

# Upper Austria



While Upper Austria may not exactly leap off the map as a holiday destination, it revels in the unexpected. Its cutting-edge cityscapes, Gothic architecture and glorious countryside aren't yet well known, but they will be. The capital, Linz, is a bit of a rebel by Austrian standards. Once considered an industrial backwater, the city is now catapulting into the 21st century: where there was dull concrete now there are flagship museums – high-tech temples of glass, steel and clean lines. With its edgy bars, boutique hotels and mushrooming avant-garde arts scene, this is clearly a city on the move.

Venture south from Linz and the countryside takes on a dreamlike quality, with rambling *Vierkanter* (four-sided) farmhouses and cornfields fading off into a watercolour distance. Pick a random spot on the map to explore on foot or by bike, or go straight for the biggies: St Florian's striking Augustine abbey, Steyr's knot of medieval lanes, the radon-laced waters of Bad Hall and the limestone pinnacles of the Nationalpark Kalkalpen grazing the border to Styria. Winding along scenic country lanes, the landscape switches from thick evergreen forests to undulating hills in the Traunviertel, where earthy locals and a pitcher of *Most* (cider) are never far away.

The northern stretch of the Mühlviertel strikes an entirely different chord – Gothic churches, mist-enshrouded forests and an air of Bohemian melancholy are evidence that the Czech Republic is close by. Stepping slightly east, the Innviertel is where, in the space of a day, you can roam the banks of the Inn River in Braunau, soak in Geinberg's Caribbean lagoon and sleep sweetly above the treetops in Kofing. Upper Austria boring? We think not.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Flying high above Linz's rooftops at the futuristic **Ars Electronica Center** (p203)
- Marvelling at the golden Tassilo Chalice in Kremsmünster's sublime **Benedictine Abbey** (p213)
- Quaffing potent brews and staggering around centuries-old fortifications in **Freistadt** (p215)
- Wandering cobblestone lanes in medieval **Steyr** (p211), squeezed between the Enns and Steyr Rivers
- Sipping cider in the orchards and soaking in the thermal baths of **Bad Hall** (p213)



■ POPULATION: 1.3 MILLION ■ AREA: 9480 SQ KM ■ HIGHEST ELEVATION: GROSSE PRIEL 2515M



## Climate

The temperate climate of the Mühltal is characterised by long summers and harsh winters. Heading south, milder temperatures are more prevalent until the Alps rise from the east.

## Getting There & Away

Upper Austria has good connections; the A1 autobahn runs east-west to Vienna and Salzburg, the A8 north to Passau and the rest of Germany and the A9 south into Styria. Express trains between Vienna and Salzburg pass through Linz and much of southern Upper Austria, and there are also express trains heading south from Linz to St

Michael in Styria, from where connections to Klagenfurt and Graz are possible.

## Getting Around

Upper Austria's excellent bus and train services are covered by **Oberösterreichischer Verkehrsverbund tickets** (☎ 0810-240 810; www.oövv.at, in German). Prices depend on the number of zones you travel (one zone is €1.60, 10 zones cost €8.10). As well as single tickets, daily, weekly, monthly and yearly passes are available.

## LINZ

☎ 0732 / pop 203,000

Linz dares to defy the braces-and-breeches image of Austria; a city with an urban edge, a

thriving youth culture and its feet firmly in the 21st century. It may not have old-world architecture to rival the giddy heights of Vienna or Salzburg, but it comes up trumps in the modern art and new technology stakes, with crystalline venues like Lentos and the Ars Electronica Center.

And who would have thought that this industrial powerhouse had it in it to become European Capital of Culture 2009? By injecting life into the centre in recent years, the city has successfully reinvented itself: where people once diverted their gaze from unsightly smoke stacks, they now crane their necks to ogle glass-walled galleries displaying Kokoschka or daring public art installations. This sleeping city has finally awoken, even though she may not be a classic beauty.

