

Burgenland



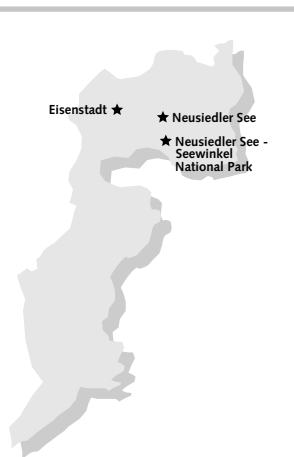
Often given a wide berth by tourists, Burgenland is all but the typical Austria you hear of or read about. It has neither bombastic architecture nor deep lakes and soaring mountains. On the contrary, it is small and sleepy, and in large sections a flat province situated on the border with Hungary. Even the jewel in its crown – Neusiedler See – has dried up and disappeared several times in its natural history – most recently in the mid-19th century.

This is the kind of place where everyday life takes precedence, but it is precisely this ‘everyday’ aspect that makes it interesting. The province receives a reputed 300 days of sunshine a year; couple this with a rich soil base and a wine history dating back to pre-Roman times, and you have Austria’s best wine-producing region. What better way to spend an afternoon than sampling local *Weine* (wines) in a *Heuriger* (wine tavern) under a warm sun? Throw in the shallow Neusiedler See and a section of it that is now the Neusiedler See-Seewinkel National Park, tack on a bike path that leads into the park and through Hungary before re-emerging in Austria, and add a swampy, medieval town such as Rust, and you might find yourself fascinated by Burgenland’s charms.

Stork-spotters will be in their element here in summer, when feathered friends populate the roofs of several towns near the lake – including Rust, one of the nicest places to observe them. Although it does have a handful of interesting cultural sights, such as Schloss Esterházy in Eisenstadt, the province’s small capital, Burgenland is more a place where people are content to enjoy good wine and food, and relax in the great outdoors.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sipping golden wines and supping in one of Burgenland’s pretty **Heurigen** (p194), dotted across Burgenland
- Swimming, splashing or sailing in the **Neusiedler See** (p193), Austria’s slurping steppe lake
- Cycling at a leisurely pace through the **Neusiedler See-Seewinkel National Park** (p197), a haven for birdlife
- Staring into the face of the mummified Roman legionnaire Constantine on a grand tour of **Schloss Esterházy** (p191) in the capital, Eisenstadt
- Revelling in views from Eisenstadt’s **Bergkirche** (p191) after completing the Stations of the Cross



■ POPULATION: 279,300 ■ AREA: 3966 SQ KM ■ HIGHEST ELEVATION: GESCHRIEBENSTEIN 884M



History

Burgenland is the youngest of Austria’s provinces, arising after the collapse of the Austrian empire at the end of WWI. It’s so named for the ‘burg’ suffix of the four western Hungarian district names at that time – Pressburg (Bratislava), Wieselburg (Moson), Ödenburg (Sopron) and Eisenburg (Vasvár).

The region was first settled some 7000 to 12,000 years ago, and over the ensuing millennia many peoples tried their hand at settling permanently, including the Illyrians, Celts and Romans. However, the arrival of the Hungarians in the 10th century changed the face of Burgenland forever. The region soon became a buffer zone between the Hungarians and the Austrian-Germans,

who traded uneasy peace with outright war throughout the centuries.

The arrival of marauding Turks in the 16th century quashed both the Hungarians and the Austrian-Germans, and devastated the local population. Landlords, without anyone to tend their farms, invited substantial numbers of Croats to settle. Their presence is still felt today – around 10% of the population is Croatian, Croatian is a recognized local language and a few small towns in middle Burgenland bear Croat signs.

With the defeat of the Turks at the gates of Vienna in 1683 (p37), relative peace settled over the area. With the demise of the Habsburg empire after WWI Austria lost control of Hungary, but managed to retain the German-speaking western region of Hungary under the Treaty of St Germain. The new province of Burgenland was born, but Hungary was loath to lose Ödenburg (Sopron) to Austria, and a plebiscite held in December 1921 (under controversial circumstances) resulted in the people of Ödenburg opting to stay in Hungary. Burgenland lost its natural capital, and Eisenstadt became the new *Hauptstadt* (capital).

Climate

The Pannonian microclimate of hot summers and mild winters is perfect for wine production. The Neusiedler See, to the north of the province, consistently records some of the highest summer temperatures in Austria, but the large expanse of water ensures high humidity.

Language

With its close proximity to Hungary, it’s no surprise that some Burgenlanders speak German with a slight Hungarian accent. Burgenland is the only province to include Croatian and Hungarian alongside German as official languages.

Getting There & Away

Eisenstadt and the northern extension of Neusiedler See are easily reached by train from Vienna and Lower Austria. Lower and middle Burgenland are less accessible by train; here the bus is often your best option. The A2 autobahn, heading south from Vienna towards Graz and Carinthia, runs parallel to the western border of Burgenland.

Its many off-ramps provide quick, easy access to much of the province.

Getting Around

Like the rest of Austria, destinations not connected to the country's train network are covered by bus. From late April to October, ferries ply the Neusiedler See, linking Podersdorf with Rust and Breitenbrunn, and Illmitz with Mörbisch (p193).

Burgenland is a cyclist's dream – much of the landscape is flat or has gentle rolling hills – and is crisscrossed with well-marked cycle paths. Local tourist offices can supply cycle maps, or simply log on to www.bikeburgenland.at, in German.

