2.30pm Fri) can help with information on the Wachau and its surrounds.

GETTING AROUND

A popular way of exploring the region is by boat, particularly between Krems and Melk, but it's also possible to travel from Passau to Vienna; see p208 for more details. The most popular time to take a boat trip on the Danube is between May and

September, when a several companies service the route.

DDSG Blue Danube (☎ 01-588 80; www.ddsg-blue-danube.at; 01, Friedrichstrasse 7, Vienna; Vienna-Dürnstein one way/return €19.50/26, Melk-Krems one way/return €17.50/22.50, Melk-Spitz & Spitz-Krems one way/return €10/13.50) does the routes Melk-Krems, Spitz-Melk, and Spitz-Krems from early April to October up to three times daily, and between Vienna and Dürnstein every Sunday from May till September.

Brandner (☎ 07433-25 90-21; www.brandner.at; Ufer 50, Wallsee; Krems-Melk return adult/child €22.50/11.50, one way adult/child €17.50/9) operates boats between Krems and Melk one to two times daily from mid-April to late October.

More popular is exploring the region by bicycle. A wonderfully flat cycle path runs along both sides of the Danube from Vienna to Melk, passing through Krems, Dürnstein, Weissenkirchen and Spitz (these are all on the northern bank). Many hotels and pensions (B&Bs) are geared towards cyclists and most towns have at least one bike-rental shop. For more information pick up a free copy of *The Donauradweg - Von Passau bis Bratislava* (from tourist offices and some hotels), which provides details of distances, hotels and information offices along the route.

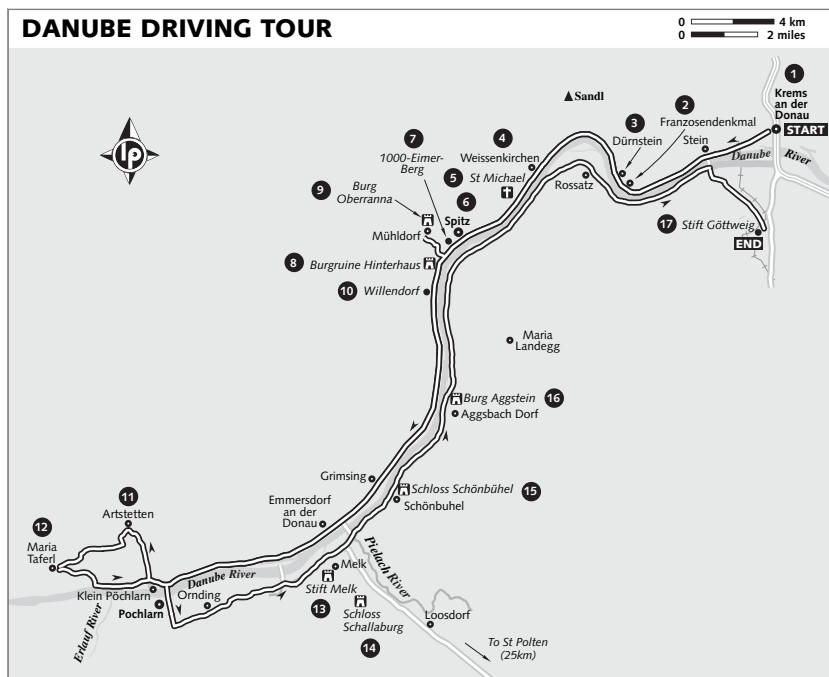
The roads on both sides of the Danube between Krems and Melk, where the B3 and the B33 hug the contours of the river, lend themselves well to a driving tour (see below). Vehicle bridges cross the river at Krems, Melk, Pöchlarn and Ybbs. A rail track runs along the Danube's northern bank and while it's a scenic trip, it's slow.

DRIVING TOUR OF THE DANUBE VALLEY

If you plan to take in just a few of the Danube Valley sights in Lower Austria, train and bus connections are adequate, but visiting many sights in one grab will, unfortunately, require having your own vehicle. See p170 for details on car rental.

This road trip is almost all-weather and needs little preparation. It follows the Danube for almost all of the 150km, taking in towns and sights on a circuit between Krems an der Donau and Maria Taferl (both on the north bank) and Melk and other significant sights on the south bank. The junctions only get tricky around Melk; but even if you only have limited experience driving on a labyrinth of

DANUBE DRIVING TOUR



side of the road, these shouldn't present a huge problem.

The best time to do the trip is on a Monday or Tuesday, when traffic is light. Allow about four hours, or a full day with stops.

From the **Krems-Stein roundabout (1)** take the B3 southwest towards Spitz. About 3km from Krems-Stein you approach the small settlement of Unterloiben, where on the right you can see the **Franzosenedenkmal (2)**; French Monument), erected in 1805 to celebrate the victory of Austrian and Russian troops here over Napoleon. Shortly afterwards the lovely town of **Dürnstein (3)**; p171), 6km from Krems, comes into view and you can see the blue-towered Chorherrenstift backed by Kuernringerburg (p171), the castle where Richard the Lionheart was imprisoned in 1192.

The valley is punctuated by picturesque terraced vineyards as you enter the heart of the Wachau. In **Weissenkirchen (4)**, 12km from Krems, you'll find the pretty hilltop fortified **parish church** (☎ 02715-2203; Weissenkirchen 3; ☎ 8am-7pm Easter-Oct, 8am-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Easter), whose front doors are approached by a labyrinth of

covered pathways. This Gothic church was built in the 15th century and has a baroque altar and a garden terrace with good views of the Danube. Below the church is the charming Teisenhoferhof arcaded courtyard, with a covered gallery and lashings of flowers and dried corn. The **Wachau Museum** (☎ 02715-2268; Weissenkirchen 32; adult/senior/concession & child €5/3.50/2.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, closed Nov-Mar) is also here and houses work by artists of the Danube school. Close to the river is the **Raffelsberger Hof** (☎ 02715-2201; www.raffelsbergerhof.at; s €72-85, d €104-124, ste €130-154; ☎ P), a four-star hotel in a small but beautifully renovated Renaissance castle.

A couple of kilometres on, just after Wösendorf, you find the church of **St Michael (5)**, in a hamlet with 13 houses. If the kids are along for this ride, now's the time to ask them to count the terracotta hares on the roof (seven, in case they're not reading this!).

Some 17km from Krems, the pretty town of **Spitz (6)**; p172) swings into view, surrounded by vineyards and lined with quiet, cobblestone streets. There are some good

trails leading across hills and into *Heurigen* (wine taverns) here (p109).

Turn right at Spitz onto the B217 (Otten-schläger Strasse). The terraced hill on your right is **1000-Eimer-Berg (7)**, so-named for its reputed ability to yield a thousand buckets of wine each season. On your left, high above the valley opening, is the castle ruin **Hinterhaus (8)**. Continue along the B217 to the mill wheel and turn right towards **Burg Oberranna (9)**; ☎ 02713-8221; www.tiscove.at/burg-oberranna, in German; s/d €68/122; (P), 6km west of Spitz in Mühldorf. Surrounded by woods, this castle and hotel overlooking the valley is furnished with period pieces and has a refreshing old-worldly feel. Tours of the grounds cost €2 and run from 3pm to 6pm every weekend.

From here, backtrack down to the B3 and continue the circuit. The valley opens up and on the left, across the Danube, you glimpse the ruins of Burg Aggstein (opposite).

Willendorf (10), located 21km from Krems, is where a 25,000-year-old figurine of Venus was discovered. The original is today housed in the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna (p128). Continuing along the B3, the majestic **Stift Melk (p172)** rises up across the river. This section of the Danube has a power station and you'll notice that just above Melk-Emmersdorf the river slows to a placid pace. There's some decent swimming in the backwaters here if you're game to dip into the Danube.

At Klein Pöchlarn a sign indicates a first turn-off on Artstettner Strasse (L7255), which you can follow for 5km to **Artstetten (11)**; ☎ 07413-80060; Artstetten 1; adult/senior/student/child €6.50/5.80/4.70/3.60; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Apr-Nov), unusual for its many onion domes. The castle has endured lots of modifications over the past 700 years but gained fame through a former owner, the one and only Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Inside is a museum devoted to the luckless heir, displaying photos and stories of his and his wife's time at the castle and their fateful trip to Sarajevo where his murder there triggered WWI. Their tomb is in the church.

From here, a minor road L7257 winds 6.5km through a sweeping green landscape to **Maria Taferl (12)**; ☎ 07413-278; Maria Taferl 1; admission free; ☎ 7am-7pm) high above the Danube Valley. Created by Jakob Prandtauer (of Melk fame), this baroque church is notable for its two onion domes and dark dome-frescoes. Its altar is a complicated array of figures in gold. You'll find lots of hotels and pensions,

and some of the most spectacular views across the Danube here.

Backtrack 6km down towards the B3. Turn left at the B3 towards Krems and follow the ramp veering off to the left and across the river at the Klein Pöchlarn bridge. Follow the road straight ahead to the B1 (Austria's longest road) and turn left onto this towards Melk.

This first section along the south bank is uninteresting, but it will soon get better. Unless the weather isn't playing along, across the river you should be able make out Artstetten in the distance, and shortly **Stift Melk (13)**; p172), will rise up ahead in a golden shimmering heap.

From Stift Melk, a 7km detour leads south to the splendid Renaissance castle, **Schloss Schallaburg (14)**; ☎ 02754-6317; www.schallaburg.at; Schallaburg 1; adult/concession/child/family €8/7/3.50/16; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct). To reach the castle from the abbey in Melk, follow the signs to the *Bahnhof* (train station) and Lindestrasse east, turn right into Hummelstrasse/Kirschengraben (L5340) until it changes name to Roggendorf and reaches the B3A near the railway line and highway. Turn right onto the B3A and 2km later right again, continuing along the L5342 to the castle.

In a region packed with gems, this is one of the highlights. Just beyond the entranceway is the castle's architectural centrepiece, a two-storey arcaded Renaissance courtyard with magnificent terracotta arches and rich red-brown carvings. There are some 400 terracotta images, completed between 1572 and 1573; the largest figures support the upper-storey arches, of which the court jester sniggering in the corner is the most intriguing. Below these are pictorial scenes and a series of mythological figures and masks. The castle is host to an annual prestigious exhibition, based on different cultural themes. Combined tickets with nearby attractions, which change yearly, are usually on offer.

Backtrack to the B33. Be careful here that you stay on the south side of the river. When you reach Hummelstrasse you need to go one block beyond Lindestrasse to Abt-Karl-Strasse and back down to the Stift. Follow the B1 for 4km to **Schloss Schönbühel (15)**; admission free; ☎ dawn-dusk), a 12th-century castle standing high on a rock some 5km northeast of Melk. Continue along this lovely stretch of the B33 in the direction of Krems. About 10km from

Schloss Schönbühel the ruins of **Burg Aggstein (16)**; ☎ 02753-82281; www.ruineaggstein.at; admission €2; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-May & Sep-Oct, till 7pm Jun-Aug) swing into view. This 12th century hilltop castle was built by the Kuenringer family and now offers a grand vista of the Danube. The 'robber barons' of both Schloss Schönbühel and Burg Aggstein are said to have imprisoned their enemies on a ledge of rock (the Rosengärtlein), where the hapless captives faced starvation (unless they opted for a quicker demise by throwing themselves into the abyss below).

From the right bank of the Danube you now get a bird's-eye view of the towns and ruins you passed earlier. One of the exquisite pleasures of the region is its famous *Marillen* (apricots), and you'll see lots of orchards among the vineyards. Shops in the region also sell a variety of liqueurs made from apricots. The section of the B33 between Aggstein and Mautern (across from Krems) is dotted with *Heurigen* for those who are not at the wheel.

About 27km from Melk some pretty cliffs rise up above the road. From Mautern it's a detour of about 6km to **Stift Göttweig (17)**; p170). To reach it, at the roundabout near the bridge follow the road right from the B33 to Mautern and right again immediately afterwards towards Fürth. Stift Göttweig is signposted at the next roundabout on the L7071. From there it's a short drive back to Krems.

This road trip can also be done from St Pölten, situated 36km south of Krems an der Donau. If you do set out from there, be sure to include **Stift Herzogenburg** (p176).