While Linz takes contemporary design seriously, it has not become a soulless space. Alongside the modernist cubes are snug cafés where you can indulge in a slice or two of scrumptious *Linzer Torte*, hip bars lining the narrow streets of the *Altstadt* (old town) and a creaking railway that has crept into the Guinness Book of Records. So next time you're passing through this corner of Austria, hop off the train to see why this city is worth more than a cursory glance.

## History

Linz was a fortified Celtic village by the time the Romans arrived, who took over and named it *Lentia*. By the 8th century, when the town came under Bavaria's thumb, its name had changed to *Linze*, and by the 13th century it had mushroomed into an important trading town for raw material out of Styria. In 1489, Linz became the imperial capital under Friedrich III until his death in 1493.

Like much of Upper Austria, Linz was at the forefront of the Protestant movement in the 16th and 17th centuries. However, the Counter-Reformation made a spectacular comeback, knocking the stuffing out of the place for the following century. Its resurgence in the 19th century was largely due to the development of the railway, when Linz became an important junction.

Adolf Hitler may have been born in Braunau am Inn (p217), but Linz was his favourite (he spent his school days here), and his (largely unrealised) plans for the city were grand. His Nazi movement built massive iron and steel works, which still employ

many locals. After WWII, Linz was at the border between the Soviet- and the US-administered zones. Since 1955, Linz has flourished into an important industrial city, port and provincial capital.

## Orientation

Linz straddles both sides of the Danube (Donau), with the *Innenstadt* (city centre) and most attractions huddling on the south bank. Most sights on the north bank cluster in the district of Urfahr, squatting in the shadow of 537m-high Pöstlingberg. The main hub is Hauptplatz, an elongated square that is mostly car-free and abuts Landstrasse, the main shopping thoroughfare with a long pedestrian-only section. The *Hauptbahnhof* (main train station) is about 1km south of Hauptplatz.

## MAPS

A free map, with information in both German and English and an enlargement of the *Innenstadt*, is available from Tourist Information Linz.

## Information

### BOOKSHOPS

**Thalia** (☎ 76 15-0; Landstrasse 41; ☒ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat) A small selection of English-language books.

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Atlas Media** (☎ 78 10 05; Graben 17; per hr €2.40; ☒ 9.30am-11pm Mon-Sat, 1-11pm Sun) Internet access, discount international calls, Skype and copying available.

**Hotspot Linz** Offers free wi-fi at 120 hotspots in the city centre; details are given online at [www.hotspotlinz.at](http://www.hotspotlinz.at), in German.

### INTERNET RESOURCES

**Linz.info.at** (in German) Links to the city's prominent cultural venues, firms and transport providers.

**www.linz-termin.at** Listings of cultural events and exhibitions throughout the year.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Krankenhaus der Stadt Linz** (☎ 78 06-0; Krankenhausstrasse 9) The main hospital, 1km east of the centre.  
**Unfallkrankenhaus** (☎ 69 20-0; Garnisonstrasse 7) Emergency hospital.

### MONEY

There are a number of banks with ATMs in the *Innenstadt*; the airport also has a bank. The *Hauptbahnhof* has an ATM and



**a money exchange office** (☎ 7.30am-4pm Mon-Thu, 7.30am-1.30pm Fri).

**American Express** (☎ 66 90 13; Bürgerstrasse 14; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Financial and travel services under one roof.

#### POST

**Main Post Office** (Bahnhofplatz 11; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat) Near the *Hauptbahnhof*; has an ATM.

**Post Office** (Domgasse 1; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri) This post office is handier to the centre.

#### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tourist Information Linz** (☎ 7070 1777; www.linz.at; Hauptplatz 1; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun May-Oct, 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Nov-Apr) Brochures, accommodation listings, free room

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reservation service and a separate Upper Austria information desk can be found here.

#### TRAVEL AGENCIES

**STA Travel** (☎ 77 58 93; Herrenstrasse 7; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

#### Sights & Activities

Before setting off, consider purchasing the Linzer Museumskarte (€12) for entry to 12 museums, or the Linzer City Ticket (€20) for entry to all museums, a €10 restaurant voucher and a return trip on the Pöstlingbergbahn. The Junior Linz Ticket (€8, for ages six to 14) is also available. All three tickets are valid the entire year.