EISENSTADT

☎ 02682 / pop 12,000

The small capital of Burgenland is perhaps best known for its most famous former resident, 18th-century musician and composer Josef Haydn. Although it doesn't have a large number of attractions for visitors, it does have a wonderful palace, a couple of good museums and a rather bizarre church. Its nightlife hums

rather than buzzes, but taking in its sights can easily be done on a day trip from Vienna or as an excursion from pretty, lakeside Rust.

History

Eisenstadt was first mentioned in 1264 (although archaeological digs have confirmed settlement since the Stone Age). At the time, the town was under control of the Hungarians, but it wasn't until 1371 that it gained its charter from the ruling nobility. In the ensuing centuries the Hungarians and the Habsburgs fought for control of Eisenstadt, but it was the Turks who decided the town's fate, by neutralising the Hungarian threat at the 1526 Battle of Mohács. In 1622 Eisenstadt became the residence of the Esterházy, a powerful Hungarian family, and in 1648 the town was granted the status of *Freistadt* (free city) by Ferdinand III. In 1925 it became the capital of Austria's newest province.

Orientation

Eisenstadt's pretty *Altstadt* (old town), centred on the pedestrian-only Hauptstrasse and Schloss Esterházy, is surrounded by a mod-

ern, uninteresting urban sprawl. It's about a 10-minute walk north along Bahnstrasse from the train station. The main bus station is on Domplatz, one block south of the Hauptstrasse. The tourist office's brochure map is useful for getting around town.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Ricky's Cafe (☎ 65 88 1; Pfarrgasse 18; ☎ 9.30am-2pm)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital & Pharmacy (☎ 601; Esterházystrasse 26)

MONEY

There are a number of banks with ATMs on the Hauptstrasse and along its side streets.

POST

Main Post Office (☎ 62 27 10; Ignaz-P-Semmelweis-Gasse 7)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Burgenland Tourismus (☎ 0633 84-0; www.burgenland.info; Schloss Esterházy, Eisenstadt; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Eisenstadt Tourismus (☎ 673 90; www.eisenstadt.at; in German; Hauptstrasse 37; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 8am-4pm Mon-Thu, 8am-1pm Fri Nov-Mar) Situated in the Rathaus, provides a useful brochure listing hotels, private rooms, restaurants, festivals and details of museums.

Sights & Activities

Eisenstadt's most significant attraction is **Schloss Esterházy** (☎ 719 3000; www.schloss-esterhazy.at; adult/student & child/family €6/5/14, grand tours €7.50/7/16, combined ticket palace & Haydn-Haus €8/7/19; ☎ tours 10am & 2pm Tue-Fri Jan-Mar & mid-Nov-Dec, noon, 2pm & 4pm Mon-Fri, hourly 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Apr & Oct-mid-Nov, hourly 10am-5pm May-Jun & Sep, hourly 10am-6pm Jul-Aug), a giant, Schönbrunn-yellow castle-cum-palace that dominates Esterházyplatz. Dating from the 14th century, the *Schloss* (castle) received a makeover in baroque, and later in neoclassical, style. Many of the 256 rooms are occupied by the provincial government, but 25 can be viewed on tours.

The regular tour covers 13 rooms and is very interesting in itself, but you need to take the grand tour to view the true highlights, culminating in the spectacularly frescoed **Haydn Hall**. The hall's original marble floor has been replaced by an aesthetically inferior but acoustically superior wooden floor (it's

rated the second-best concert hall in Austria, after Vienna's Musikverein). During Haydn's employment by the Esterházy from 1761 to 1790, he conducted an orchestra on a near-nightly basis in this hall.

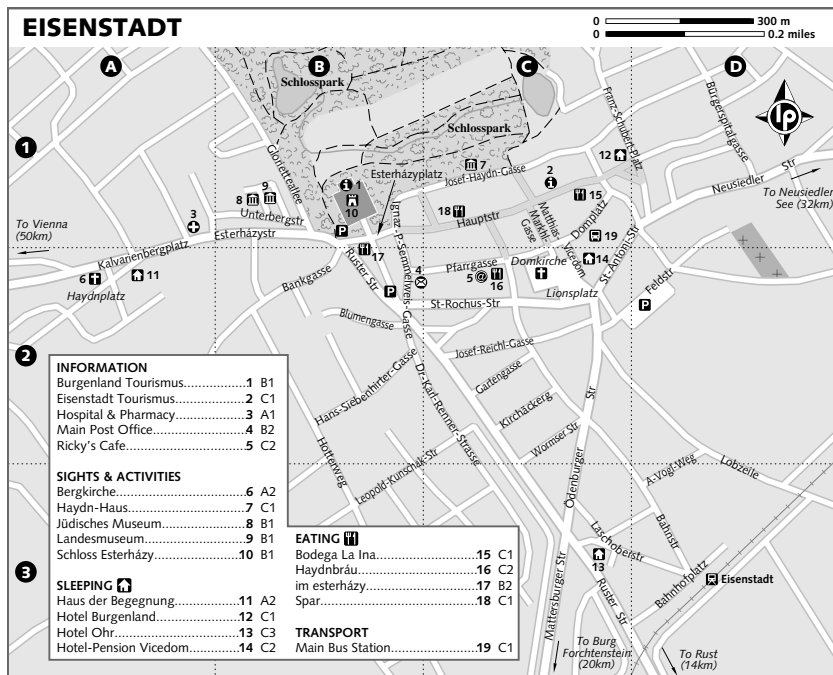
After that you view the **palace chapel**, completed in 1740 and now containing the remains of Constantine 'Conny' the Martyr, a mummified Roman legionnaire who converted to Christianity and was given to the Esterházy by Pope Innocent XI for services in fighting the Turks. (He's in a glass case and looks like he could do with a stiff Turkish coffee.)