KREMS AN DER DONAU

☎ 02732 / pop 23,900

Krems an der Donau is the prettiest of the larger towns on the Danube and marks the beginning of the Wachau. It has a small university and some good eating and drinking, and if the circus of history that can be Vienna in summer has not sated the appetite for past glories, Krems offers a very attractive historical aspect too. It rests on the northern bank of the Danube, surrounded by terraced vineyards, and has been a centre of the wine trade for most of its history.

Orientation & Information

Krems has three parts: Krems to the east, the smaller settlement of Stein (formerly a separate town) to the west, and the connecting suburb of Und. Hence the local witticism:

Krems und Stein sind drei Städte (Krems and Stein are three towns).

The centre of Krems stretches along a pedestrian-only street, Obere and Untere Landstrasse. The **tourist office** (☎ 826 76; www.tiscove.com/krems; Undstrasse 6; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 9am-4pm Sun May-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Apr) has an excellent walk-by-numbers *Krems Stadtrundgang* (Krems city walk; in German) map with route descriptions. It also stocks a *Heurigen* calendar and culinary guide and for those with their own car a *Weinstrasse Kremstal* map (in German) showing vineyards.

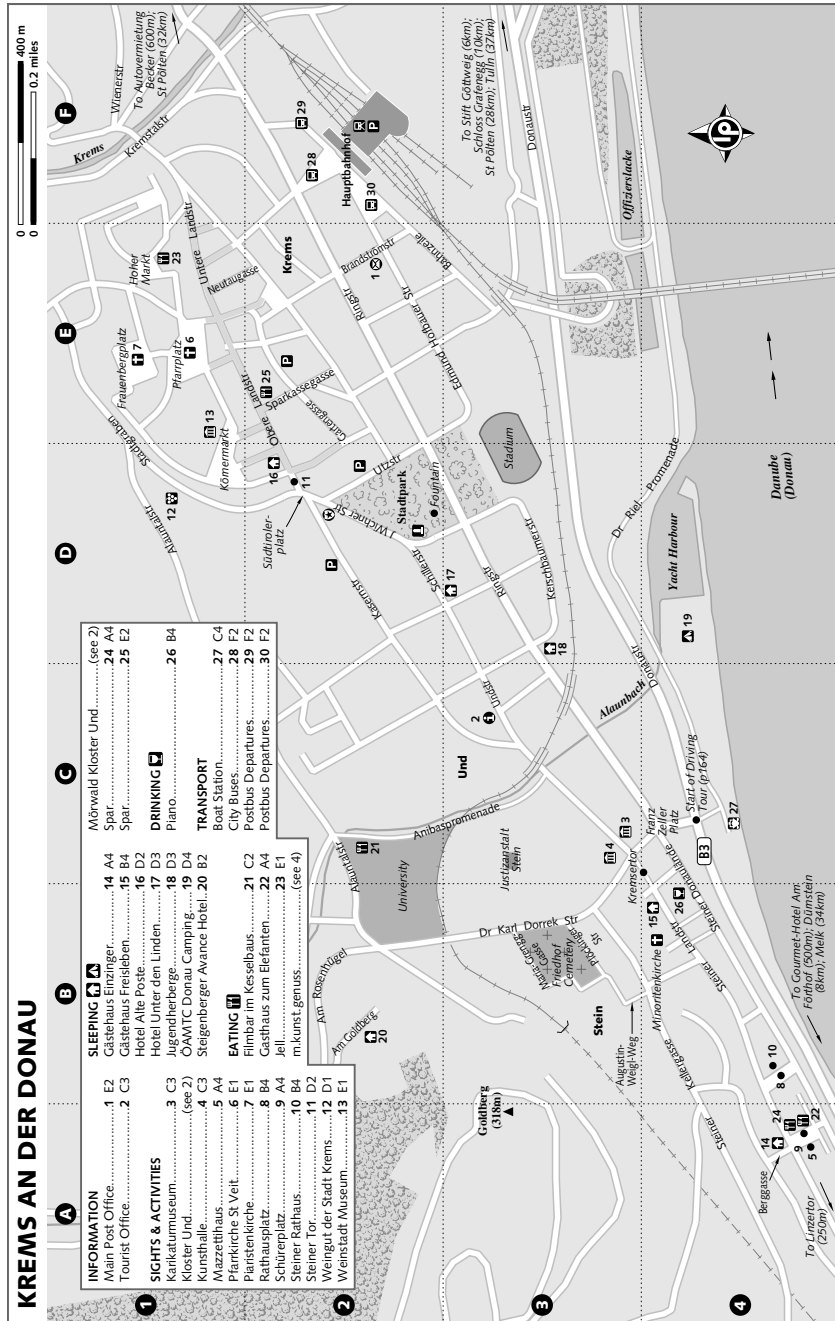
The **main post office** (☎ 677-3500; Brandströmstrasse 4-6) is near the *Hauptbahnhof* (main train station). The boat station is near Donaustrasse, about 2km west of the train station.

Sights

A walk through the cobblestone streets of Krems and Stein, especially at night, is one of the delights of a visit. Some of the most atmospheric parts to explore are on and behind **Schürerplatz** and **Rathausplatz** in Stein (don't miss these two wonderful squares), dominated by the baroque **Mazzettihaus** and the 18th-century **Steiner Rathaus** respectively; here you could be forgiven for thinking you had stumbled upon an isolated Adriatic village.

If you've picked up the tourist office's walking map, it leads you there via 20 stops, beginning at the imposing **Steiner Tor** on Obere Landstrasse, constructed in the 15th century and refashioned into a baroque gate in the 18th century. Another highlight along the way is the **Pfarrkirche St Veit** (☎ 832 85; Pfarrplatz 5; ☎ dawn-dusk), a baroque parish church resurrected from earlier Gothic and Romanesque forms. Its colourful frescoes are by Martin Johann Schmidt, an 18th-century local artist who was also known as Kremser Schmidt and occupied a house from 1756 near the Linzer Tor in Stein. Behind this is the **Piарistenkirche** (☎ 820 92; Frauenbergplatz; ☎ dawn-dusk), with Gothic vaulting, huge windows and baroque altars.

Just west of here is the **Weinstadt Museum** (☎ 801 567; www.weinstadtmuseum.at; Körnermarkt 14; adult/student/child €4/3/2; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Mar-Nov), housed in a former Dominican monastery; inside you'll find displays on the town's pride and joy (wine) and its production, and paintings by our friend, Kremser Schmidt.



Further west of here, along Steiner Landstrasse, you reach the **Kunstmile** (Art Mile), the section of Steiner Landstrasse with museums and space for art and media. The rather forbidding building nearby is the local prison, and behind that is the leafy university.

The **Karikaturmuseum** (☎ 908 020; www.karikaturmuseum.at, in German; Steiner Landstrasse 3a; adult/student/child/family €9/8/3.50/18; combined ticket for 3 Kunstmeile museums €11; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar) features changing exhibitions and a large permanent collection of caricatures of prominent Austrian and international figures. Directly opposite is the town's arts centre, the **Kunsthalle** (☎ 908 010-19; Steiner Landstrasse 3; adult/student/child/family €9/8/3.50/18; combined ticket for 3 Kunstmeile museums €11; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar). Small but often unusual changing exhibitions are held here.

Krems is a wine-making heartland and **Weingut der Stadt Krems** (☎ 801 441; Stadtgraben 11; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Sat) is the city-owned vineyard, yielding 200,000 bottles per year (90% is Grüner Veltliner and Riesling), some of which you can sample free and buy.

Sleeping

Krems is fairly well-supplied with hotels, pensions and private rooms, but booking ahead in summer is always advisable. Many private rooms, especially in Stein, are marked with signs; the tourist office can also help.

ÖAMTC Donau Camping (☎ 844 55; donaucamp.ingkrems@aon.at; Wiedengasse 7; campsites per person with tent €5.30; ☎ Easter-mid-Oct; P) This campsite is conveniently close to town.

Jugendherberge (☎ 834 52; oejhv.noe.krems@aon.at; Ringstrasse 77; dm €18.50; ☎ Apr-Oct; P) This popular Hostelling International (HI) hostel close to the tourist office is well geared for cyclists; it features a garage, an onsite bicycle repair service and packed lunches.

Gästehaus Einzinger (☎ 823 16; gaestehaus.einzinger@aon.at; Steiner Landstrasse 82; s €33, d €54-64) The courtyard in this 16th-century guesthouse will blow away even the most history-hardened: blackbirds buzz and chirp, budgies taunt them from a cage, and one portico after another opens up around a courtyard spilling with foliage. Rooms are a little basic but some have views to night-lit Stift Göttweig.

Hotel Alte Poste (☎ 822 76; www.altepost-krems.at, in German; Obere Landstrasse 32; s €30-45, d €55-75; P) This friendly guesthouse in a historic 500-year-old building has comfortable rooms,

an enchanting courtyard and a good traditional restaurant.

Gästehaus Freisleben (☎ 851 69; www.gaestehaus-freisleben.at, in German; Steiner Landstrasse 16; s €37-49, d €60-84) Freisleben is bright and tastefully furnished, with sparkling tiled surfaces, large rooms and a small table in each room where you can catch up on writing your travel journal.

Hotel Unter den Linden (☎ 821 15; www.udl.at; Schillerstrasse 5; s €45-70, d €66-92; P) This big, yellow, family-run hotel has knowledgeable and helpful owners, bright comfortable rooms and a convenient location in Krems itself. Book ahead as it gets bus groups and is arguably the best deal in town.

Gourmet-Hotel Am Förthof (☎ 833 45; www.hotel-foerthof.at; Förthofer Donaulände 8; s €60-80, d €100-130; P) This country-style mansion about 500m west of Stein combines cosy rooms, romantic ambience, a pretty garden and a superb gourmet restaurant (mains €15, menus €22 to €44) serving Austrian classics such as *Tafelspitz* (boiled beef with apple and horseradish sauce), lamb, and fried liver with slices of apple.

Steigenberger Avance Hotel (☎ 710 10; www.krems.steigenberger.at; Am Goldberg; s €108-113, d €176-186; P) It's a stiff walk up the hill here but well worth it for a splurge in comfortable modern rooms. Views are across town and the valley, or over to the vineyards from the twin-level wellness/spa area with its infinity pool and panorama windows (it also has an outdoor pool and bar area). Reserve to get the best views from the outdoor restaurant patio.

Eating & Drinking

Filmar im Kesselhaus (☎ 893 3599; www.filmar.at, in German; Dr.-Karl-Dorreck-Strasse 30; mains €5-10; ☎ 11am-6pm Sun-Tue, 11am-11pm Wed-Sat) This sleek student restaurant and bar is the hub of eating and drinking activity on the university campus. Beyond that, it also shows art-house films usually related to the theme of shows in its associated exhibition space (www.filmgalerie.at). If the vegetarian offerings, salads, pasta and meats don't get you up here, then the lively indoor and outdoor bar or the cinematic aspect might.

m.kunst.genuss (☎ 908 010-21; Steiner Landstrasse 3; lunch buffets €8-15; ☎ 10am-6pm) Another eatery in the Toni Mörwald stable – excellent for breakfast, buffet or a quick coffee beside the Kunsthalle.

Gasthaus zum Elefanten (☎ 850 16; Schürerplatz 10; mains €8.50-14.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Situated on a romantic baroque town square, 'the Elephant' serves classics such as Styrian chicken with beans and pumpkin oil, schnitzel and lamb in a cosy atmosphere indoors or at outdoor tables.

Jell (☎ 823 45; Hoher Markt 8-9; mains €16-24; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, lunch Sat & Sun) Occupying a gorgeous stone house, Jell is hard to beat for a rustic atmosphere and fine wine from its own vineyard. The game goulash is a bit rich, but Jell has good food on the whole. It's friendly staff also adds to a great regional experience.

our pick **Mörwald Kloster Und** (☎ 704 930; Undstrasse 6; mains €20-33, menus €39-56; ☎ 10am-10pm Tue-Sat) Mörwald is most central of a crop of restaurants run by Toni Mörwald outside Vienna; it offers exquisite delights ranging from roast pigeon breast to beef, poultry and fish dishes with French influences. A lovely yard and an impressive wine selection round off one of the best restaurants in the Wachau.

You'll find one **Spar** (Obere Landstrasse 15) supermarket in Krems, and a second **Spar** (Schürerplatz) in Stein.

