



Lower Austria

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Stay

- » Restaurant & Hotel Schloss Grafenegg (p115)
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- » Panorama Hotel Wagner (p136)

Why Go?

Surrounding Vienna on all sides, Lower Austria is a cradle of Austrian culture. The region offers visitors one of the country's most lively cultural landscapes, a strong range of outdoor activities and at Carnuntum a glimpse into the age of the Romans.

The world-renowned Danube River (Donau) and its valley is a place of magnificent natural beauty and cultural achievement. The Wachau, which stretches between Melk and Krems an der Donau, is the prettiest section and truly a European highlight for its wines, castles, abbeys and medieval villages.

The north is an often neglected region of rich pastures, forested glens and pretty vineyards set upon gentle, rolling hills, lending itself to day trips from Vienna and touring. The region directly surrounding Vienna in the west and south forms the Wienerwald (Vienna Woods), and further southwest the mountains are ideal for hikes or riding the world-famous Semmeringbahn (Semmering Railway).

When to Go

The best time to visit Lower Austria is during the April to October warm season, when the Wachau is often bathed in a soft light and you can make the most of the Danube River and its sights and activities. The shoulder season periods (April to May and September to October) are quieter. Autumn is the best time to enjoy wine in the Wachau, and from 11 November (St Martin's Day) each year semifermented young wine is sold in open-topped bottles. Between November and April many sights are closed, but winter sport in the mountains around Semmering comes into its own.

Wine Experiences

The predominantly white wines of the Wachau complement perfectly the region's magnificent landscapes and excellent local foods. One way to enjoy the fruits of the vineyards is to visit a *Heuriger* (vineyard wine tavern). The *Heurigen* open on a rotating basis, and tourist offices (and many hotels) stock a local calendar listing the opening dates for each one. A highlight of the wine calendar is 11 November (St Martin's Day), when the new wine, known as *Sturm*, is traditionally released and drunk semifermented.

The **Weinstrasse Kamptal** (Kamptal Wine Rd), running north from Krems through the Kamp Valley, is more low key than the Wachau and has lots of vineyards. In Krems the **Weingut der Stadt Krems** (p112) also has tastings; in Langenlois at the **Loisium Weinwelt** (p123) you can walk through ancient cellars or take wine treatments; and **Schloss Grafenegg** (p115) has wine tastings at its Vinothegg wine bar. For restaurants, try inexpensive **Jell** (p113) in Krems or the more upmarket **Mörwald Kloster Und** (p113) and **Restaurant zur Traube** (p115).

DON'T MISS

The **Wachau**, the section of the Danube Valley between Krems an der Donau and Melk, is one of the world's great cultural landscapes. A ride or drive along the valley will take you past castle ruins, baroque churches and some stunning scenery.

Stift Melk, at the western end of the Wachau, is easily the most spectacular and celebrated of the abbeys in this Unesco Cultural Heritage region. It dates back to the 11th century and was later reshaped into a baroque masterpiece, with frescoes by Paul Troger and Johann Michael Rottmayr. A nice way to get there is by bicycle or on one of the regular ferries from Krems.

Hikes & Rides

- » **Wachau** Cycling a stretch of the Wachau between Krems and Melk or taking a Danube boat trip is a great way to soak up the scenery.
- » **Schneeberg** Lower Austria's highest mountain can be hiked or enjoyed on a ride on the cogwheel railway.
- » **Petronell-Carnuntum to Hainburg** Cycling from Petronell-Carnuntum to Hainburg is the best way to take in the Romans.
- » **Schlossbergweg** After visiting the ruins of Kuenringerburg, hike the Schlossbergweg to Fesselhütte.
- » **Semmeringbahn** The railway can be enjoyed not only from the inside – walking trails abound in the region.

MEDIEVAL & LOW KEY

Drosendorf (p122), a far-flung village with Austria's only intact medieval town wall, and the Nationalpark Thayatal (p123), are two low-key places where you can escape the summer crowds, right on the Czech border.

Best Concert Location

The best place to enjoy a concert in Lower Austria is in the parks and gardens of **Schloss Grafenegg** (www.grafenegg.at; p115). A 15-metre Cloud Tower open-air stage is situated in the grounds, with seating for over 1700 spectators.

Transport Planning

Use the **ÖBB** (www.oebb.at) and **Postbus** (www.postbus.at) websites to plan your travel. Bus services often reduce to a trickle or dry up altogether on a Sunday, so plan travelling to more remote places during the week.

Resources

- » Das Land Niederösterreich (www.noel.gv.at) Facts and figures.
- » Lower Austria (www.lower-austria.info) Food, culture and outdoor themes.
- » Schneebergbahn (www.schneebergbahn.at) Cogwheel railway.