Josef Haydn said that Eisenstadt was 'where I wish to live and to die'. He achieved the former, being a resident for 31 years, but it was in Vienna that he finally tinkled his last tune. He also rather carelessly neglected to give any directive about his preferred residence after death. His skull was stolen from a temporary grave shortly after he died in 1809, after which it ended up on display in a Viennese museum. The headless cadaver was subsequently returned to Eisenstadt (in 1932), but it wasn't until 1954 that the skull re-joined it.

The white marble tomb that now contains Haydn's reunited parts can be viewed in the **Bergkirche** (☎ 626 38; www.haydnkirche.at; in German; Haydnplatz 1; adult/student €3/1; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Apr-Oct). This unusual church began life as a small chapel and in 1701 was transformed into a bizarre representation of Calvary, the mountain outside Jerusalem upon which Christ is thought to have been crucified. Manage all the dungeon-like rooms and you'll quite literally be feeling the Stations of the Cross in your feet; get to the top of the 'mountain', though, and not a gaggle of stone-throwing sinners awaits you but a fantastic view over town.

For more on Haydn, visit **Haydn-Haus** (☎ 719 3900; www.haydnhaus.at; Josef Haydn Gasse 21; adult/student & child/family €3.50/2.50/8; ☎ 9am-5pm Apr-mid-Nov), the great composer's former residence to the east of the *Schloss*. The recently revamped museum has a strong permanent exhibition documenting Haydn's life and work.

Just west of the *Schloss* are two other interesting museums: the **Landesmuseum** (☎ 600 1234; www.burgenland.at/landesmuseum, in German; Museumgasse 1-5; adult/student & child/family €5/3/9; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) and the **Jüdisches Museum** (☎ 651 45; Unterbergstrasse 6; adult/student & child €3.70/2.90; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Oct). The Landesmuseum plunges you deep into the local history of the region, and includes a collection of Roman



mosaics, ancient artefacts, wine-making equipment and some interesting propaganda posters from the 1920s. There's also a room devoted to Franz Liszt, replete with a warty death mask of the Hungarian composer. The latter museum primarily hosts temporary and permanent exhibitions on Jewish culture, and includes one of the few synagogues to survive the *Reichskristallnacht* (p36) of 1938.

Festivals & Events

The high point on Eisenstadt's cultural calendar is, of course, associated with Haydn. The **Internationale Haydnstage**, staged through much of September, attracts both local and international acts and features anything from chamber pieces to full-scale orchestral performances. Most events take place in the Haydn Hall or the Bergkirche; for more information contact the **Haydnfestspiele Büro** (☎ 618 66-0; www.haydnfestspiele.at).

Behind the palace is the **Schlosspark**, a picturesque park and the setting for the **Fest der 1000 Weine** (Festival of 1000 Wines) in late August.

Sleeping

Staff at the tourist office have a complete list of accommodation.

Hotel-Pension Vicedom (☎ 642 22; www.vicedom.at; Vicedom 5; s/d €44/72; ☑) This bright and breezy pension has quite simple but very clean and comfortable rooms in a new building located in the heart of town.

Haus der Begegnung (☎ 632 90; www.hdb-eisenstadt.at; Kalvarienbergplatz 11; s/d €44/74; ☑) This church-affiliated pension is spotless, very quiet and well run. Rooms are simple but comfortable and it has its own grassed café area. It's open to everyone, but obviously not the place to stay if you want to party all night.

Hotel Ohr (☎ 624 60; www.hotelohr.at; Ruster Strasse 51; s/€68-78, d/€105-115, tr/€150 ☑); restaurant mains €8-16; ☑ lunch & dinner, closed Mon Sep-Apr) The Ohr is a family-run hotel with nicely styled modern rooms and within walking distance of the centre. Its rustic restaurant is one of the best around: there's leafy outdoor/undercover seating on decking and it serves seasonal dishes often on a theme, such as goose around St Martin's day (late October & early November).

Hotel Burgenland (☎ 6960; www.hotelburgenland.at; Franz Schubert-Platz 1; s/€85-100, d/€110-140, ste from €195; ☑) This centrally located business

and seminar hotel is the best of the crop, and defies its ugly exterior with comfortable modern rooms. The kitchen in the midrange restaurant downstairs is open all day.

Eating

Bodega La Ina (☎ 623 05; Hauptstrasse 48; tapas €3-8, menus €44-65; ☑ 10am-midnight Tue-Sat) Tapas and full-course menus featuring *Kalbstrücken* (saddle of veal) are the speciality in this up-market Austro-Andalusian restaurant with a quiet courtyard.

Haydnbräu (☎ 639 45; Pfarrgasse 22; mains €6.50-16; ☑ 8am-11pm) Duck into this microbrewery and restaurant for some of the best-value eating in town; culinary classics like schnitzel and goulash to seasonal lamb with polenta plus steaks are a treat here.

im esterházy (☎ 628 19; Esterházyplatz 5; mains €17-20, menus €25-45; ☑ 9am-midnight Mon-Thu & Sun, to 2am Fri & Sat) This stylish eatery directly opposite the *Schloss* is a wonderful spot for coffee or a drink outside in summer, as well as a full meal from its international cuisine.