Don't omit a *Heurigen* visit; most are out of the centre and provide an authentic eating and drinking experience. They're only open for two- or three-week bursts during the year; get the schedule from the tourist office.

Piano (☎ 858 09; Steiner Landstrasse 21; ☎ 5pm-2am Mon-Thu, 5pm-3am Fri & Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun) A cross-over crowd of students, young workers and mellow jazz types gathers at this lively and off-beat pub. It does a couple of local sausage snacks to go with its great selection of beer; a few other decent bars and restaurants are on this street.

Getting There & Away

Frequent daily trains depart from Krems for Vienna's Franz Josefs Bahnhof (€13.50, one hour). The quickest way to Melk is by train to Spitz and continue by bus (€4.40, five times daily, one hour).

Autovermietung Becker (☎ 82433; www.rent.becker.at, in German; Wachauer Strasse 30) rents cars from €49 per day and minibuses from €120.

Getting Around

From the train station, bus 1 does a long loop through Stein and back into the centre of Krems for the cost of €1.70. Bikes can be

hired at ÖAMTC Donau Camping (p169) and some hotels.

AROUND KREMS Stift Göttweig

It's difficult *not* to notice **Stift Göttweig** (Göttweig Abbey; ☎ 02732-85581-231; Furth bei Göttweig; adult/student & child €7/6.50, full/part-guided tour €3/2; ☎ 10am-6pm Oct-May, 9am-6pm Jun-Sep, tours 11am & 3pm), not least because of its brooding hilltop presence. Founded in 1083, the abbey you see today is mostly baroque due to restoration after a devastating fire in the early 18th century. Aside from the grand view back across the Danube Valley from its garden terrace and restaurant, the abbey's highlights include the **Imperial Staircase** with a heavenly ceiling fresco painted by Paul Troger in 1739, and the over-the-top baroque interior of the **Stiftskirche** (which has a Kremser Schmidt work in the crypt). Fully guided tours take in the abbey's Imperial Wing, church and summer vestry; shorter tours explore either the Imperial Wing or the church and vestry.

Only three direct buses on weekdays travel between Krems train station and Göttweig (€1.70, 25 minutes). The train is another possibility, but it's a steep walk up hill from the Klein Wien station (€2.90, 10 minutes).

Schloss Grafenegg

About 10km east of Krems near the road to Tulln is **Schloss Grafenegg** (☎ 02735-220 522; www.grafenegg.com; Haitzendorf; adult/senior/family €5/3/7.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-Apr-Sep), a castle with the look and feel of an ornate Tudor mansion set in English woods. Built in a revivalist (neo-gothic) style by Leopold Ernst in the mid-19th century it is now a venue for exhibitions and concerts, but you can explore the interior, which includes a chapel and decadent state rooms, weighed down with plenty of wood, period furniture, carpets and fireplaces.

The castle's manicured gardens are perfect for a picnic, but for fine dining don't pass up **Restaurant & Hotel Schloss Grafenegg** (☎ 02735-2616-0; grafenegg@moerwald.at; Grafenegg 12; 3-/5-course menu €45/60; ☎ 10am-10pm Wed-Sun Easter-Oct; ☎) owned by celebrity chef and winemaker Toni Mörwald. Accommodation costs are €89 to €103 for a single, and €118 to €138 for a double. Two kilometres away in Feuersbrunn is his **Hotel Villa Katharina** (☎ 02738-229 80; rezeption@moerwald.at; Kleine Zeile 10; s €81-96, d €108-128; ☎), with its **Restaurant zur**

Traube (☎ 02738-229 80; Kleine Zeile 13-17; 3-/8-course menu €29/69; ☎ 10am-10pm).

To get to Schloss Grafenegg, catch one of the six daily trains to nearby Wagram-Grafenegg (€4.40, 18 minutes) and walk 2km northeast to the castle.

DÜRNSTEIN

☎ 02711 / pop 1000

The pretty town of Dürnstein, on a supple curve in the Danube, is not only known for its beautiful buildings but also for the castle above the town where Richard I (the Lionheart) of England was once imprisoned.

Orientation & Information

The train station and **tourist office** (☎ 200; www.duernstein.at; Dürnstein Bahnhof; ☎ 1-6pm mid-Apr-mid-May & late Sep-mid-Oct, 11am-6pm mid-May-late Sep) are about five minutes' walk east of Hauptstrasse, the town's main street. The **Rathaus** (town hall; ☎ 219; Hauptstrasse 25; ☎ 8am-noon & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri), near the centre of the town, also offers information.

Sights

Kuenringerburg, the castle high on the hill above the town, is where Richard the Lionheart was incarcerated from 1192 to 1193. His crime was to have insulted Leopold V; his misfortune was to be recognised despite his disguise when journeying through Austria on his way home from the Holy Lands; his liberty was achieved only upon the payment of an enormous ransom of 35,000kg of silver (which partly funded the building of Wiener Neustadt). It was also here that the singing minstrel Blondel attempted to rescue his sovereign. There's not a lot to see but a heap of rubble, but the view is worth the 15- to 20-minute climb.

Of the picturesque 16th-century houses and other prominent buildings lining Dürnstein's streets, the meticulously restored **Chorherrenstift** (☎ 375; Stiftshof; admission adult/concession & child €2.40/1.50; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Oct) is the most impressive. It's all that remains of the former Augustinian monastery originally founded in 1410; it received its baroque facelift in the 18th century (overseen by Josef Munggenast, among others). Kremser Schmidt did many of the ceiling and altar paintings. Entry includes access to the porch overlooking the Danube and an exhibition on the Augustinian monks who once ruled

the roost here (up until the monastery was dissolved by Joseph II in 1788).

Sleeping & Eating

The tourist office can supply a list of private rooms, pensions and *Gasthöfe* (inns) in Dürnstein and neighbouring Oberloiben and Unterloiben.

Pension Böhmer (☎ 239; pension.boehmer@i-one.at; Hauptstrasse 22; s €35, d €60-70) This small pension in the heart of town has comfortable rooms at very reasonable prices. It's only a hop, step and a crawl to the castle from here.

Hotel Sängler Blondel (☎ 253; www.saenglerblondel.at; Klosterplatz/Dürnstein 64; s €64, d €92-98; ☎) One of the nicest options in town, this hotel has good-sized rooms furnished in light woods, some with sofas. A couple have views to the Danube and others look out onto the castle or garden. Meals are served in a fine tree-shaded garden restaurant (mains €9 to €17).

Richard Löwenherz (☎ 222; www.richardloewenherz.at; Dürnstein 8; s €96-116, d €166-191, apt €250; ☎) One of the best hotels in town, the 'Lionheart' has midsized rooms right on the Danube in a former monastery. These days the monastic side has been thrown overboard and there's no reason to do without comforts. The walled garden is superb, and the restaurant (mains €10.50 to €23) serving the Austrian classics such as seasonal baked calf's head or *Tafelspitz* is also very good.

our pick **Hotel Schloss Dürnstein** (☎ 212; www.schloss.at; Dürnstein 2; s €153-165, d €166-253, apt €338-365; ☎) This castle is the last word in luxury in town and has a high-end restaurant. Most rooms are furnished tastefully in antiques, a massage can be arranged for your arrival, and it has a sauna and steam bath. Stay five nights and you will be treated to a free 'surprise menu' in the terrace restaurant (mains €16 to €25) with staggering views over the river. Stay 10 and you get a night on the house (which might be useful if you happen to be broke by that stage).

Alter Klosterkeller (☎ 378; Anzuggasse 237; mains €5-15; ☎ 3-11pm Mon-Fri, noon-11pm weekends Apr-Nov) This attractive *Heuriger* is just outside the village walls (on the eastern side) and overlooks the vineyards close to the town. It's the perfect place to sample the local cuisine and wines.

Restaurant Loibnerhof (☎ 828 90; Unterloiben 7; mains €13-25, 4-course menu €37; ☎ 11.30am-9.30pm Wed-Sun) Situated 1.5km east of Dürnstein in Unterloiben, this family-run restaurant inside

a 400-year-old building has a lovely garden where you can enjoy delicious local specialties such as *Kalbsbeuschel* (veal lights), which traditionally uses the lung and heart of the calf.

Getting There & Away

Dürnstein's train station is called Dürnstein-Oberloiben. Krems and Weissenkirchen are both about 20 minutes away by Brandner boat (€10, twice daily May to September); it's cheaper and quicker by train though (€2.90, 11 minutes to Krems, seven minutes to Weissenkirchen, hourly).

SPITZ

☎ 02713 / pop 1800

Situated 17km west of Krems on the north bank of the Danube, Spitz is a pleasant town that doesn't get as clogged with visitors as Dürnstein, has a picturesque old town centre, and offers some good hiking in the surrounding forests and vineyards.

The train station is near the B3 and river. To reach the old town, turn left after leaving the station and right up Markstrasse to Kirchenplatz. The **tourist office** (☎ 02713-2363; www.spitz-wachau.at, in German; Mittergasse 3a; ☹ 9.30am-1pm & 2-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-6pm Sun May-Oct, 2-4pm Mon-Fri Nov-Apr) is situated 400m west of the station. It has free maps of the town and hiking trails, including a good *Naturerlebnis Wachau* map (€1).

Spitz's major sight is its Gothic **parish church** (☎ 02713-2231; Kirchenplatz 12; ☹ 8am-6pm), unusual for its chancel, which is out of whack with the main body of the church. Other noteworthy features are the 15th-century statues of the 12 apostles lining the organ loft.

Many of the local hiking trails begin from the former medieval city gate, **Rotes Tor**, which offers nice views over the Danube, and if you're energetic even better views are had from the castle ruins of the 13th-century **Burgruine Hinterhaus** (see p109).

If you decide to stay in town, the tourist office can help with accommodation, or look for signs advertising private rooms. **Hotel Wachauer Hof** (☎ 2303; www.wachauerhof-spitz.at, in German; Hauptstrasse 15; s/d €39/62; ☐) is very centrally located, with comfortable rooms and a restaurant with outside seating in summer. **Hotel Garni Weinberghof** (☎ 2939; www.weingut-lagler.at, in German; Am Hinterweg 17; s €45-48, d €70-80; ☐) is situated above the centre among the

pretty vineyards and is geared more to hikers and cyclists.

Regular trains run between Spitz and Krems (€4.40, 30 minutes), and frequent buses and less frequent train services connect Spitz and Schwallenbach (€2.90, three minutes). See opposite and p164 for bus and boat services. Bicycles can be rented from the train station (see opposite).

MELK

☎ 02752 / pop 5200

With its sparkling and majestic abbey-fortress, Melk is a high point for tourists visiting the Danube Valley. And they arrive here in hoards – either by the busload, by train or wearily trudging with bikes through the cobblestone streets.

The **tourist office** (☎ 523 07-410; www.tiscover.com/melk; Babenbergerstrasse 1; ☹ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 4-6pm Sat & Sun May, Jun & Sep, 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 5-7pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat Apr, 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat Oct) east of Rathausplatz has maps and plenty of useful information.

Stift Melk

Of the many abbeys in Austria, **Stift Melk** (Benedictine Abbey of Melk; ☎ 555-232; www.stiftmelk.at; Abt Berthold Dietmayr Strasse 1; adult/student & child/family €7.50/4.10/15, with guided tour €9.30/5.90/18.60; ☹ 9am-5.30pm May-Sep, 9am-4.30pm mid-Mar-Apr & Oct-Nov) is the best known. Historically, Melk was of great importance to both the Romans and the Babenbergs, who built a castle here. In 1089 the Babenberg margrave Leopold II donated the castle to Benedictine monks, who converted it into a fortified abbey. Fire destroyed the original edifice, which was completely rebuilt between 1702 and 1738 according to plans by Jakob Prandtauer and his disciple, Josef Munggenast.

The huge **monastery church** is enclosed by the buildings, but dominates the complex with its twin spires and high octagonal dome. The interior is baroque gone barmy, with endless prancing angels and gold twirls. The theatrical high-altar scene, depicting St Peter and St Paul (the two patron saints of the church), is by Peter Widerin. Johann Michael Rottmayr did most of the ceiling paintings, including those in the dome.

Other highlights include the **Bibliothek** (Library) and the **Marmorsaal** (Marble Hall); both have painted tiers on the ceiling (by

Paul Troger) to give the illusion of greater height, and ceilings are slightly curved to aid the effect. Eleven of the **Imperial rooms**, where dignitaries (including Napoleon) stayed, are now used to house a **museum**.

