



Styria

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel Daniel (p179)
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- » Jugend- und Familiengästehaus Schloss Röthelstein (p196)

Why Go?

Austria's second-largest province is a perfect combination of culture, architecture, rolling hills, vine-covered slopes and, of course, mountains. Its capital, Graz, Austria's second-largest city, is attractive and has one of the highest standards of living in Europe. Head south from Graz and you're in wine country, dubbed the 'Styrian Tuscany'. This is also the land of *Kürbiskernöl* – the strong, dark pumpkin-seed oil ubiquitous in Styrian cooking.

The eastern stretch of Styria is dotted with rejuvenating thermal spas and centuries-old castles. If you're a fan of the former, Bad Blumau is a mandatory stop, not only to take the waters but also to appreciate its unusual architecture, designed by Friedensreich Hundertwasser. If you prefer castles, Schloss Riegersburg is one of Austria's best.

In the north and west, Styria's landscape changes to cold, fast-flowing alpine rivers, towering mountains and carved valleys. Two highlights are Admont Abbey and Erzberg's open-cast mine. Note that the northwestern reaches of Styria stretch into Salzkammergut.

When to Go

Unless you are here for the skiing, the best time to visit is during the main season from April to October. From November many of the sights and cultural events – such as Graz's best sight, Schloss Eggenberg – close or end for the season. Skiers usually hit Schladming from mid-December (or year round on the Dachstein Glacier), whereas the wine roads of southern Styria peak in September, when there are festivals, in October when the vineyards turn golden brown, and around St Martin's Day (11 November), when the young wine is released.

Planning your Itinerary

Styria mirrors Austria itself: broad in an east-west direction. Based in Graz, you can easily visit the wine regions of southern Styria on a day trip with your own wheels if time is at a premium. In northern Styria, Bruck an der Mur and Leoben can be combined into a long day, but if you want to visit Mariazell or Eisenerz, an overnight stop is unavoidable without a car. Murau (in the Mur River valley) is too far from Graz for a day trip and is a nice spot to spend a night. Admont in the Enns Valley combines well with Eisenerz, either with your own wheels or by bus. Once you are in the Enns Valley, trains, buses and roads connect Schladming and Admont. Exiting Styria to the Salzkammergut lakes region can easily be done by backtracking a short way from Schladming to the Steinach-Irdning rail junction.

DON'T MISS

High-profile **Graz** (p175), the capital of Styria, has Renaissance palace Schloss Eggenberg, replete with museums and lush gardens. The festivals of Graz fill the city's courtyards with music, and the Graz populace can stake a convincing claim to being the friendliest and most charming in Austria.

Low-key **Admont** (p195) attracts bus loads of visitors for its abbey, but beyond the car park Admont's attractions become sublime: the mountains of the Gesäuse region, gurgling rivers and streams, outdoor life and a relaxed feel.

The Great Outdoors

» **Cycling** is one of the best ways to enjoy the Styrian outdoors. Some of the best cycling on minor sealed roads is in southern Styria in the wine-growing region, especially southeast of Leutschach near the Slovenian border.

» **Skiing** is best in the Schladming region in the west of Styria; the Dachstein Glacier has year-round skiing.

» **Hiking** is a national pastime among Austrians, and the Styrians are no exception. The Gesäuse region, Schladming and the wine country in the south are places with good access to trails. Mariazell, Leoben, Bruck an der Mur and Eisenerz are others.

» **Mountain biking** has its mecca in Schladming, where some demanding trails wind through the mountains and there is no shortage of hire facilities.

» **Cable-car rides** are bountiful in Schladming, with the most spectacular of all gondolas leading up to the Dachstein mountains.

FAMOUS STYRIANS

Strongman, actor and governor of California
Arnold Schwarzenegger, tennis champion
Thomas Muster, and European and Hollywood actor Klaus Maria Brandauer all hail from Styria.

Where to Splurge

» **Graz** Splurge on a hotel, eat well and check out a wine bar and the small but rich cultural scene.

» **South Styrian wine roads** Stop at vineyards, taste the wines, eat and hike.

Getting Around Styria

Despite its remote valleys, Styria can be easily travelled by train and by bus. Plan ahead using the website www.mobilzentral.at (in German). Car-hire rates and choice are best in Graz.

Resources

» Overview of Steiermark (www.steiermark.com)

» Skiing and outdoors (www.bergfex.at/steiermark, in German)

» South Styrian wine roads (www.suedsteirischeweinstrasse.at, in German)