A **Spar** (Hauptstrasse 13) supermarket on the main street is handy for self-caterers.

Getting There & Away

Bus is one option for travel between Eisenstadt and Vienna; frequent direct buses leave from Vienna's Südtiroler Platz daily (€6, 1¼ hours). Frequent trains make the same trip daily (from Südbahnhof), but a change is required at either Neusiedl am See or Wulkaprodersdorf (€14, 1¼ hours).

AROUND EISENSTADT Burg Forchtenstein

Straddling a dolomite spur some 20km southwest of Eisenstadt, **Burg Forchtenstein** (☎ 02626-812 12; www.burg-forchtenstein.at, in German; Melinda Esterházy-Platz 1; guided tour of castle & arsenal adult/student & child/family €7/6/20, treasury €9/8/27; ☑ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct) is another of Burgenland's imposing castles. This stronghold was built in the 14th century and enlarged by the Esterházys (who still own it today) in 1635. Apart from a grand view from its ramparts, the castle's highlights include an impressive collection of armour and weapons, portraits of regal Esterházys in the **Ahnengalerie** (Ancestral Gallery; adult/student & child/family €6/5/18) and spoils from the Turkish wars (the castle curators will proudly tell you Forchtenstein was the only castle in the area not to fall to the Turks). Its

Schatzkammer (treasury) contains a rich collection of jewellery and porcelain.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

On weekdays four buses run directly from Eisenstadt (€5.10, 40 minutes) and three from Wiener Neustadt (€4.40, 30 minutes) to Forchtenstein.

Wiesen

About 5km north of Forchtenstein lies the small town of Wiesen which, during summer, morphs into Austria's version of Glastonbury. The series of summer festivals hosted here are the biggest in the country and range from jazz to reggae. For more information, log on to www.wiesen.at, in German.

Wiesen can be reached by bus or train from Vienna's Südbahnhof (€12, 1½ hours) on a regular basis Monday to Saturday.

NEUSIEDLER SEE

Neusiedler See, Europe's second-largest steppe lake, is the lowest point in Austria. But what it lacks in height, it makes up for in other areas. Ringed by a wetland area of reed beds, it's an ideal breeding ground for nearly 300 bird species and its Seewinkel area is a particular favourite for **bird-watching**. The lake's average depth is 1.5m, which means the water warms quickly in summer. Add to this prevailing warm winds from the northwest and you have a water enthusiast's dream come true. Thousands of tourists flock to the lake for **windsurfing** and **sailing** during the summer months. The best swimming beaches are on the eastern side of the lake, as the western shore is thick with reed beds. The lake's shallowness also attracts many families – the only drawback is that the water has a slightly saline quality, as there is no natural outlet.

The area is also perfect for **cycling**; a flat cycle track winds all the way round the reed beds, the ferries crisscrossing the lake carry bikes and most hotels and pensions cater well to cyclists. It's possible to do a full circuit of the lake but as the southern section stretches into Hungary, remember to take your passport (path open April to November).

To top it all off there are acres upon acres of vineyards, producing some of Austria's best wines. Rust, on the western shore of the lake, is a perfect place to sample wine in a *Heuriger*.

Much of the Neusiedler See closes down from October to late March. If you're overnighting, ask whether the place you're staying at issues the free *Neusiedler See Gästekarte* (most do), which provides free admission to swimming areas and museums (including many in Sopron), the national park, free use of public transport (travel on ferries is half-price) and other perks.

Neusiedler See Tourismus (☎ 02167-8600; www.neusiedlersee.com; Obere Hauptstraße 24, in Neusiedl am See; ☑ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) is the information centre for the lake region for telephone, post and email enquiries.

Getting Around

There is at least one *Radverleih* (bike hire) shop in every town on the lake; rental costs around €10 to €15 per day. Pick up a copy of the *Radtouren* map, available from tourist offices, which lists all *Radverleih* and marks out cycle routes around the lake.

Ferry services across the Neusiedler See are provided by a number of companies from around 9am to 6pm from May to the beginning of October; it costs €6 for ferries between Podersdorf and Breitenbrunn, Podersdorf and Rust, and between Mörbisch and Illmitz.

Bus connections are frequent; see the separate towns below for specific details.

RUST

☎ 02685 / pop 1700

Rust, 14km east of Eisenstadt, is one of the prettiest towns along the Neusiedler See. It brims with *Heurigen*, has a reed seashore and hidden boatsheds, giving it a sleepy, swampy feel on a steamy day, and in the summer months storks glide lazily overhead, make out with each other, and clack their beaks agitated from rooftop roosts. Dozens of storks roost on chimneys in town, although it's wine, not storks, that has made Rust prosperous. In 1524 the emperor granted local vintners the right to display the letter 'R' (a distinctive insignia as a mark of origin from Rust) on their wine barrels and today the corks still bear this insignia. It's best to sample this history in one of the town's many *Heurigen*.

Orientation & Information

Postbus services stop at the post office, 100m from Conradplatz, a small square that leads to the town hall and Rathausplatz, the focal point of the village.

The **tourist office** (☎ 502; www.rust.at; Conradplatz 1, Rathaus; ☹ core hr 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Thu all year, also 9am-noon Fri Jan-Feb & Nov-Dec, 9am-noon & 1-4pm or later Fri Apr-Oct, 9am-noon & 1-4pm Sat Apr-Oct, 9am-noon Sun Aug & Sep) has a list of wine growers offering tasting, plus hotels and private rooms in the town.