In preparation for Linz seizing the reigns of European Capital of Culture in 2009, many sights are undergoing renovation, including the Pöstlingbergbahn. The Ars Electronica Center is moving to a temporary home (Graben 15) until early 2009.

#### LENTOS KUNSTMUSEUM

The gleaming **Lentos Kunstmuseum** (☎ 7070 3614; www.lentos.at; Ernst-Koref-Promenade 1; adult/child €6.50/4.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon, to 10pm Thu) stops you dead in your tracks. Defined by razor-sharp lines, this glass-and-steel landmark was designed by Zurich architects Weber & Hofer, who decided to leave a large gap in the base of its rectangular shape. The gallery showcases a world-class collection of contemporary art,

including works by Warhol, Schiele, Klimt and Kokoschka, which is complemented by rotating exhibitions.

Next to Lentos onto the southern bank of the Danube is the **Donaupark** (Danube Park), the city's green escape vault. Modern sculptures rise above the bushes in the well-tended gardens, which are a magnet to walkers, joggers, skaters, picnickers and city workers seeking fresh air in summer.

#### ARS ELECTRONICA CENTER

On the opposite side of the Danube is the **Ars Electronica Center** (☎ 72 72-0; www.aec.at; Hauptstrasse 2; adult/child €6/3; ☎ 9am-5pm Wed-Fri, 10am-6pm weekends), where virtually anything is possible – from diving to the depths of the Danube to flying high above Linz. This temple of interactive wizardry is devoted to the evolving world of technology (the lift projects graphics and a remote-controlled robotic arm tends to the entrance-hall flower garden). The must-do attractions are Humphrey II, a flight simulator that (literally) sweeps you off your feet, and Gulliver's World, where you can redesign the planet by shaping landscapes, moving mountains and putting yourself in the picture.

#### LANDESGALERIE

Housed in a sumptuous 19th-century building, the **Landesgalerie** (☎ 77 44 82-0; www.landesgalerie.at; Museumstrasse 14; adult/child €4/2.20; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) exhibits

20th-century paintings, photography and installations that bear some relation to Upper Austria. Alongside masterpieces by Dürer and Kokoschka, you'll find a peerless collection of fantastical works by the Austrian expressionist Alfred Kubin. The open-air **Skulpturenpark** juxtaposes modern sculpture with the gallery's classic architecture.

#### BOTANISCHER GARTEN

Rest beside the rhododendrons and orchids in Linz's **botanical garden** (☎ 7070 8160; Roseggerstrasse 20-22; adult/child €2/1; ☎ 8am-5pm Nov-Feb, to 6pm Mar & Oct, to 7pm Apr & Sep, 7.30am-7.30pm May-Aug). This peaceful pocket of greenery south of the centre nurtures 10,000 species, from native alpine plants to tropical palms and one of Europe's largest cacti collections.

#### PÖSTLINGBERG

Linz spreads out beneath you atop **Pöstlingberg** (537m), which affords bird's-eye views over the city and the snaking Danube. It's a gentle hike to the top or a precipitous 15-minute ride aboard the narrow-gauge **Pöstlingerbahn** (adult/child €4/2, combined ticket with Tram 3 €6.20/3.10; ☎ every 20-30min 5.40am-8.20pm Mon-Sat, 7.15am-8.20pm Sun). This gondola features in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's steepest mountain railway – quite some feat for such a low-lying city!

At the summit is the turn-of-the-century **Grottenbahn** (☎ 3400 7506; Am Pöstlingberg 16; adult/child €4.50/2.30; ☎ 10am-6pm Jun-Aug, to 5pm Sep-Nov & Mar-May), where families – and anyone that loves a bit of cult kitsch – can board the dragon train to trundle past gnomes, glittering stalactites and scenes from Grimms' fairytales.