From around November to mid-March, the monastery can only be visited by guided tour. Always phone ahead, even in summer, to ensure you get an English-language tour.

Sleeping & Eating

There is no shortage of hotels, but you're actually better off doing a day trip and staying in more attractive Dürnstein, Spitz or Krems.

If you do stay, **Hotel Restaurant zur Post** (☎ 523 45; www.post-melk.at, in German; Linzer Strasse 1; s €55-62, d €90-99, apt €138-198; ☐) is a bright and pleasant hotel in the heart of town and has the attraction of large, comfortable rooms in plush colours with additional nice touches such as brass bed lamps. There's a sauna, facilities for massages and free bike use for guests (€10 per day for nonguests). The restaurant is also very decent for Austrian classics.

Tom's Restaurant (☎ 524 75; mains €20, 4/9-course menu with wine €90/135; ☹ lunch & dinner Thu-Tue) is gourmet quality and changes its menu each week; it has an extensive wine cellar and a list as thick as a book!

Getting There & Away

Boats leave from the canal by Pionierstrasse, 400m north of the abbey; see p164 for more information. Almost hourly trains travel direct to Melk from Vienna's Westbahnhof (€15.50, 1¼ hours). To get to Schloss Schallaburg from Melk, **Taxi Türke** (☎ 523 16) runs a minibus from the Melk train station (€4 one way, leaving 10.25am, 1.15pm and 4pm daily). You might be able to negotiate other trips between runs, but expect to pay about €1 per kilometre (the going rate in summer for a driver).

Wachau Touristik Bernhardt (☎ 02713-2222; office@wachau-touristik.at; Laaben 1a in Spitz; €12 per day) rents out bicycles from the ferry station in Melk and from the train station in Spitz. Book ahead.

TULLN

☎ 02272 / pop 14,000

Tulln, the home town of painter Egon Schiele and situated 30km northwest of Vienna, has several interesting attractions and has recently put a lot of energy into pulling in visitors by staging world-class exhibitions and upgrading its museums.

Orientation & Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 675 66; www.tulln.at, in German; Minoritenplatz 2; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri & 10am-7pm Sat May-Sep, 8am-3pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr) is one block north of Hauptplatz (the fountain end) and a 15-minute walk northwest from the main train station. Tulln Stadt, an S-Bahn station (for suburban trains from Vienna), is just five minutes' walk south of Hauptplatz along Bahnhofstrasse.

Sights & Activities

The **Egon Schiele Museum** (☎ 645 70; Donaulände 28; adult/concession/child €5/3.50/3; ☹ 10am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), housed in a former jail near the Danube, vividly presents the story of the life of the Tulln-born artist. It contains 100 of his paintings and sketches and a mock-up of the cell he was briefly imprisoned in (he was however jailed in Neulengbach). He fell foul of the law in 1912 following the seizure of 125 erotic drawings; some were of pubescent girls, and Schiele was also in trouble for allowing children to view his explicit works. Schiele fans should also make sure they visit the Leopold Museum in Vienna (p130).

Alongside the tourist office, the rococo **Minoritenkirche** (☎ 623 380; Minoritenplatz 1; ☹ 8am-7pm) from 1739 is decorated with a magnificent series of ceiling frescoes dedicated to St Johannes Nepomuk, culminating in one depicting his fall from a bridge at the hands of Bohemia's King Wenceslaus IV; the angel trying to save him is tumbling out of the frame. Also not to be missed is the **Pfarrkirche St Stephan** (☎ 623 380; Wiener Strasse 20; admission free; ☹ 7.30am-7.30pm summer, 7.30am-5pm winter) with its perfectly preserved 13th-century frescoed Romanesque funerary chapel.

The **Museum im Minoritenkloster** (☎ 690 442; Minoritenplatz 1; hr & price vary) adjoins the church. This city-promoted art space features excellent changing exhibitions such as one in 2007 of erotic art with works by Picasso, Warhol, Richard Lindner and Viennese artist Gottfried Helnwein among the many on show.

The town and its tourist office are well set up for cyclists as the Danube cycle-way cuts between the river on the town's northern border; to encourage green tourism, the city provides six free city bicycles, which you can pick up just off Hauptplatz from **2Rad Wegl** (☎ 626 95; Jasomirgottgasse 4). Bikes can also be hired from Donaupark Camping (see p174).

Sleeping & Eating

The tourist office can help with a list of accommodation options (including private rooms), and also provide a map of the town.

Donaupark Camping (☎ 652 00; www.campingtulln.at; Hafenstrasse 4; campsites per person/tent €6.50/4.50; ☹ Apr-Oct; P) This campsite is located just east of the centre on the river and alongside a pretty forest.

Jugendherberge Tulln (☎ 651 65 10; jugendherberge-tulln@aon.at; Marc-Aurel-Park 1; dm €18.90-28.90; P) This youth hostel near the Danube caters for seminar guests as well as tourists. All the dorms have their own showers, and there is table tennis, table football, a café, plus a handy ATM.

Zum Schwarzen Adler (☎ 626 76; Rathausplatz 7; s/d/tr €42/64/78; P) In a town short on mid-range or upmarket options, this hotel in the centre of town is the best choice; rooms are clean, the furnishings are modern, and it has a restaurant downstairs that brews its own dark and light beer and serves up honest Austrian nosh at very reasonable prices (menus €5 to €7, mains €6 to €13).

Verdi (☎ 0676/40 84 841; Hauptplatz 25; mains €8-19; ☹ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) Verdi is a refreshing, all-round eating option with a range from fish through Austrian classics to Mediterranean flavours; there's a terrace for warm summer evenings.

Getting There & Away

Tulln is reached hourly by train (€7.60, 25 minutes) or S-Bahn (line 40; €7.60, 45 minutes) from Vienna's Franz Josefs Bahnhof. The train is quicker, but only stops at the main Tulln station, while the S-Bahn stops at Tulln Stadt. Heading west, trains go to Krems (€9.30, 30 to 45 minutes, hourly) or St Pölten (€9.30, one hour, hourly).

ST PÖLTEN

☎ 02742 / pop 51,000

St Pölten, a destination few may even notice as they scream through on their way from Vienna to Salzburg, may be Lower Austria's capital but it retains a very sleepy atmosphere. While it's not all that attractive or exciting, it does have a nice *Altstadt* (old town), with pedestrian-only cobblestone streets, juxtaposed by a new Landhaus

Viertel (Landhaus Quarter) with contemporary architectural delights.

HISTORY

In a strange twist of fate – first an ailing economy in the 1920s stalled the decision to give Lower Austria its own capital, and later the Nazis favoured making Krems the capital – St Pölten became capital of Lower Austria only in 1986, ending an anomaly in which Lower Austria was administered geographically from Vienna, but was in fact a separate province. This prompted the catch-cry, 'A province without a capital is like a goulash without juice'. Ironically, it happens to have the oldest known municipal charter – granted in 1159. The *Altstadt* is noted for its baroque buildings: baroque master Jakob Prandtauer lived and died in the city.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The centre of town is a compact, mostly pedestrian-only area to the west of the Traisen River. Rathausplatz, is home to the *Rathaus* (town hall) and **tourist office** (☎ 353 354; tourism@st-poelten.gv.at; Rathausplatz 1; ☹ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar). Ask for the *Übermachten in St Pölten* booklet (in German, but with useful listings). The main post office is near Herrenplatz, and internet access is available in Cinema Paradiso (see p176). The Landhaus Viertel is 700m east of Rathausplatz.

SIGHTS

Pick up the tourist office's *Your Personal City Guide* brochure (in English) that outlines two walking tours of the city which can be complemented by an audio guide (€1.45).

Rathausplatz is lined with eye-catching pastel-coloured buildings and dominated by the **Rathaus** and **Franziskanerkirche** (☎ 352 6211; Rathausplatz 12; ☹ dawn-dusk), which was completed in 1770 and has a grandiose altar offset by side altar paintings by Kremser Schmidt. Between the two is the tall **Dreifaltigkeitssäule** (Trinity Column).

Not far south and west of Rathausplatz is the **Institut der Englischen Fräulein** (☎ 352 188-0; Linzer Strasse 11; admission free; ☹ 8am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 3-6pm Sun), a convent founded in 1706, which has a classic baroque façade, black-and-gold organ and several frescoes by Paul Troger in the chapel. At the time of publication the **Stadtmuseum** (☎ 333-26 43;

Prandtauerstrasse 2) was receiving a facelift and upgrade, but when this museum reopens it should have a permanent section on Art Nouveau and changing exhibitions on town history.

To the east of Rathausplatz is Domplatz, which hosts a **morning market** every Thursday and Saturday and is home to the **Domkirk** (☎ 353 402-0; Domplatz 1; ☹ dawn-dusk); its interior, with lashings of fake marble and gold, was designed by Jakob Prandtauer and is easily the most impressive in St Pölten.

From Domplatz walk down Lederergasse to the Landhaus Viertel, passing the town's former **synagogue** (Dr. Karl Renner-Promenade 22; admission free; ☹ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri). The building, which contains Art Nouveau frescoes,

dates from 1912; it was ravaged by the Nazis and restored to become an institute for Jewish history. The Jewish community itself couldn't be re-established. The **Landesmuseum** (☎ 90 80 90-153; Franz Schubert-Platz 5; adult/concession/child/family €8/7/3.50/16; ☹ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) is devoted to the history, art and environment of Lower Austria. A wave made from glass, frozen in movement above the entrance, sets the mood, and indeed water is a theme throughout. Its highlight in an art collection spanning the Middle Ages to the present is the 13th-century Lion of Schönggrabern.

For a bird's-eye view of the quarter take the lift to the top of the **Klangturm** (☎ 90 80 50; Landhausplatz; adult/child €7.50/3.50; ☹ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun).

INFORMATION		SLEEPING	
Main Post Office	1 B2	Gasthof Graf	12 B1
Police	(see 2)	Jugendherberge St Pölten	13 C1
Tourist Office	2 B2	Mariazellerhof	14 A4
		Metropol	15 B3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		EATING	
Domkirche	3 B2	Billa	16 A1
Dreifaltigkeitssäule	4 A2	Galerie	17 B2
Franziskanerkirche	5 B2	Landhaus Stüberl	18 D3
Institut der Englischen Fräulein	6 B2		
Klangturm	7 D4		
Landesmuseum	8 C4		
Markt	9 B2		
Stadtmuseum	10 A2		
Synagogue	11 C3		
ENTERTAINMENT			
		Cinema Paradiso	19 B2
		FestSpielHaus	20 C3
TRANSPORT			
		Bundesbus Departures	21 B1
		City Bus Stop	22 B1

SLEEPING

The tourist office has a list of accommodation, including private rooms.

Hotel im Seepark (☎ 251 510; www.hotel-seepark.at; Am Ratzendorfer See; campsite per single-person tent €15.50, extra person €7.50, s/d €45/66; 📍) This lakeside pension, 3km to the northeast of the centre in the Freizeitpark, doubles as a camping ground and is a fine place to spend the day sunning and swimming.

Jugendherberge St Pölten (☎ 321 96; office 3100@hotel.or.at; Bahnhofplatz 1; dm €17.50) The youth hostel is about as convenient to the train station as it gets – it's virtually in the same building.

Mariazellerhof (☎ 769 95; www.pension-mariazellerhof.at, in German; Mariazeller Strasse 6; s €33-42, d €52-64; 📍) The pink façade of family-owned Mariazellerhof faces a busy intersection, but double-glazing keeps the noise down. Many of the good-sized rooms come with kitchen facilities.

Gasthof Graf (☎ 352 757; www.hotel-graf.at, in German; Bahnhofplatz 7; s €55, d €76; 📍) This pleasant *Gasthof* directly across from the *Hauptbahnhof* is very good value for the price: it's clean and its modern rooms are pleasant. Furnishings, though venerable, include a coffee table and desk.

Metropol (☎ 707 00-0; www.austria-trend.at/met; Schillerplatz 1; s €250, d €300; 📍) Cosy, upmarket and aimed at a business and culture clientele, the Metropol is not cheap (low season prices are 20% less), but for these prices, you get free use of the sauna, steam bath and infrared lamps. Its restaurant (mains €14 to €22) serves up steak and good business-type meals.