Sights & Activities

Rust's affluent past has left a legacy of attractive burgher houses on and around the main squares. **Storks**, which descend on the town from the end of March to rear their young, take full advantage of these houses (and their kindly owners, who have erected metal platforms on chimneys to entice the storks). The clacking of expectant parents can be heard till late August. A good vantage point is from the tower of the **Katholische Kirche** (Haydengasse; ☹ dawn-dusk Apr-Oct) at the southern end of Rathausplatz. The **Fischerkirche** (☎ 502; Rathausplatz 16; ☹ dawn-dusk Apr-Oct), at the opposite end of Rathausplatz, is the oldest church in Rust, built between the 12th and 16th centuries.

Access to the **lake and bathing facilities** (☎ 591; Seebad; adult/child per day €4; ☹ 9am-7pm May-mid-Sep) is 1km down the reed-fringed Seepromenade. The swimming is very reedy.

Sleeping

Storchencamp (☎ 595; office@gmeiner.co.at; Ruster Bucht; campsite per adult/tent/car €5.20/4/4; ☹ Apr-Oct) With a large children's playground, cheap bike rental, close proximity to the lake and free access to the bathing area, this campsite is a great place for families.

Ruster Jugendgästehaus & Pension (☎ 591; www.seebadrust.at; Ruster Bucht 2; dm/s/d €17/33/60; ☹ year-round) This HI hostel is right on the harbour, forms part of the bathing complex and has modern, clean rooms.

Alexander (☎ 301; www.pension-alexander.at, in German; Dorfmeistergasse 21; s €55, d 76-110; ☎ ☹) Though situated on the northern outskirts of town and more suitable if you have your own bike or car, Alexander is a great deal for comfortable three- and four-star rooms; take advantage of its sauna, garden and outdoor swimming pool.

Hotel Sifkovits (☎ 276; Am Seekanal 8; s/d €68/104; mains €10-17; ☎) Close to the centre of town, Sifkovits is a fine family-run hotel with large rooms and extras, like a downstairs lounge for reading and relaxing, a fruit bowl and a refrigerator stocked with free mineral water. It also has one of the finest restaurants in town.

Eating

When in Rust, do as the locals do and head for one of the many **Heurigen**. They're easy to spot – just look for the **Buschen** (small bush) hanging in front of doorways. Some operate under restaurant licenses and are therefore open throughout the summer.

our pick **Weingut Gabriel** (☎ 236; www.weingut-gabriel.at; Hauptstrasse 25; cold platter about €10; ☹ from 4pm Thu & Fri, from 2pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct) Not only is the pay-by-weight buffet brimming with delicious sausage and cold cuts (plus one warm), the wine is a treat, and in season the idyllic cobblestone courtyard is a wonderful vantage point to observe storks.

Peter Schandl (☎ 265; Hauptstrasse 20; mains €6-12; ☹ 4pm-midnight Mon & Wed-Fri, from 11am Sat & Sun Apr-Oct) With more of a restaurant feel, here you can enjoy game goulash and other warm dishes just off Rathausplatz.

Inamera (☎ 64 73; Oggauer Strasse 29; mains €9-22, menus €44-69; ☹ dinner Wed & Thu, lunch & dinner Fri-Sun) With its lovely stone interior, tiled floor and the small pond in the charming garden, Inamera is packed with atmosphere. It rates among the best restaurants in the Neusiedler See region.

Bla Bla (☎ 379; Hauptstrasse 18; ☹ from 9pm) It's easy to overlook this tiny champagne bar – until it opens up and the night owls move in for some bubbly and fun.

Getting There & Away

One to two hourly buses connect Eisenstadt and Rust (€3.40, 25 minutes). For Neusiedl am See (€6.80, one to 1½ hours), a change is required in Eisenstadt. Ferries cross the lake to Podersdorf from mid-May to September (€6).

MÖRBISCH AM SEE

☎ 02685 / pop 2350

Mörbisch am See, a quiet town 6km south of Rust and only a couple of kilometres from the Hungarian border, is pleasant for soaking

THE WINES OF BURGENLAND

The wine produced throughout this province is some of the best in Austria, due in no small part to the 300 days of sunshine per year, rich soil and excellent drainage. Although classic white varieties have a higher profile, the area's reds are more unusual, and the finest of the local wines is arguably the red Blaufränkisch, whose 18th-century pedigree here predates its arrival in the Danube region and Germany.

Sweet dessert wines are currently enjoying a renaissance in Austria. *Eiswein* (wine made from grapes picked late and shrivelled by frost) and selected late-picking for sweet or dessert wines are being complemented by *Schilfwein*, made by placing the grapes on reed (*Schilf*) matting so they shrivel in the heat. The guru of *Schilfwein* is Gerhard Nekowitsch from **Weingut Gerhard Nekowitsch** (☎ 02175-2039; www.nekowitsch.at, in German; Urbanusgasse 2, Illmitz).

Middle Burgenland, especially around the villages of Horitschon and Deutschkreutz, has a long tradition of Blaufränkisch, which is also at home in southern Burgenland, although this area is better known for Uhudler, a wine with a distinctly fruity taste.

One of the easiest ways to experience wine in the Neusiedler See region is to hire a bicycle in Neusiedl am See and pedal south through the vineyards towards the national park (p197). Along the way you'll pass vineyards and places where you can taste the local wine.

up a relaxed atmosphere and taking in quaint whitewashed houses with hanging corn and flower-strewn balconies.

