



# Austria

A popular holiday destination for tourists from Europe and further afield, one of Austria's most popular attractions is the Alps, a mountain range that covers much of Switzerland, Liechtenstein and southern Austria. The distinctive landscape generated by this range has created thriving skiing and hiking industries that attract thousands of tourists to Austria each year.

The best skiing is reputedly found in the Arlberg region, in the Tirol, and the city of St Anton am Arlsberg is one of the most popular ski destinations in the world. The area is hailed as the birthplace of the skiing tradition and helped raise the profile of slalom ski racing with the International Skiing Federation when the first Arlsberg Kandahar ski race was held in 1928.

However, skiing and winter sports are only some of Austria's many attractions. Evidence of the country's imperial past, when it played a significant role in the Hapsburg Empire, can be seen in the cities' architecture and cultural heritage. The capital city of Vienna was once the primary residence of the Hapsburg dynasty and the Imperial burial vault, which holds 145 members of the imperial family, is situated beneath the Church of the Capuchins in the heart of the capital.

Vienna is also home to the Viennese Spanish riding school, which is the only riding institute to practise and maintain the Renaissance tradition of classic horse riding. At the school, Lipizzaners – a particular breed of horse descended from Spanish stock and the result of hundreds of years of selective breeding – and their elaborately uniformed riders are taught a particular style of riding that consists of classic dressage and 'haute école' where the horses are ridden in an upright stance.

Austria's second largest city, Graz, is also proud of its cultural roots. The city was designated the Cultural Capital of Europe for 2003 and numerous concerts and events have been scheduled throughout the year to mark the occasion, incorporating jazz, classical music, opera and theatre. A regular annual music event is the Styriarte Festival, which is held in Graz every year during the

month of June, in many of the various historical buildings around the city.

One of Graz's more unusual features is a 473-metre green hill – the Schlossberg – that towers over the centre of the city. The hill was once home to a fortress but now houses the city's symbol, a clock tower that dates from 1712 and still contains its original works. The tower is traditionally the place in Graz where couples have their first kiss.

Styria, of which Graz is the capital, is one of Austria's important wine growing regions, along with Lower Austria and Burgenland. Austria has a number of indigenous grape varieties that are not grown anywhere else, meaning that the country produces a range of unique wines. In Lower Austria, the wine growing region is concentrated near the flat plains of the River Danube that crosses through Austria from Germany to Slovakia. A popular trip for cyclists is to follow the river along its 340-kilometre route from Passau on the Germany/Austria border to Vienna, which takes in many tourist attractions along the way, including the castles of Artstetten and Klam.

Travelling through Austria by bike is a good way to see the country and its sights first-hand, although routes are rather restricted to the flat areas of the country in the north. Car tours, however, offer a very different view of Austria with a number of established routes taking in some of the country's more breathtaking sights.

The Glossglockner High-Alpine pass in Salzburg incorporates the Hohe Tauern National Park, includes 39 hairpin bends and provides stunning views of Austria's highest mountain – the Glossglockner. The highway, which opens from early May to November, follows a traditional route over the Alps previously used by the Celts, Romans and pack animals.

The city of Salzburg itself offers visitors the chance to take part in one of the country's more traditional activities and visit a coffee shop. The city is home to one of the oldest coffee shops in Austria, the Tomaselli, which was once frequented by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart himself, as well as other famous musicians. As well as serving coffee, many cafés provide traditional Austrian pastisseries such as Sacher Torte and the Salzburg Mozartkugel, made from marzipan and chocolate.



*"The ego is not master in its own house."*

Sigmund Freud, Austrian Psychiatrist (1856-1939)