#### Walking Tour

Kick off your one-hour walk of Linz's **Innenstadt** at the effervescent **Hauptplatz (1)**, where street performers wow the crowds and locals chill in pavement cafés. Pause to admire the pastel-coloured baroque houses framing the square and its centrepiece, the **Dreifaltigkeitssäule (2)** (trinity column), a striking 20m pillar of Salzburg marble carved in 1723 to commemorate the town's deliverance from war, fire and plague. Opposite is the **Altes Rathaus (3)** housing **Linz-Genesis** (☎ 7070 1920; Hauptplatz 1; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri), unravelling the city's history and celebrating famous sons such as Johannes Kepler and Anton Bruckner.

Turning into Klosterstrasse, you'll spy the sleek grey-and-white façade of the 13th-

century **Minoritenkirche (4)**, famed for its rococo stuccowork and frescoes (the brushwork of Bartolomeo Altomonte). Next door is the **Landhaus (5)**; wander into the arcaded courtyard to see the **Planet Fountain** (1582), which predated the arrival of the great astronomer Johannes Kepler, who taught here for 14 years. Across the way, appreciate the Renaissance architecture of **Mozarthaus (6)**, where Amadeus composed the *Linzer Sinfonie* in 1783, before soaking up the ambience in the *Altstadt's* maze of cobbled streets.

Crossing the Alter Markt, take the steps up the Hofberg to medieval **Schloss Linz (7)** for great views of the Danube. Time permitting, pop into the **Schlossmuseum** (☎ 77 44 19; Tummelplatz 10; adult/child €3/1.70; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) to glimpse a fine collection of Gothic art. From here, follow Römerstrasse to the 8th-century **Martinskirche (8)**. This humble little church is one of Austria's oldest, as the Roman oven inside confirms.

Head back along Römerstrasse towards Promenade, presided over by the mighty **Landestheater (9)**, then onto Herrenstrasse, where you'll be forced to look up at the **Neue Dom (10)**, a neo-Gothic giant with a riot of skinny spires and fabulous stained glass windows depicting Linz's history. The cathedral's height was apparently restricted to 134m, so as not to outshine Stephansdom (p124) in Vienna. Veer onto Bichofstrasse for a peak at Michael Pruckmayer's handiwork – the baroque **Bischofshof (11)** residence.



Continue along Landstrasse, the city's main artery dominated by the twin onion-domed towers of former nunnery **Ursulinenkirche (12)**, then nip down Domgasse to admire the 17th-century **Alter Dom (13)** (☎ 770 866-0; Domgasse 3; ☎ 7am-7pm), where Anton Bruckner served as church organist. Step inside to admire the interior – the architectural equivalent of a wedding cake, with its theatrical pink marble altar and lavish white stuccowork. Bearing left on Domgasse brings you back to the **Hauptplatz**.

#### Tours

If you'd prefer to explore the city with a group, Tourist Information Linz organises 1½-hour **walking tours** (tour €8; ☎ 11am & 2.30pm May-Sep), which go ahead regardless of the weather or the number of people.

#### Festivals & Events

Linz's most celebrated festival is the **Brucknerfest** (☎ 7612 2170; www.brucknerhaus.at; tickets €11-92) in September, when the Brucknerhaus or the Stiftskirche in St Florian (p209) stage world-class concerts. It's preceded by the **Ars Electronica Festival**, an innovative art and technology event held in early September. Both festivals coincide with free **Klangwolke** concerts in Donaupark.

The **Linz Fest**, a huge shindig in late May or early June, runs for three or four weeks and brings free rock, jazz and folk concerts to the city. In July, musicians, jugglers and acrobats from across Europe take to the city's streets for the three-day **Pflasterspektakel** street festival.

#### Sleeping

Besides traditional pensions, the city has a growing crop of no-nonsense hostels and designer boutique hotels. Tourist Information Linz offers a free accommodation booking service for visitors, but only face-to-face and not over the phone.

#### BUDGET

**Camping Linz-Pichlingersee** (☎ 30 53 14; Wienerstrasse 937; campsites per adult/child/tent €4/2.60/4.50; ☎) Escape to the country at this tree-shaded site, where you can wake up with a swim in Pichlingersee lake. There is a playground, kitchen and a restaurant serving Portuguese food. Hop on bus 2051 from the **Hauptbahnhof**.