The town's sleepy mood changes dramatically during the evening from mid-July to August with the **Seefestspiele** (www.seefestspiele-moerbisch.at), a summer operetta festival that attracts some 200,000 people each year. Its biggest competitor is the **Opern Festspiele** (www.ofs.at, in German; ☹ early Jul-late Aug), an opera festival held in an old Roman quarry near St Margareten, around 7km northwest of Mörbisch.

The local **tourist office** (☎ 8430; www.moerbisch.com; Hauptstrasse 23; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat & Sun Mar-Jun & Sep-Oct, to noon & 1-6pm Jul & Aug, to 3pm Mon-Thu Nov-Feb) can advise on accommodation and what's available, the festivals, lakeside facilities and give you a list of *Heurigen*.

Frequent buses pass through Rust on their way to Mörbisch from Eisenstadt (€3.40, 40 minutes). A foot- and cycle-only **border crossing** (☹ 6am-10pm Jun-Sep, 8am-8pm Apr, May & Oct) into Hungary, 2km south of Mörbisch, is handy for those circumnavigating the lake. If you've forgotten your passport, or don't have the energy, jump on the ferry.

PURBACH AM SEE

☎ 02683 / pop 2500

Purbach am See, 17km north of Rust, is another pretty town along the lake. Its small, compact centre is filled with squat houses and it is still protected by bastions and three gates – reminders of the Turkish wars.

While there isn't a lot to see in the town – nor has it direct access to Neusiedler See – it's nice to soak up the slow pace of life and wander from one **wine cellar** (☹ from 4pm 1st Sat in month Apr-Oct) to the next along historic Kellergasse and Kellerplatz, both outside the town's walls.

The **tourist office** (☎ 5920-4; www.tiscover.at/purbach; Hauptgasse 38; ☹ 9am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, to noon Sun Apr-Sep, to noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar) has information on accommodation and wine. If you need a place to stay, look no further than **Camping Purbach & Jugendberge** (☎ 51 70; office@gmeiner.co.at; Türkenhain; campsite per adult/child/tent/car €4.50/3/2.60/2.40, dm €19) on the edge of the red beds, or **Purbachhof** (☎ 55 64; www.tiscover.com/purbachhof; Schulgasse 14; d/tr/q €80/99/112), a converted wine-maker's house that could easily double as a folk museum.

our pick **Weingut & Weingasthof Kloster am Spitz** (☎ 5519; www.klosteramspitz.at, in German; Waldsiedlung 2; s €63-70, d €96-130; 6-course menu €75 with wine, mains €13-21; ☹ dinner Wed, lunch & dinner Thu-Sun Mar-Dec), on the northwest fringe of town located among vineyards (follow Fellnergasse), is a small former monastery with a modern hotel. Wines from the vineyard are produced organically and served in its very highly rated restaurant. Roast venison with ginger couscous and a pumpkin-plum chutney is one dish you may find on its seasonal menu.

Frequent daily trains heading for Neusiedl am See from Eisenstadt pass through Purbach (€4.40, 20 minutes).

NEUSIEDL AM SEE

☎ 02167 / pop 5900

Neusiedl am See is the region's largest town, the most accessible from Vienna, and a good springboard into the region.

Neusiedl's city **tourist office** (☎ 2229; www.tiscover.at/neusiedl.see; Hauptplatz 1; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-1pm Fri Oct-Apr, 8am-noon & 1-4.30pm Mon-Fri May, Jun & Sep, 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 2-6pm Sat, 3-6pm Sun Jul & Aug) has a map of the town and the lake, as well as information on other towns. If you do stay in town, **Rathausstüberl** (☎ 2883; www.rathausstueberl.at; Kirchengasse 2; s €42-67, d €84-104; ☐) has bright rooms and a lovely midrange restaurant.

Neusiedl has good train connections from Vienna's Südbahnhof (€11, 40 minutes). Hourly buses travel down the eastern side of the lake, passing through Podersdorf (€3.40, 15 minutes) and Illmitz (€5.10, 30 minutes). Regular trains to Eisenstadt (€6, 35 minutes) pass through Purbach (€4.40, 15 minutes). For Rust, change to the bus in Eisenstadt.

Fairly regular city buses (€1) go to town from the train station, or call a **taxi** (☎ 5959). **Fahrräder Bucsis** (☎ 207 90; train station, Neusiedl am See; ☎ Apr-mid-Oct) rents bikes (with seven to 24 gears) for €15 per day at the station, where the Neusiedler See bike trail leads south.

PODERSDORF AM SEE

☎ 02177 / pop 2050

Podersdorf am See, on the eastern shore, is the only town which can truly claim to be *Am See* (on the lake). It's the most popular holiday destination in the Neusiedler See region (and Burgenland), largely due to good wind conditions and a reed-free location by the lake.

The town's **tourist office** (☎ 2227; www.podersdorfamsee.at; Hauptstrasse 1; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 2-4pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun Jun-Sep, 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, Oct-May) can help find accommodation.

Sights & Activities

Podersdorf offers the most convenient bathing on Neusiedler See, with a long grassy **beach** (adult/child €4/2; ☎ 7.30am-6pm Apr-Sep) for swimming, boating and windsurfing. Windsurfing costs an extra €3.50, even with your own board, and paddle/electric boat hire is €6/10 per day. Wind and water enthusiasts can head for the Südstrand (South Beach), where **Fun & Sail** (☎ 0676-407 23 44; www.fun-and-sail.at, in German; boards per hr/day €9/45, 2-day kite surfing courses €199) has

equipment for hire and offers kite-surfing courses; **Surf- & Segelschule Nordstrand** (☎ 23 20; www.nordstrand.at, in German; Seeufergasse 17; boats per hr €14) rents out sailing boats and holds weekday sailing courses (from €160).