EATING & DRINKING

Landhaus Stüberl (☎ 245 24; Landhausboulevard 27; breakfast €3.50-5, mains €5.50-12; 📍) breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Fri) Aimed at office workers in the quarter, Landhaus has good, cheap lunchtime dishes, including pasta; a terrace overlooks the Traisen River.

Gasthof Winkler (☎ 364 944; Mühlweg 64; mains €7-18; 📍) lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) This upmarket restaurant has been serving delicious local and Austrian seasonal specialties for over a century. You'll find it about 1km north of the *Hauptbahnhof*.

Restaurant Galerie (☎ 351 305; Fuhrmannsgasse 1; mains €12.50-25.50, 4 courses €29.50; 📍) lunch & dinner Mon-Fri) Galerie serves delicious Viennese cuis-

ine and has a great wine list, especially for Italian and French vintages. Although Wiener schnitzel isn't on the menu, it's always available for the asking.

Cinema Paradiso (☎ 214 00; www.cinema-paradiso.at, in German; Rathausplatz 14; Sun breakfast buffet €6; 📍) 9-1am) This is one of the best centrally located places in town for a coffee or drink. It also does an all-you-can eat breakfast buffet on Sunday and, true to its name, is an art-house cinema.

Self-caterers should head for **Billa** supermarket on the corner of Brunnegasse and Bräuhausgasse.

ENTERTAINMENT

The **Festspielhaus** (☎ 90 80 80-222; www.festspielhaus.at, in German; Franz Schubert-Platz 2) is a modern theatre which features an impressive array of music, theatre and dance performances from both Austria and abroad.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Trains run about every half hour from Vienna to St Pölten (€11, 40 to 75 minutes), continuing on to Linz (€20, one hour) and Salzburg (€34, 2½ hours). Hourly direct trains run to Krems (€7.60, 45 minutes) and several each day to Mariazell (€14.50, 2½ hours).

St Pölten has equally good road connections: the east-west A1/E60 passes a few kilometres south of the city and the S33 branches north from there, bypassing St Pölten to the east, and continuing to Krems.

AROUND ST PÖLTEN

Although the region around Lower Austria's capital won't bowl you over, the baroque Augustinian abbey **Stift Herzogenburg** (☎ 02782-831 12; Herzogenburg; adult/student/child €7/5.50/3/2; 📍) tours 9.30am, 11am, 1.30pm, 3pm, 4.30pm Apr-Oct) is a highlight. Admission is on a guided tour (in English, arrange in advance), which includes the **Stiftskirche** and a late Gothic collection of paintings by the Danube School of artists.

Herzogenburg lies on the main train line between Krems (€4.40, 30 minutes) and St Pölten (€4.40, 15 minutes); at least a dozen trains pass through the town's train station (which is 10 minutes' walk from the abbey) daily.

MOSTVIERTEL

The Mostviertel, in Lower Austria's southwestern corner, takes its name from apple cider which is produced and consumed in the area. By Lower Austrian standards, the landscape is spectacular, with the eastern Alps ever-present in its southern reaches. It's largely ignored by international tourists and is certainly an area off the beaten track.

One town not to be missed is **Waidhofen an der Ybbs**, with historic gabled houses, arcaded courtyards and dramatic onion domes. Staff at its **tourist office** (☎ 07442-511 255; www.waidhofen.at; Schlossweg 2; 📍) 9am-6pm) have information on the town and the eight **mountain bike trails** of varying degrees of difficulty around Waidhofen. Mountain bikes are available free of charge between 10am and 6pm, Thursday to Sunday from May to October (maximum period one week). Pick up the key to the lock and the tour map from the tourist office, and then the bike from the *Sporthalle* (sport hall) on Oskar-Czeija-Strasse.

From Gstadt, Bundesstrasse 31 leads through some lovely mountainous country and a string of pretty little villages such as **Göstling**, **Lunz am See** and **Gaming**.

In the eastern fringes of the Mostviertel, and only 23km south of St Pölten, is the **Cistercian monastery** (☎ 02762-524 20; www.stift-lilienfeld.at; Klosterrotte 1; tours adult/student & child €7/4, admission without tour €3/1; 📍) 8am-noon & 1-5pm, tours 10am & 2pm Mon-Sat, 2pm Sun) of Lilienfeld. Founded in 1202, the foundations of the monastery are Romanesque, but have received Gothic and baroque make-overs.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Frequent daily trains go to Waidhofen an der Ybbs (€15.50, one hour, change at Amstetten) from St Pölten; only a couple of services run to Göstling (€9.30, 1¼ hours), daily services to Lunz (€11, 1½ hours) are more frequent. You'll need your own wheels for Gaming, which is 30km from Waidhofen.

WALDVIERTEL & WEINVIERTEL

Between them, the Waldviertel (Woods Quarter) and Weinviertel (Wine Quarter) take up most of the land north of the

Danube in Lower Austria. The Waldviertel to the northwest is a region of rolling hills and rural villages, and while there isn't actually much forest to speak of, there are a number of fine attractions. The Weinviertel, north and northeast of Vienna, is flat and agricultural, and has little of interest for the average tourist (unless you're crazy about Austrian wine). Both regions are places to escape the madding crowds.

Waldviertel's central **tourist office** (☎ 02822-54109-0; info@waldviertel.or.at; www.waldviertel.or.at, in German; Sparkasseplatz 4; telephone & email only) is located in Zwettl, a small town near a baroque **Cistercian Abbey** (☎ 02822-550; Stift Zwettl 1; tours adult/child €6/3; tours 10am, 11am, 2pm, 3pm & 4pm Mon-Sat, 11am, 2pm, 3pm & 4pm Sun May-Oct), which has one-hour tours in German with English description sheets. The B217 south of Zwettl leads through the heart of poppy country, a booming industry in Lower Austria.

Some 40km east of Zwettl are a group of interesting sights. First up is the Benedictine **Stift Altenburg** (☎ 02982-3451; www.stift-altenburg.at, in German; Stift 1; adult/child & student/family €9/4.50/16, includes English audio guide; 📍) 10am-5pm Apr-Oct), which can trace its foundations back to 1144. The abbey library (which has ceiling frescoes by Paul Troger) and the crypt (with frescoes by Troger's pupils) are highlights. The abbey's church, which is free to enter, contains some of Troger's best frescoes (you'll find them in the central dome, and above the high and side altars).

A few kilometres southeast of Altenburg is **Schloss Rosenberg** (☎ 02982-2911; www.rosenburg.at, in German; Rosenberg am Kamp; tours adult/child & student/family €10/8.50/24, extra €3 for falconry & pageantry; 📍) 9.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Mar, Apr & Oct, 9.30am-5pm May-Sep), a Renaissance castle where splendid falconry shows take place at 11am and 3pm.

A further 18km east of Rosenberg, the quaint town of **Eggenburg** comes into view. It's still surrounded by much of its original defensive walls, but more intriguing is its **Österreichisches Motorradmuseum** (Motorbike Museum; ☎ 02984-2151; www.motorradmuseum.at, in German; Museumgasse 6; adult/student/child €6/5/3; 📍) 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun mid-Jan-mid-Dec). This masterpiece of motorbike dedication has over 320 immaculately restored bikes on show. More unusual models include the NSU Max Sportversion, with its sharp angles, and the Böhmerland 600, the longest bike in the world.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Zwettl is best reached by bus from Krems (€9, 45 minutes to 1½ hours). Services are frequent but only a couple run on Sunday. Several direct trains travel from Krems to Horn daily (€9.30, one hour), stopping at Rosenberg (€7.60, one hour). From Horn, very irregular buses run to Altenburg (€2.20, 10 minutes). Eggenburg has plenty of daily train connections to Tulln (€9.30, 40 minutes).

DROSENDORF

☎ 02915 / pop 1280

Situated on the extreme northern fringe of the Waldviertel, hard on the Czech border, the lovely fortified town of Drosendorf is often overlooked by the Viennese – it's simply too far-flung. Yet, with a completely intact town wall, it is a unique and beautiful town.

An **information service** (☎ 232 10; ☎ 8am–4.30pm Mon–Fri) is located inside the castle, and an **information stand** with a useful walk-by-numbers brochure (in German) as well as an accommodation list is situated on Hauptplatz, inside the walls.

The **fortress walk** also begins here, passes the **Schloss**, a mostly baroque structure on top of Romanesque foundations, and exits through the **Hornertor**, the main gate in the southeast dating from the 13th to the 15th century. Cross the moat and follow the wall clockwise.

If you're staying overnight in town, there are several good options, but the most atmospheric is **Schloss Drosendorf** (☎ 232 10; schloss-drosendorf@drosendorf.at; Schlossplatz 1; s €34–50, d €60–70; ☐ ☒).

Poppies – or rather poppy-seed specialities – are a big local industry in the Waldviertel. **MOKA** (☎ 22 27; www.moka.at, in German; Hauptplatz 5; cake & coffee €6; ☎ 9am–7pm Thu–Mon Apr–Oct) does a delicious poppy-seed cake and coffee, and also has a few comfortable rooms right on Hauptplatz (single/double €35/70).

To reach Drosendorf from Vienna (Floridsdorf station), take the frequent train to Retz (€12.50, one hour), making sure it connects with one of several buses weekdays (€5.90, one hour).

NATIONALPARK THAYATAL

Straddling the border of Austria and the Czech Republic in the northwestern reaches of the Weinviertel is Austria's smallest national park, Thayatal. This unique stretch of land is actually two parks; its other half, Podjvi

National Park, is located across the border. Of the 3000 plant species found in Austria, about 1300 occur in Thayatal. Thayatal's landscape consists of a deep canyon cut by the Thaya river, numerous rock formations and steep slopes. Walking is the most popular activity in the park.

The **Nationalparkhaus** (☎ 02949-7005-0; www.np-thayatal.at, in German; exhibition adult/student & child €3.80/2.20; ☎ 9am–6pm Apr–Sep, 10am–4pm Mar, Oct & Nov), near Hardegg, has loads of information and an exhibition on the park's ecology. Hardegg, the natural jump-off point for the park, is not easy to get to without your own transport; it's best approached by train from Vienna to Retz (€12.50, one hour), from where the occasional bus runs to the town (€3.60, 20 minutes).

MARCH-DONAULAND

The March-Donauland stretches from the eastern border of Vienna to the Slovakian border, an area dominated by the Danube and its natural flood plains. It's an area rich in history and natural wonder – Carnuntum, an important Roman camp, and Nationalpark Donau-Auen are found here.

CARNUNTUM

The Roman town of Carnuntum was the most important political and military centre in the empire's northeast; with a population of 50,000 people at its peak, it made Vienna look like a village in comparison. The town developed around AD 40 and was abandoned some 400 years later. Today it exists as a relic of Roman civilisation in Upper Pannonia, and is integrated into two modern-day settlements set 4km apart: Petronell-Carnuntum and the larger spa town of Bad Deutsch-Altenburg.

Orientation & Information

Carnuntum consists of three parts: an open-air museum and nearby ancient victory arch in Petronell-Carnuntum, an amphitheatre halfway between Bad Deutsch-Altenburg and Petronell, and a museum in Bad Deutsch-Altenburg. Petronell's **Bahnhof** (train station) is 1km south of the main street, Hauptstrasse, which is home to the open-air museum, its **information office** (☎ 02163-337 70; www.carnuntum.co.at; Hauptstrasse 1; ☎ 9am–5pm

mid-Mar–mid-Nov) and the **Regionalbüro Auland-Carnuntum** (☎ 02163-3555-10; www.aulandcarnuntum.com, in German; Hauptstrasse 3; ☎ 9am–4.30pm Mon–Thu, 9am–2.30pm Fri).

Bad Deutsch-Altenburg also has its own **tourist office** (☎ 02165-629 00-11; www.baddeutsch-altenburg.at, in German; Erhardgasse 2; ☎ 7am–noon, 12.30–5pm Mon–Thu, 7am–1pm Fri May–Oct, 7am–noon & 12.30–4pm Mon–Fri Nov–Apr).

Sights

All four local attractions are covered by the one ticket (adult/student and concession/child €8/6/3, tours extra €3/2), including transport in the archaeological park bus on weekends (see right).