**Herberge Linz** (☎ 0699-1180 7003; herberge.linz@aon.at; Kapuzinerstrasse 14; dm/s/d €15/22/36) Within staggering distance of the big sights, this bright yellow hostel has a friendly vibe. The spacious dorms all have lockers, fridges and showers. Chill over drinks in the leafy garden.

**Jugendgästehaus** (☎ 66 44 34; jgh.linz@oejvhv.or.at; Stanglhofweg 3; dm/s/d €19.50/29.50/44; ☎) This modern HI hostel is 1.5km from the centre. The rooms won't win any design awards, but the above-par facilities include a tennis court and common room.

**Wilder Mann** (☎ 65 60 78; wilder-mann@aon.at; Goethestrasse 14; s/d €35/60; ☎) Don't be put off by the '70s wallpaper in the corridors at this simple pension, the high-ceilinged rooms are quiet, spacious and a bargain, given the central location.

#### MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Goldenes Dachl** (☎ 77 58 97; goldenesdachl@gmx.de; Hafnerstrasse 27; s/d €45/85) Few can beat this place for price and proximity to the centre. Rooms aren't flash but they're comfy, with wooden floors, sofas and loads of space. There's a restaurant and beer garden downstairs.

**Goldener Anker** (☎ 77 10 88; Hofgasse 5; s/d €55/90) Set in a 17th-century inn, this family-run place just off Hauptplatz is a superb deal, with cosy rooms, a beer garden and a vaulted tavern serving Austrian staples and monastic brews.

**Zum Schwarzen Bären** (☎ 77 24 77; baer@linz-hotel.at; Herrenstrasse 9-11; s/d €68/90; ☎) Modern art glams up this three-star hotel, offering free wi-fi throughout. The warm-hued rooms are quiet and comfy, but bathrooms are a bit poky. You can upgrade to a room with a waterbed if the mood takes you.

**Wolfinger** (☎ 77 32 91; www.hotelwolfinger.at; Hauptplatz 19; s/d €87/126; ☎) The scent of fresh-cut flowers hits you upon entering this ever-so-posh hotel. One of the top addresses in Linz, its historical feel is accentuated by archways, stuccowork and period furniture. Ask for one of the back rooms with a balcony.

**Drei Mohren** (☎ 77 26 26-0; www.drei-mohren.at; Promenade 17; s/d €108/142; ☎) Anton Bruckner tops the list of famous past guests at this grand 16th-century hotel with plush touches like marble floors, chandeliers and gold drapes. Its 25 Biedermeier-style rooms are individually furnished.

**our pick Spitz Hotel** (☎ 73 64 410; www.spitzhotel.at; Fiedlerstrasse 6; r €120-250; ☎) Isa Stein is

the brainchild of the Spitz Hotel's futuristic design. The wow factor is there from the moment you enter the lobby, decked out with pod-shaped stools, sphere lighting and a wall screening clips from the Prix Ars Electronica. Clean lines, open-plan bathrooms and hardwood floors define minimalist chic in the rooms, where free wi-fi and flat-screen TVs are standard.

## Eating

Linz's cuisine is a melting pot of Austrian classics, world flavours and fusion cuisine. The city has recently jumped on the organic bandwagon, so you'll find plenty of healthy vegetarian and fair-trade options. The *Linz is(s)t gut* booklet, available from the tourist office, lists most restaurants in town.

## RESTAURANTS

**Gragger** (Hofgasse 3; snacks €2-5; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat) Antipasti, chunky soups and organic breads are served at a communal wooden table in this little gem of a café.

**Ikaan** (☎ 77 19 40; Altstadt 16; mains €5-12; lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Zesty lime walls and bamboo set the scene at this ethnic restaurant blending organic Asian and European flavours. Create-your-own salads and stir-fries top the menu. The chilli-chocolate mousse and mango lassis are divine.