If you haven't already picked up a bicycle – the perfect way to see the Seewinkel wetlands, which start about 5km south of town – six places around town rent for between €7 and €15 per day, depending on the category of bike.

Sleeping & Eating

Book ahead for July and August. Seestrasse, the street leading from the tourist office to the lake, has many small places to stay.

Strandcamping (☎ 2279; Strandplatz 19; campsites per adult/child/tent/car €6.80/4/4.80/4.90; ☎ end-Mar-Oct) Right by the beach, this popular camping ground is one of the largest around and has plenty of shade from sweltering heat.

Steiner (☎ 2790; www.steineragg.at; Seestrasse 33; s/d €26.50/53; ☐) This *Gästehaus* has friendly staff, a quiet, homy atmosphere and super clean rooms with modern bathrooms and balcony. Don't let the cat out, though.

Hotel-Restaurant Pannonia (☎ 2245; www.pannonia-hotel.at, in German; Seezeile 20; s €54-57, d €77-114; ☐ ☎ ☎) Set back from the waterfront, this recently renovated hotel has a New World feel, ultra-modern furnishings (including glass doors to the bathroom) and a large grassed area where children can play. The owners run a second hotel across the road. The restaurant (meals €10 to €20, open lunch and dinner) has an enormous wine list and seasonal dishes such as venison carpaccio served on bear's garlic pesto with tomatoes.

Seewirt (☎ 2415; www.seewirtkammer.at; Strandplatz 1; s €72-84, d €99-162; ☐) Four-star Seewirt is especially popular because it occupies a prime spot right next to the ferry terminal and beach. Its restaurant (€12 to €14, open lunch and dinner) serves uncomplicated Austrian cuisine.

Zur Dankbarkeit (☎ 2223, Hauptstrasse 39, Podersdorf; mains €8-19; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon, Tue, Fri, 11.30am-9pm Sat & Sun) Zur Dankbarkeit is a lovely old restaurant that serves some of the best regional cooking around. The inner garden, with its mature trees and country ambience, is perfectly complimented by a glass of wine.

Weinklub 21 (☎ 21 170, Seestrasse 37; tastings €10; ☎ 9am-noon & 4-9pm May, Aug & Sep, 2-7pm Fri-Sun Oct-mid-Dec & mid-Feb-Apr) This excellent Vinothek represents 21 wine producers in

town and the region; it holds regular tastings and events.

Getting There & Away

Hourly buses make the journey between Neusiedl and Podersdorf on weekdays but are infrequent on the weekend (€3.40, 15 minutes). Ferries connect Podersdorf with Rust (€6) and Breitenbrunn (€5.50) on the western shore.

SEEWINKEL

☎ 02175

Seewinkel is the heart of the Neusiedler See-Seewinkel National Park, and a grassland and wetland of immense importance to birds and other wildlife. The vineyards, reed beds, shimmering waters and constant birdsong make this an enchanting region for an excursion. This is an excellent area for **bird-watching** and explorations on foot or by bicycle.

The protected areas cannot be directly accessed by visitors, so to really get into the bird-watching you need a pair of binoculars. There are viewing stands along the way.

The park has its own information centre on the northern fringes of Illmitz, the **Nationalparkhaus** (☎ 344 20; www.nationalpark-neusiedlersee.org, in German; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar). It has a small display on the ecology and staff can tell you the best places to spot local wildlife.

The town of **Illmitz**, 4km from the lake, is surrounded by the national park and makes for a good base. Staff at its **tourist office** (☎ 2383; www.tiscover.at/illmitz; Obere Hauptplatz 2-4; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 1-5pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun Jul & Aug, 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri Sep & Nov-Jun, 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun October) can provide information on the region. **Arkadenweingut-Gästehaus** (☎ 3345; www.tiscover.at/arkadenweingut-fam.heiss; Obere Hauptstrasse 20; s/d €29/50) is a lovely arcaded homestead in the centre of Illmitz.

Illmitz is connected with Mörbisch by ferry (€6) and Neusiedl am See by one-to-two hourly buses (€5.10, 30 minutes).

MIDDLE & SOUTHERN BURGENLAND

Heading south, the flat expanse of the Neusiedler See is soon forgotten as you enter an undulating landscape replete with

lush hills, forested glens and castles that rise up in the distance. It's a region often overlooked by visitors and a place where life is still very much connected to the land; the influence of long-resident Hungarian and Croatian settlers can be felt here.

LOCKENHAUS & AROUND

Lockenhaus, in the centre of Burgenland, is famous for its **castle** (☎ 02616-23 94; www.tiscover.com/burg.hotel.lockenhaus; adult/student/child €5/4/2.50; ☎ 8am-4pm Sat & Sun Mar, to 4pm Apr, to 6pm May-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Christmas, closed late-Dec-Feb), or more accurately, for its former resident Elizabeth Bathory. Better known as the 'Blood Countess', she has gone down in history for her reign of terror early in the 17th century, when she reputedly tortured and murdered over 600 mainly peasant women for her own sadistic pleasure. The castle has long been cleansed of such gruesome horrors but still contains an impressive torture chamber, complete with an Iron Maiden.