The **open-air museum** (☎ 02163-3377-16; www.carnuntum.co.at; Hauptstrasse 1; ☎ 9am–5pm mid-Mar–mid-Nov, tours 10am, 11.30am, 2pm & 3.30pm) lies on the site of the old civilian town. It includes ruins of the public baths and a reconstructed temple of Diana. Actors lead tours in tunics and togas, and you can buy replicas of Roman sandals and clothing here for your next toga party. The museum is enclosed and very touristy, but is interesting and good fun; descriptions everywhere are in English. The **Heidentor** (Heathen Gate; admission free) was once the south-west entrance to the city and now stands as an isolated anachronism amid fields of grain.

About 2km on from the park towards Bad Deutsch-Altenburg is the grass-covered **amphitheatre** (Wienerstrasse 52; ☎ 9am–5pm mid-Mar–mid-Nov) that formerly seated 15,000. It now hosts a theatre festival over summer.

Bad Deutsch-Altenburg's **Museum Carnuntinum** (Badgasse 40-46; ☎ noon–5pm Mon, 10am–5pm Tue–Sun mid-Mar–mid-Nov, tours 1.30pm & 3.30pm Sat & Sun) is the largest of its kind in Austria, having amassed over 3300 Roman treasures in its 100-year existence. The museums highlight, *Tanzende Mänade* (Dancing Maenad), a marble figure with a perfect bum, is usually here. The town is also a health spa, with 28°C iodine sulphur springs and a wonderful **Kurpark** (spa gardens) on the Danube.

Hainburg, 3km further east, has the depot for Museum Carnuntum, housed in the **Kulturfabrik** (☎ 02163-33 770; www.kulturfabrik-hainburg.at; Kulturplatz 1; adult/child €5/3; ☎ 10am–6pm). The depot can be toured with an advance booking and special exhibitions on archaeological themes are also held here. On top of this, it has splendid views over the Danube and **fenestra** (☎ 02165-63844; Kulturplatz 1; mains €8–16, ☎ 10am–

TAKING IN THE ROMANS

Getting from one Roman site to the next in Carnuntum can be difficult during the week. If you feel energetic, your best option on a weekday is either to hire a bike in Vienna and ride the 50km along the Danube (see p159 for bike hire in Vienna) or take the train out and hire a bike locally in Bad-Deutsch-Altenburg (see below). On weekends from mid-March to mid-November a free bus meets the Vienna train hourly from 10am and does the circuit of sites (the last bus from Museum Carnuntum is 4.30pm).

10pm), a café and gourmet restaurant with a changing seasonal menu. Hainburg itself is a pretty town with hilltop ruins. **Bratislava**, the Slovakian capital, is also an easy day trip from Carnuntum.

Sleeping & Eating

Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, with its pretty *Kurpark*, spa facilities and location near the Danube, is far more appealing than Petronell for overnighting. Much of the accommodation is found on Badgasse.

Gasthof Hotel zum Amphitheater (☎ 02165-627 37; Wienerstrasse 51; s/d/tr €28.60/45.20/66.60; ☐) Rising up from the road opposite the amphitheatre, this friendly, family-run hotel is packed with local atmosphere; rooms are spacious and some have views over the fields or amphitheatre.

Pension Riedmüller (☎ 02165-62473-0; www.tiscover.at/riedmueller.hotels; Badgasse 28; s/d €27/54; ☐) This hotel has massage facilities, free bike use for guests and organises tours or helps with bike tours to Bratislava (€40 each way). Rooms are fine, though not as good as their delicious apple strudel downstairs in the café.

Hotel König Stephan (☎ 02165-624 73-0; Badgasse 34; s/d €27/54; ☐) Run by the same people who operate Pension Riedmüller. This place also has a good restaurant (mains €7 to €17).

A nice place to relax and sip a beer while watching the Danube flow is the **Wirtshaus an der Donau** (☎ 10am–11pm) in the *Kurpark*.

Getting There & Around

From Vienna, the S7 train (direction Wolfsthal) departs Wien Floridsdorf hourly, via Wien Nord and Wien Mitte to Petronell (€9.30, 55 minutes), Bad Deutsch-Altenburg

(€9.30, one hour) and Hainburg (€10.90, 66 minutes).

The cycle path from Vienna goes along the north bank of the Danube, crosses to the south at Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, and continues into Slovakia. See p179 for information about buses and bikes.

NATIONALPARK DONAU-AUEN

Nationalpark Donau-Auen is a thin strip of natural floodplain on either side of the Danube, running from Vienna to the Slovakian border. Established as a national park in 1997, it was the culmination of 13 years of protest and environmentalist action against the building of a hydroelectric power station in Hainburg. You'll find plentiful flora and fauna, including 700 species of fern and flowering plants, and a high density of kingfishers (feeding off the 50 species of fish). Guided tours by foot or boat are available; for more information contact **Nationalpark Donau-Auen** (☎ 02212-355 55; www.donauauen.at, in German; Schlossplatz 1, Orth an der Donau; ☞ 9am-6pm mid-Mar-Sep, till 5pm Oct & 8am-1pm Mon-Fri Nov-mid-Mar).

From Vienna, the Nationalpark Donau-Auen is best explored either by bicycle (see p159 for details of bicycle hire in Vienna), or on summer Nationalpark-run 4½ hour tours leaving from the **Salztorbrücke** (☎ 01-4000 494-80; adult/child €10/4, booking necessary; ☞ departs 9am May-Oct).

WIENERWALD

The Wienerwald (Vienna Woods) encompasses gentle wooded hills to the west and southwest of Vienna, and the wine growing region directly south of the capital. For the Viennese, it's a place for walking and mountain biking, but it is often overlooked by tourists. Numerous walking and cycling trails in the area are covered in the *Wienerwald Wander und Radkarte*, available free from local tourist offices and the region's main office, **Wienerwald Tourismus** (☎ 02231-621 76; www.wienerwald.info; Hauptplatz 11, 3002 Purkersdorf; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri).

Attractive settlements, such as the grape-growing towns of **Pechtoldsdorf** and **Gumpoldskirchen**, speckle the Wienerwald. Picturesque **Mödling**, only 15km south of Vienna, was once favoured by the artistic

elite: Beethoven's itchy feet took him to Hauptstrasse 79 from 1818 to 1820, and Schönberg stayed at Bernhardgasse 6 from 1918 to 1925. More information is available from the **Tourismus-Information Mödling** (☎ 02236-267 27; tourismus@moedling.at; Elisabethstrasse 2; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri).

About 20km from Mödling is **Heiligenkreuz** and the 12th-century Cistercian abbey **Stift Heiligenkreuz** (☎ 02258-8703; www.stift-heiligenkreuz.at, in German; Heiligenkreuz 1; tours adult/student & child €6.40/3.20; ☞ tours 10am, 11am, 2pm, 3pm & 4pm Mon-Sat, 11am, 2pm, 3pm & 4pm Sun). The chapter house is the final resting place of most of the Babenberg dynasty, which ruled Austria until 1246. The abbey museum contains 150 clay models by Giovanni Giuliani (1663-1744), a Venetian sculptor who also created the Trinity column in the courtyard. Note that tours in English are by request only.

Mayerling, which lies 6km southwest of Heiligenkreuz, has little to show now, but the bloody event that occurred there (see the boxed text opposite) still draws people to the site. The **Carmelite convent** (☎ 02258-2275; Mayerling 1; admission €1.50; ☞ 9am-5pm) can be visited, but it's not really worth the effort; all you see is a chapel and a couple of rooms of mementos.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

To explore this region, it's best if you have your own transport. Trains skirt either side of the woods and the bus service is patchy. The Baden-Alland bus passes through Heiligenkreuz (€1.70, 35 minutes) and Mayerling (€3.40, 45 minutes) on an hourly basis Monday to Friday, but this drops to a trickle on weekends. From Mödling (reached on the Vienna Südbahnhof-Baden train route), there are frequent buses going to Hinterbrühl (€1.70, 11 minutes) which sometimes continue on to Alland via Heiligenkreuz (€3.40, 30 minutes).

The main road through the area is the A21 that loops down from Vienna, passes by Heiligenkreuz, then curves north to join the A1 just east of Altlenbach.

BADEN BEI WIEN

☎ 02252 / pop 25,200

With its sulphurous mineral springs (giving it an egg-like smell in parts) and its lush green parks, gardens and woods, this spa town on the eastern fringes of the Wienerwald is a picturesque anomaly. Baden has a long his-

MYSTERY AT MAYERLING

It's the stuff of lurid pulp fiction: the heir to the throne found dead in a hunting lodge with his teenage mistress. It became fact in Mayerling on 30 January 1889, yet for years the details of the case were shrouded in secrecy and denial. Even now a definitive picture has yet to be established – the 100th anniversary of the tragedy saw a flurry of books published on the subject, and Empress Zita claimed publicly that the heir had actually been murdered.

The heir was Archduke Rudolf, 30-year-old son of Emperor Franz Josef, husband of Stephanie of Coburg, and something of a libertine who was fond of drinking and womanising. Rudolf's marriage was little more than a public façade by the time he met the 17-year-old Baroness Maria Vetsera in the autumn of 1888. The attraction was immediate, but it wasn't until 13 January the following year that the affair was consummated, an event commemorated by an inscribed cigarette case, a gift from Maria to Rudolf.

On 28 January, Rudolf secretly took Maria with him on a shooting trip to his hunting lodge in Mayerling. His other guests arrived a day later; Maria's presence, however, remained unknown to them. On the night of 29 January, the valet, Loschek, heard the couple talking until the early hours, and at about 5.30am a fully dressed Rudolf appeared and instructed him to get a horse and carriage ready. As he was doing his master's bidding, he reportedly heard two gun shots; racing back, he discovered Rudolf lifeless on his bed, with a revolver by his side. Maria was on her bed, also fully clothed, also dead. Just two days earlier Rudolf had discussed a suicide pact with long-term mistress Mizzi Caspar. Apparently he hadn't been joking.

The official line was proffered by Empress Elisabeth, who claimed Rudolf died of heart failure. The newspapers swallowed the heart failure story, though a few speculated about a hunting accident. Then the rumours began: some believed Maria had poisoned her lover, that Rudolf had contracted an incurable venereal disease, or that he had been assassinated by Austrian secret police because of his liberal politics. Even as late as 1982, Empress Zita claimed the heir to the throne had been killed by French secret agents. Numerous books have been written on the subject, but no-one can say what exactly occurred on that ill-fated morning.

Through all the intrigue, the real victim remains Maria. How much of a willing party she was to the suicide will never be known. What has become clear is that Maria, after her death, represented not a tragically curtailed young life but an embarrassing scandal that had to be discreetly disposed of. Her body was left untouched for 38 hours, after which it was loaded into a carriage in such a manner as to imply that it was a living person being aided rather than a corpse beyond help. Her subsequent burial was a rude, secretive affair, during which she was consigned to the ground in an unmarked grave (her body was later moved to Heiligenkreuz). Today the hunting lodge is no more – a Carmelite nunnery stands in its place.

tory of receiving notable visitors; the Romans came here to wallow in the medicinal waters, Beethoven blew into town in the hope of a cure for his deafness, and in the early 19th century it flourished as the favourite summer retreat of the Habsburgs. Much of the town centre is in the 19th-century Biedermeier style, resulting from rebuilding after Turkish invasions and severe fires. Note that Baden goes into hibernation between October and March.