**Pius** (☎ 070-77 05 70; Hauptplatz 2; mains €6-10; ☎ 11am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat) Health-conscious locals pack into this home-grown shop and café to fill up on organic salads, handmade pasta and vegetarian dishes. The freshly squeezed juices pack a punch.

**p'aa** (☎ 070-77 64 61; Altstadt 28; mains €7-11; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) p'aa dishes up vegan and organic dishes, from feisty curries to pumpkin schnitzel, in a trendy lounge setting with low seating and mellow music.

**Tom Yam** (☎ 94 69 69; Johann-Konrad-Vogel-Strasse 11; mains €7-15; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun) The King of Thailand beams down from the wall and Thai pop plays at this funky little restaurant with a terrace the size of a postage stamp. Breathe fire with a green papaya salad or the house special – tom yam prawn soup.

**Mia Cara** (☎ 78 57 28; Pfarrplatz 13; mains €8-16; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Mario cooks up a storm in the kitchen at this buzzing Italian *osteria*. Sample antipasti from the counter or homemade penne with a nice glass of Chianti. The patio is popular in summer.

**Niu** (☎ 78 67 78; Klamstrasse 1; mains €8-15; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Fri) Zen-style minimalism and Asian fusion cuisine draw foodies to this hole-in-the-wall restaurant. The aromatic yellow porcini mushroom curry and chilli beef noodles come recommended.

**Alte Welt** (☎ 77 00 53; www.altewelt.at, in German; Hauptplatz 4; mains €9-16; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Opening onto an inner courtyard, Alte Welt is a bit of a Jekyll and Hyde: by day it serves hearty fare such as crispy roast pork and potato gnocchi, while by night it becomes a haunt for students, artists and musicians (the cellar hosts jam sessions, live jazz and plays).

**Klosterhof** (☎ 77 33 73; Landstrasse 30; mains €9-18; ☎ 9am-midnight) Klosterhof's tree-shaded beer garden is arguably the best in Linz, with space for 1500. If this isn't enough to tempt you, tasty *Knödel* (dumplings) with Stiegl beer in the vaulted tavern at the front should.

**Los Caballeros** (☎ 77 89 70; Landstrasse 32; mains €10-19; ☎ 11am-2am) Decked out with fake cacti and sombreros, this Mexican place is cheesy but a good laugh for a group. Potent shark shots (tequila and Tabasco) help wash down T-bone steaks and enchiladas.

**Zum Kleinen Griechen** (☎ 78 24 67; Hofberg 8; mains €13-26; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Close to Schloss Linz, this classy little number tempts with well-prepared Greek specialities such as octopus, stuffed vine leaves and ouzo-drenched figs. The award-winning cuisine is definitely worth it.

## SELF-CATERING

Self-caterers will have no problem finding a supermarket; there are two Billas and a Spar on Landstrasse. For fresh local produce, head to the *Bauernmärkte* (farmers markets) on Hauptplatz (9am to 2pm Tuesday and Friday) and outside the Neuen Rathaus (8am to noon Saturday). Cheap *Würstel* (sausage) stands line the Volksgarten.

## Drinking

Linz's young, fun-loving population ensures plenty of after-dark action. The tourist office hands out *Linzer Nacht Meile* with night-life listings, but it's fairly easy to pinpoint the main drag; the glut of watering holes around Landstrasse, Hauptplatz and the area nicknamed the 'Bermuda Triangle', one block west, are safe bets for a night out on the tiles.

## BARs

**Thüsen Tak** (Walterstrasse 21; ☎ 5pm-4am) This spit 'n' sawdust pub is pure rock 'n' roll, with loud music and walls smothered in posters of Led Zeppelin, Thin Lizzy and Deep Purple. Enjoy a beer and natter with Mike at the bar, or surf the web for free.

**Strom** (☎ 73 12 09; Kirchengasse 4; ☎ 2pm-2am Sun-Thu; to 4am Fri & Sat) DJs spin hip-hop, electro and funk at this lively bar. Upstairs is rough and ready, while downstairs is more laid-back, with partygoers spilling out onto Kirchengasse. Next door is Stadtwerk, which hosts clubbing events.