If you want to sleep inside a castle, the **Burghotel Lockenhaus** (☎ 02616-23 94; www.tiscover.com/burg.hotel.lockenhaus; s/d €65/100) has antique-furnished rooms and a sauna.

Some 13km east of Lockenhaus is the tiny village of **Klostermarienberg**, home to a now-defunct monastery housing the only dog museum in Europe, the **Europäisches Hundemuseum** (☎ 2611-22 92; www.kulturimkloster.at, in German; Klostermarienberg; adult/student/child/family €4/3/2/8; ☎ 2-5pm Sat & Sun May-Oct). The odd collection of dog paraphernalia includes paintings, statues and intriguing photos of dogs dressed for war during WWI and WWII, complete with gas masks. Take a few minutes to visit the monastery's crypt, a chamber containing archaeological finds dating from the 13th and 14th centuries.

Bernstein, 15km west of Lockenhaus, is another town dominated by an impressive **castle** (☎ 03354-63 82; www.burgbernstein.at; r €150-190; ☎ end Apr-mid-Oct; ☐). Ten of the castle's rooms, all of which are tastefully decorated with period furniture, are now used to accommodate guests. The castle, whose foundations date from 1199, is a delightful retreat from the stress of modern-day living and a time warp back to more rustic days. In the town centre is a small **Felsenmuseum** (☎ 03354-66 20-14; www.felsenmuseum.at, in German; Hauptplatz 5; adult/child €5/2; ☎ 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 1.30-6pm Mar-Jun & Sep-Dec), which concentrates its displays on the gemstone

serpentine and its local mining (it was first mined in the town in the mid-19th century).

If your body needs some TLC, stop in at the spa-town of **Bad Tatzmannsdorf**, 15km south of Bernstein. Aside from taking the waters at the **Burgenland Therme** (☎ 03353-89 90; www.burgenlandtherme.at; Am Thermenplatz 1; daycard adult/child €17.50/12; ☎ 9am-10pm), you can visit the **Südburgenländisches Freilichtmuseum** (☎ 03353-83 14; Bahnhofstrasse; admission adult/child €2/1; ☎ 9am-6pm May-Oct), a small but rewarding open-air museum filled with thatched buildings from 19th-century Burgenland. The local **tourist office** (☎ 03353-70 15; www.bad.tatzmannsdorf.at; Joseph-Haydn-Platz 3; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2.30pm Sat, 9.30-11.30am Sun Apr-mid-Oct, 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30-11am Sat mid-Oct-Mar) helps with accommodation.

Getting There & Away

You're better off with your own transport in this region, as bus connections can be thin. A couple of direct buses connect Lockenhaus and Eisenstadt (€12.30, 1½ hours), but just one on Sunday. Taking a direct bus north from Oberwart (where there's a train station) to Bad Tatzmannsdorf (€2.20, 5 minutes; every two hours), Bernstein (€4.30, 30 minutes, every one to three hours) or Lockenhaus (€5.90, one hour, twice each weekday) is manageable on weekdays.

GÜSSING & AROUND

If you're not castled-out by this stage, head 40km south of Bad Tatzmannsdorf to Güssing, a peaceful town on the banks of the Strembach river. Here the arresting **Burg Güssing** (☎ 03322-434 00; www.burggussing.info, in German; adult/child & student €5.50/3.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Easter Mon-Oct) rises dramatically over the river and town. The castle, which is a mix of ruins and renovations, contains plenty of weapons from the Turks and Hungarians, striking portraits from the 16th century and a tower with 360-degree

views. Also on display is an iron safe with a tiny statue of a dog at the bottom – a sign that the owner was *auf den Hund gekommen* (had gone to the dogs). A modern 100m **funicular railway** (tickets €1; ☎ same hr as castle) helps those with weary legs reach the castle.

A visit to the **Auswanderer Museum** (☎ 03322-425 98; Stremtalstrasse 2; adult/child €2/1; ☎ 2-6pm Sat & Sun May-Oct), to the north of the castle, is also worthwhile; it relays the story of the mass exodus of *Burgenlander* (including Fred Astaire's father) to America before and after WWI. Most emigrated due to lack of work or poor living conditions.

If you missed the open-air museum in Bad Tatzmannsdorf, head 5km west of Güssing to the **Freilichtmuseum** (☎ 03328-322 55; Gerersdorf bei Güssing 66; adult/child & student €4.50/2; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct) at **Gerersdorf**. An hour or two could easily slip by while you explore the 30-odd buildings and their traditional furniture and fittings, which capture the rural culture of Burgenland in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The **tourist office** (☎ 03322-440 03; www.tiscover.at/guessing; Hauptplatz 7; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri Jan-Jun & Sep-Dec, 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri Jul & Aug) in Güssing can help with private rooms, otherwise try **Landgasthof Kedl** (☎ 03322-42 40 30; www.tiscover.at/gasthof.kedl; Urbersdorf 33; s/d €34/52; ☎), 3km north of Güssing in Urbersdorf. The castle's restaurant, **Burg Güssing** (☎ 03322-444 74; mains €8-17, menu €25; ☎ 10am-10pm Tue-Sun May-Oct), has a filling six-course Knight's menu (with chicken in barley juice) and a terrace with extensive views over the countryside.

Getting There & Away

Two to four direct buses daily connect Güssing (€6.50, 50 minutes) with Oberwart. On weekdays and Saturday several direct buses connect Güssing and Gerersdorf (€1.70, 10 minutes).