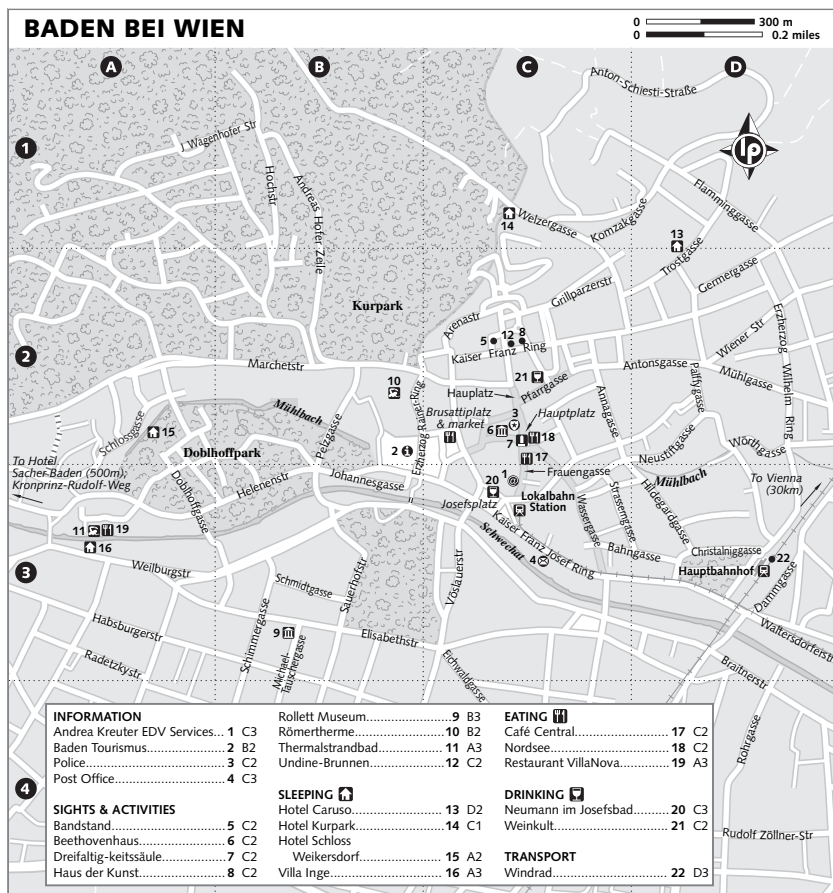
Orientation & Information

The town is centred on pedestrian-only Hauptplatz; the *Lokalbahn* (tram) station is just south of the Hauptplatz, while the *Hauptbahnhof* is 500m southeast. A couple of minutes' walk west of Hauptplatz is **Baden**

Tourismus (☎ 226 00-600; www.baden.at; Brusattplatz 3; ☞ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat May-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr); ask about the VIP Card (free if you stay two nights or more in any type of accommodation), which gives very useful benefits such as discounts on entry prices and free walking tours. In the centre, **Andrea Kreuter EDV Services** (☎ 444 22 22; Frauengasse 10; per hr €5; ☞ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) has internet access. The post office is squeezed between the Schwechat River and Kaiser Franz Josef Ring, 150m south of Hauptplatz.

Sights & Activities

Baden's prime attraction is its 14 **hot springs**, with a daily flow of 6.5 million litres. The waters emerge at a temperature of 36°C and are



enriched with sulphates. Its largest pool complex, the **Thermalstrandbad**, is actually dedicated to good old-fashioned fun (see opposite). The **Römertherme** (Roman baths; ☎ 450 30; www.roemertherme.at, in German; Brusattplatz 4; 2hr/all-day entry €8.90/13.10, 3hr family card €19.10-27.30; ☎ 10am-10pm) offers the same health benefits albeit without the fun.

The **Kurpark** is a magnificent setting for a stroll or as a place to repose on the benches in front of the **bandstand**, where free concerts are held from May to September. The tourist office can tell you about these and others held in winter in the **Haus der Kunst** (€3); an operetta festival takes place from June to September. Attractive flower beds complement monuments to famous artists (Mozart, Beethoven,

Strauss, Grillparzer etc). Near the southern entrance to the park, the **Undine-Brunnen** (fountain) is a fine amalgam of human and fish images.

Back in the town centre, one of the houses Beethoven stayed in has inevitably been turned into the **Beethovenhaus** (Rathausgasse 10; adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 4-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-noon & 2-4pm Sat & Sun) with little to actually see; nearby, though, is the **Dreifaltig-keitssäule**, dating from 1714, dominating the Hauptplatz.

The **Rollett Museum** (☎ 482 55; Weikersdorfer Platz 1; adult/child €2.50/1; ☎ 3-6pm Wed-Mon), southwest of the town centre, covers important aspects of the town's history. The most unusual exhibit is the collection of skulls, busts and death masks amassed by the founder of phrenology,

EGGS BENEDICT IN THE BATH

Because of the sulphur content in its healing waters, Baden bei Wien has a distinctive 'poached egg' smell in parts of town. All the more unusual, therefore, when an outdoor swimming pool used for recreation and fun has this ubiquitous 'eggy' scent. If you've got a finely tuned nose, the egg smell is very in your face at the **Thermalstrandbad** (☎ 486 70; Helenenstrasse 19-21; all day entry with locker or cabin €5.30-8.20, child/student €3.80/2.70; ☎ 8am-6.30pm May-mid-Sep). With its dubious brownish stretch of sand backed by a functionalist building from 1926, the pool complex is a sulphurous Hades-meets-Majorca. Originally, the designers wanted to import sand from the Adriatic (not exactly known for sandy beaches, but anyway); in the end they settled for sand from Melk in the Danube Valley.

Josef Gall (1752-1828), who sparked the craze of inferring criminal characteristics from the shape of one's cranium.

Though interesting, the museums won't knock you over if you have seen those in Vienna, so **cycling** or **hiking** the 12-km long Kronprinz-Rudolf-Weg along the Schwechat River to Mayerling (see p180) is a good summer alternative. The tourist office has a free trail description (in German) and bikes can be hired in town (see p184). The trail can be combined with a 6km northern trail leading to Heiligenkreuz (see p180) to make a loop.

Sleeping

It's possible to visit Baden on a day trip from Vienna, and in summer the hotels can get very full. The tourist office has a good accommodation brochure.

Villa Inge (☎ 431 71; Weilburgstrasse 24-26; s/d €36/58; 📍) This large villa is set alongside the river and close to the Thermalstrandbad. Although the furnishing is rather long in the tooth, it's spacious and run by a friendly family. It offers good value for Baden.

Hotel Kurpark (☎ 891 04; www.hotel-kurpark.at; Welzergasse 29; s €49-52, d 74-84, apt €96-130; 📍) This small hotel backing onto the *Kurpark* has a large garden, indoor and outdoor pools and bright, spacious, rooms.

Hotel Caruso (☎ 88 662-0; www.hotelcaruso.at, in German; Trostgasse 23; s €80-135, d €115-170, ste €166-210; 📍) One advantage of this four-star hotel is that it's large enough to cope with busy periods; facilities are excellent, rooms have modern furnishings, and it is situated in its own grounds. It caters for business people as well as tourists.

Hotel Schloss Weikersdorf (☎ 48 301-0; www.hotelschlossweikersdorf.at; Schlossgasse 9-11; s €135-155, d €170-190; 📍) For a weekend of pamper-

ing look no further. This hotel with modern rooms has massage services, relaxation coves and lounges and other wellness facilities; it's also set in beautiful gardens.

Eating & Drinking

Baden is no great shakes when it comes to eating and drinking; nor is it really a town where the nightlife has a wild call. A few practical or very decent places are to be found, however.

Nordsee (☎ 441-65; Hauptplatz 17; fish snacks €5, mains €10; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) This fast-seafood chain is very convenient. The standard of freshness and hygiene is high, and the fish rolls are tasty.

Restaurant VillaNova (☎ 209 74 5; Helenenstrasse 19; mains €17-25; ☎ 5.30-11pm Tue-Sat) Veal roulade with carrot, ginger and polenta was on the ticket when we visited. The menu is changing, but the standard is consistently high - food often features Austrian cuisine with Asian influences.

Café Central (☎ 48 454; Hauptplatz 19; coffee €2.40-3; ☎ 7am-9pm Tue-Sat, 8am-9pm Sun) Central takes pride of place on the Hauptplatz. It's a '60s-style café that's a bit on the dark side but dripping with character.

Weinkult (☎ 699 1280 65 46; Pfarrgasse 7; anti-pasto plate €9; ☎ 1-8pm Mon-Wed, till 10pm Thu & Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) This wine shop sells almost 150 Austrian wines and serves 10 (mostly) Austrian wines by the glass, rotating the selection on a weekly basis. Antipasto is served to prime the palate.

Neumann im Josefsbad (☎ 252 212; Josefsplatz 2; ☎ 8am-2am Mon-Sat, 10am-1am Sun) This all-rounder serves light dishes such as chicken wings but is better known as a café and the hub of nightlife in town, with a DJ spinning on Friday and Saturday.

Getting There & Around

Frequent regional and S-Bahn trains run to Baden from Vienna's Südbahnhof (€4.50, 20 to 30 minutes). The *Lokalbahn* tram (€4.50, one hour, every 15 minutes) and buses (€4.50, 40 minutes, hourly) from Karlsplatz in Vienna do the same. Frequent trains run to Wiener Neustadt (€6, 20 minutes).

The north-south road routes, Hwy 17 and the A2, pass a few kilometres to the east of the town.

Bikes can be rented from **Windrad** (☎ 0664-511 37 38; Bahnhof; hire half day/day €6/9; ☎ 8-11.45am & 1-6pm Mon-Fri). Bus 362 runs between the Thermalstrandbad and Bahnhof (€1.50) via the centre.

SÜD-ALPIN

This southern corner of Lower Austria, known as the Süd-Alpin (Southern Alps), has some of the province's most spectacular landscapes. Here the hills rise to meet the Alps, peaking at Schneeberg (2076m), a mountain popular with the Viennese for its skiing and hiking possibilities. Nearby Semmering has long been a favourite of the capital's burghers, due mainly to its crisp alpine air. One of the greatest highlights of the area though is the journey there; the winding railway over the Semmering Pass has been designated a Unesco World Heritage site.

WIENER NEUSTADT

☎ 02622 / pop 39,650

Wiener Neustadt used to be known simply as Neustadt (New City) or Nova Civitas and was built by the Babenbergs in 1194 with the help of King Richard the Lionheart's ransom payment (see p171). It became a Habsburg residence in the 15th century during the reign of Friedrich III. His famous AEIOU (*Alles Erdreich Ist Österreich Untertan*; Austria rules the world) engraving can be found throughout the city. The town was severely damaged in WWII (only 18 homes were left unscathed), so the historic buildings of Wiener Neustadt needed careful reconstruction.

Orientation & Information

Wiener Neustadt is centred on the large Hauptplatz, where you'll find the **tourist office** (☎ 373-311; Hauptplatz 3; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon

Sat) which provides the free booklet, *Cultural Promenade*, describing the central sights and giving their locations on a map. Parts of the centre are pedestrian-only.

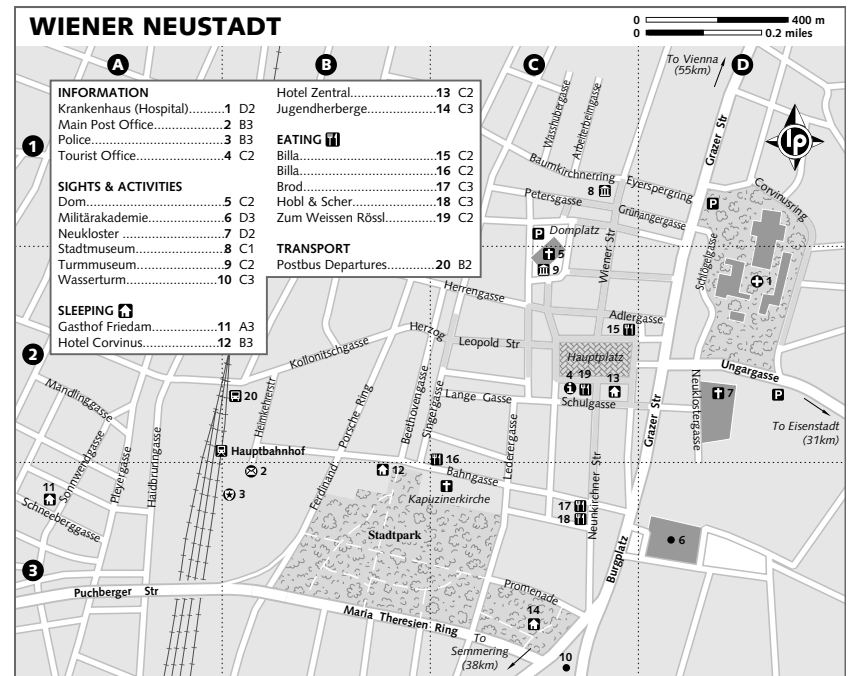
The **Hauptbahnhof** is about 750m south-west of the Hauptplatz; regional buses also stop here. It has bike rental, a travel agency and an ATM. The main post office is next door.