**Cheese** (☎ 79 28 27; Waltherstrasse 11; ☎ 6pm-4am Tue-Sat) A grinning Cheshire cat welcomes you to this party-hearty bar, reeling in a young crowd with wacky events – from Latino parties and all-you-can-eat spaghetti feasts to ear-splitting karaoke nights on Thursdays.

**Divino** (☎ 070-94 74 73; Domgasse 20; ☎ 2-10pm Mon-Fri, to 10pm Sat) Pillar-box red walls, gleaming wine bottles and huge hunks of Serrano ham set the scene in this Spanish *vinoteca*, where flamenco music plays and glasses tinkle.

**Count Davis** (☎ 0664-1984 732; Landstrasse 71-75; ☎ 6pm-4am Mon-Sat) Sounds of the sax fill this

uber-cool jazz club; the place to sip a mojito and see up-and-coming homegrown talent perform.

## CAFÉS

While in Linz, it would be rude not to try the famous *Linzer Torte*, an almond pastry and redcurrant (not raspberry!) tart. The recipe has been around since the 17th century, and it's the greatest rival to Vienna's own *Sacher torte*.

**k.u.k. Hofbäckerei** (☎ 78 41 10; Pfarrgasse 17; coffee & cake €3-6; ☎ 6.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 7am-12.30pm Sat) Fritz Rath (below) pours passion into creating the best *Linzer Torte* in the city's oldest café (first mentioned in 1371). Whiffs of sugar and butter permeate the wood-paneled café, crammed with Sissi portraits and Habsburg curios.

**Café Jindrak** (☎ 77 92 58; Herrenstrasse 22; lunch menus €5-7; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) Join the old dames for sticky cakes at this celebrated café. You would need a huge appetite (and fork) to tackle the legendary *Linzer Torte* that set a Guinness World Record in 1999, measuring 4m high and weighing 650kg.

**Traxlmayr** (☎ 77 33 53; Promenade 16; coffee & cake €2.50-6; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat) A blast from

## VOICES: FRITZ RATH, LINZ BAKER

Fritz Rath has known the secret of the *Linzer Torte* since he was knee-high. He runs the k.u.k. Hofbäckerei in Linz, where he can often be seen flitting to and fro with a wagon-wheel-sized *Linzer Torte*. Here he reveals his lifelong passion for baking cakes according to age-old family recipes.

**Did you always want to continue the family baking tradition?** I felt tied to the kitchen as a teenager and needed to get out and experience the world – spread my wings a bit. So I worked in Sweden and the Midlands for a while in the late '60s. It was quite an eye-opener, but eventually you always come back to your roots.

**What does baking mean to you?** Baking holds up a mirror up to culture: Austria is the king of cakes, Germany rye bread, France baguettes...

**What is the key ingredient in Linzer Torte?** I recently met a lady in Berlin who insisted *Linzer Torte* is made with raspberry jam. My god, raspberry! It's redcurrant! But she was right in a way. The tart is world famous and each country interprets the recipe differently. It just tastes better in Linz because that's where it comes from.

**So what's the secret to baking Linzer Torte?** You need the right balance of ingredients (almonds, flour, butter, spices, redcurrant jam) and I usually add a dash of milk to the dough. But a lot boils down to instinct. My father used to say baking cakes is like playing music: if you take the same piano, sheet of music and 10 musicians the mixture is the same, but each one produces a slightly different result.

the 1920s, Traxlmayr is a Viennese-mould coffee house with a buzzing atmosphere, high ceilings and dickie-bow-tied waiters carrying trays piled high with dainty sandwiches and strudel.

Both the Lentos Kunstmuseum and Ars Electronica Center have ultramodern cafés that afford fine views over the Danube and city.

## Entertainment

**Brucknerhaus** (☎ 76 12-0; www.brucknerhaus.linz.at, in German; Untere Donaulände 7) The Brucknerhaus is the city's premier music venue, staging regular classical and jazz concerts, plus a dedicated programme for kids ('mini' and 'midi' music).