Sights

While the **Hauptplatz** is too big to be truly charming, it is lined with elegant buildings, not least of which are the three parts of the **Rathaus** (first built in 1401), featuring an arcade and colourful crests. East of Hauptplatz is **Neukloster** (☎ 231-02; Ungargasse; admission free; ☎ dawn-dusk), a 14th-century Gothic church with striking baroque fittings and a dark-wood pulpit. A finely carved tomb of Empress Eleonore, wife of Friedrich III, is behind the high altar.

To the north of Hauptplatz is the Romanesque **Dom** (☎ 373-440; Domplatz; admission free; ☎ dawn-dusk), erected in 1279 but subsequently rebuilt. It has a rather bare and grey exterior, two severe-looking square towers, and the interior has an unbalanced look, caused by the chancel being out of line with the nave as well as an asymmetric arch connecting the two. Fifteenth-century wooden apostles peer down from pillars and there's a baroque high altar and pulpit. At the Dom's southwest corner is the **Turmmuseum** (☎ 373-441; admission €2; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue & Wed, 10am-8pm Thu, 10am-noon Fri, 10am-4pm Sun May-Oct), a free-standing tower that provides grand views over the city's rooftops. The key for the Turmmuseum is available from the **Stadtmuseum** (☎ 373-950; Petergasse 2a; adult/student & child €3/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue & Wed, 10am-8pm Thu, 10am-noon Fri, 10am-4pm Sun), housed in the former St Peter's monastery. Its displays include artefacts from the Dom and photos of the devastation Allied bombing wrought on the town.

Heading south from the Hauptplatz, the imposing **Militärakademie** (Military Academy; ☎ 381-0; Burgplatz 1; admission free) soon comes into view. The four towers and walls of this former castle date from the 13th century, though it was completely rebuilt after WWII bombing. Since the mid-18th century it has housed a military academy (founded by Empress Maria Theresia) which at one time was commanded by the young Rommel



from his pre-'desert fox' days. Visits are by appointment only, or register at the gate. Within the complex is **St-Georgs-Kathedrale** (admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm), with a fine late-Gothic interior. Maximilian I, who was born in the castle, is buried under the altar. On the outside wall is the **Wappenwand** (Heraldic Wall) comprising 15th-century carvings of 107 coats of arms. This wall was all that survived the bombing during WWII (the stained glass had already been previously removed to the Altaussee salt mines in the Salzkammergut). The statue below the window is Friedrich III, whose AEIOU motto also appears on the wall.

Further south, rising between the convergence of two busy roads, is the town's **Wasserturm** (water tower) from 1910. Its shape intentionally apes the gilded goblet donated to the townsfolk by King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary after he took the town in 1487.

Sleeping

Jugendherberge (☎ 296 95; oejhv-noe@oejhv.or.at; Promenade 1; dm/s/d €12.50/16/32; P) This HI

hostel is situated in the Stadtpark, near the **Wasserturm**. Phone ahead as reception is not always open and it's often full.

Hotel Zentral (☎ 23 169; www.hotel-zentral.tos.at; Hauptplatz 27; s €40-43, d €73.50, tr €98, 4-bed €110; P) Situated right in the heart of town, all 45 rooms of Zentral are renovated, comfortable and decked out with modern furnishings. Some front the Hauptplatz.

Hotel Corvinus (☎ 24 134; www.hotel-corvinus.at; Bahngasse 29-33; s/d/tr €75/118/147; P) Catering to business and seminar guests as well as tourists, the Corvinus has bright rooms sweetened with extras such as a wellness area, a bar and a leafy terrace. The cube-like exterior may not appeal to all, but this four-star hotel is very comfortable inside.

Eating

Zum Weissen Rössl (☎ 233 04; Hauptplatz 3; mains €7-11; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7am-5pm Sat) This *Gasthaus* may look a little dusty from the outside, but it's cosy and welcoming and serves solid Austrian food, including a choice of a small or large goulash. It has outdoor seating on the Hauptplatz.

Hobl & Scher (☎ 269 69; Neunkirchner Strasse 34; mains €7-18; 🍴 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat, Vinothek 5pm-midnight Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm & 6pm-midnight Sat) At street level Hobl & Scher is a restaurant, but downstairs it's a vaulted cellar Vinothek where you can enjoy a drink after, say, a hearty steak with potato wedges or one of the vegetarian pasta options. The wine selection is quite good, with New World as well as Austrian and other European wines.

Brod (☎ 281 07; Bahngasse 1; 3-6 course menus €33-49; à la carte €10-20; 🍴 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Situated in a lovely baroque house, this quality restaurant has the attraction of courtyard seating for warm summer nights. Austrian wines, especially those from Burgenland, feature prominently on its long wine list. Upmarket renditions of Austrian classics such as *Tafelspitz* or *Kalbskopf* (calf's head) share a place with delicious new cuisine.

Billa supermarkets can be found on Bahngasse and Hauptplatz, which also has no less than three *Würstel* (sausage) stands and one stand selling kebabs.

Getting There & Away

Half-hourly trains connect Wiener Neustadt with Vienna (€9.30, 45 minutes) and the Hungarian town of Sopron (€4.50, 25 to 45 minutes) daily. Postbus services depart from the northern end of Wiener Neustadt train station.

SEMMERING

☎ 02664 / pop 750

With its clean air and grandiose peaks rising out of deeply folded valleys, Semmering is a popular alpine resort for the Viennese, especially among a slightly older crowd who come to this spa town in summer for peaceful walks or to ride the railway; a younger set hits the ski pistes.

Orientation & Information

Semmering sits on a south-facing slope above the Semmering Pass. There's no real centre to the resort: it's mostly ranged along Hochstrasse, which forms an arc behind the train station.

Railway enthusiasts at the train station run an **Infostelle Bahnhof** (☎ 845 20; www.semmeringbahn.at, in German; 🕒 9-11.30am & 1.30-4.30pm May-Oct), with material on the Semmeringbahn as well as a good stock of the town's brochures. The *Semmering* booklet has useful addresses and

a handy sketch map of town. **Tourismusbüro Semmering** (☎ 200 25; www.semmering.at, in German; Passhöhe 248; 🕒 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) is situated close to a bank.

Sights & Activities

Towering over Semmering to the south is the **Hirschenkogel** (1340m), where a modern cable car whisks walkers (one way €9, return €12.50) or skiers (day pass €28.50) to the top. Regional skiing day passes are also available for €31.

The tourist office and Infostelle have maps and brochures on walks. Two fairly easy trails follow the scenic route of the Semmeringbahn, starting behind the train station. One follows the line for 17km to Mürzzuschlag in Styria, where frequent trains chug you back to Semmering, and a second leads to Breitenstein and Klamm (Lower Austria), 9.5km and 15km respectively from the start. At Klamm the trail divides up and one route leads to Payerbach (21km from the start) and another to Gloggnitz (23km from the start).

The tourist office can provide information on ski schools or golf (on a horrendously steep course). The four-star **Hotel Panhans** (☎ 818 10; Hochstrasse 32) has a swimming pool and fitness centre that can be used by nonguests (day cards €9 weekdays, €14 weekends).

Sleeping & Eating

Most sleeping options are situated on Hochstrasse. Many have their own restaurants, which means there's only a short hobble between table and bed.

Gasthof Edelweiss (☎ 2284; edel-weiss@aon.at; Hochstrasse 57; s/d €32/64; 🍴) This quaint wooden chalet is set back from the road in a grove of trees; it has a children's playground, a lovely secluded garden, and also rents bikes and organises skiing as well as airport shuttle services.

Pension-Restaurant Löffler (☎ 23 04; Hochstrasse 174; s/d €39/72; 🍴) Löffler is a fresh, colourful and modern pension with a restaurant (mains €8 to €18) serving classic meat and fish dishes, including baby lamb, pepper steaks and trout.

Hotel-Restaurant Belvedere (☎ 22 70; hotel.belvedere@telecom.at; Hochstrasse 60; s €40, d €80-96; 🍴 🚿) The family-run Belvedere has alpine décor, rooms with balconies, and features such as a swimming pool, sauna and large garden and

SEMMERING PASS BY TRAIN

For its time, it was an incredible feat of engineering, something which took more than 20,000 workers years to complete. Even today, it never fails to impress with its switchbacks, 15 tunnels and 16 viaducts. This is the **Semmering railway** (www.semmeringbahn.at, in German), a 42km stretch of track that begins at Gloggnitz and rises 455m to its highest point of 896m at Semmering Bahnhof.

Completed in 1854 by Karl Ritter von Ghega, the Semmering line was Europe's first alpine railway, and due to its engineering genius, gained Unesco World Heritage status in 1998. It passes through some impressive scenery of precipitous cliffs and forested hills en route; the most scenic section is the 30-minute stretch between Semmering and Payerbach (€6). If you're leaving from Vienna, there are four direct IC/EC services daily to Semmering (€19, 1¼ hours), a few regional direct services, and others trains with a change at Wiener Neustadt.

patio area. The restaurant has a regional and seasonal focus (mains €6 to €18).

Panorama Hotel Wagner (☎ 25 12-0; www.panoramahotel-wagner.at, in German; Hochstrasse 267; s €106-215, d €158-300; 🍴 🚿) Body and mind are catered for here: rooms have wood furniture, natural cotton bedding and grand views of the valley. Yoga, meditation and Qi Gong courses are offered and there are sauna, spa and massage facilities. Its highly rated restaurant (mains €8 to €16) uses organic products.

There is a **Billa** supermarket between Hotel Belvedere and the main highway.

Getting There & Away

At least once-daily direct EC/IC trains between Graz (€18, 1½ hours) and Vienna Südbahnhof (€19, 1½ hours) stop at Semmering. For trains from Vienna, see the boxed text (above).

If you're under your own steam, consider taking the small back road northwest of Semmering to Höllental via Breitenstein; the road winds its way down the mountain, passing under the railway line a number of times and taking in the spectacular scenery you see on the train trip.

SCHNEEBERG, RAXALPE & HÖLLENTAL

To the north of Semmering are two of Lower Austria's highest points, Schneeberg (2076m) and the Raxalpe (2007m). The area is easily reached by train from Vienna, making it popular for hiking (see p107).

The trailhead for hiking or taking the cog-wheel railway is Puchberg am Schneeberg, where the **tourist office** (☎ 02636-2256; www.puchberg.at; Sticklergasse 3; 🕒 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Thu, 9am-noon Fri Oct-late May, 9am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Thu, 9am-noon & 3-5pm Fri, 9.30-11.30am Sat late May-Sep) can tell you about hiking conditions on Schneeberg. The

Schneebergbahn (☎ 02636-3661-20; www.schneebergbahn.at, in German; Salamander one way/return €21/29.60, steam train €27/36.60; 🕒 late Apr-Oct) Leaves from Puchberg am Schneeberg and takes about an hour on the Salamander and around 1¼ hours on the steam train; check the website for the train timetable.

A hotel and several huts are situated on the mountain if you want to stay overnight here (see p107), whereas in Puchberg itself **Gasthof Pension Schmirl** (☎ 2636-2277; www.schmirl.at; Muthenhofer Strasse 8; s €30, d €60-68; 🍴) has comfortable rooms on the edge of town near the railway. Some have balconies, in others you can psyche yourself for the stiff climb ahead with window views of Schneeberg.

On the southern side of Schneeberg is the scenic **Höllental** (Hell's Valley), a deep, narrow gorge created by the Schwarza River. Rising to the south of Höllental is the **Raxalpe**, another place for walkers; from Hirschwang, a small village in Höllental, the **Raxseilbahn** (☎ 02666-52497; www.raxseilbahn.at, in German; return adult/child €17.60/15.70; 🕒 year-round) cable car ascends to 1547m and hiking trails. The Raxseilbahn is the site of Austria's first cable car, built in 1926.

In Höllental, the **Hotel Marienhof** (☎ 02666-52995; www.marienhof.at, in German; Hauptstrasse 71-73, Reichenau; s/d from €76/104; 🍴 🚿), a grand old dame with a restaurant (mains €11 to €14), is not far from the Raxseilbahn.

Getting There & Away

There are hourly direct trains daily from Vienna to Puchberg am Schneeberg (€13.50, 1½ hours), going via Wiener Neustadt (€6, 45 minutes). Hirschwang (€7.60, 50 minutes) is only a little harder to get to; a train must first be taken to Payerbach, from where regular buses run up the Höllental valley.

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