**Posthof** (☎ 77 05 48-0; www.posthof.at, in German; Posthofstrasse 43) This venue near the docks headlines Linz's avant-garde events with an eclectic line-up of music, dance and theatre. Raves are occasionally held here.

**Landestheater** (☎ 76 11-0; www.landestheater-linz.at, in German; Promenade 39) Opera, ballet and musicals take to the stage of Linz's main theatre, which hosts largely classic productions. The u/hof team keeps kids amused with plays aimed at a young audience.

## Shopping

Antique shops, galleries and musty bookshops line Bischofstrasse; this is a great street to rummage for handcrafted jewellery, paintings and kooky gifts. If you've got the spare change and a well-padded suitcase, check out the designer glasswork in the **Glas Galerie** (☎ 77 10 11; Bischofstrasse 11; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat).

At the other end of the scale, the city's **Flohmärkte** (flea markets) spring forth in front of the **Neues Rathaus** (☎ 7am-2pm Sat Nov-Mar) and on the **Hauptplatz** (☎ 6am-2pm Sat Mar-Oct).

The glass-roofed **Arkade** (☎ 79 38 07; Landstrasse 12; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) mall is the place to hibernate when it rains. Alongside high-street names like Boss and Agatha, you'll find a smattering of boutiques, speciality shops and a juice bar.

Honey you can eat, drink and bathe in (including chestnut and acacia tree varieties) fills the shelves at the **Imkerhof** (☎ 77 17 09; Altstadt 15; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat).

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Austrian Airlines, Lufthansa, Ryanair and Air Berlin are the main airlines servicing the

**Blue Danube Airport** (☎ 07221-600-0; www.linz-airport.at). There are flights to Vienna, Salzburg and Graz, as well as Berlin, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Stuttgart and Zürich. Ryanair has daily flights to London Stansted; see p397

### BOAT

The **Schiffsstation** (Untere Donaulände 1) is on the south bank next to the Lentos Kunstmuseum. **Wurm + Köck** (☎ 78 36 07; www.donauschiffahrt.de, in German) sends boats westwards to Passau (one-way/return €22/25, six to seven hours, 9.45am and 2.20pm Tuesday to Sunday May to October) and east to Vienna (€52/64, 11½ hours, 9am Saturday May to September).

### BUS

Regional buses depart from stands at the main bus station adjacent to the **Hauptbahnhof**. Information can be obtained from the **bus information counter** (☎ 61 71 81; ☎ 7.50am-5.30pm Mon-Fri).

### TRAIN

Linz is on the main rail route between Vienna (€27.90, two hours) and Salzburg (€19.90, 1½ hours), and express trains run twice hourly in both directions. Slower trains also service this route and others. At least three trains depart daily for Prague (€58, five hours). Aside from the obligatory **information desk** (☎ 8am-6.50pm), there are also some snack bars and an ATM at the **Hauptbahnhof**.

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Linz airport is located 12km southwest of the town. A direct airport bus service connects the **Hauptbahnhof** (€2.30, 20 minutes) with the airport hourly.

### BICYCLE

Bikes are available for hire at **Donau Touristik** (☎ 20 80 38; Lederergasse 4-12; bike per day/week €10/63; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, to 4.30pm Fri).

### CAR

One-way systems, congested roads and pricey parking make public transport preferable to driving in central Linz, although a car is a definite plus if you're keen to explore more of Upper Austria. There are some free car parks along Obere Donaulände. Linz has offices for all the major car hire firms:

**Avis** (☎ 0722-1600 6300; Flughafenstrasse 1)

**Denzel Drive** (☎ 0501-0541 70; Bahnhofplatz 3-6)

**Hertz** (☎ 78 48 41; Bürgerstrasse)

**LaudaMotion** (☎ 0900 240 120) Has an office at the **Hauptbahnhof**.

### PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Linz has an extensive bus and tram network (☎ 3400 7000, www.linzag.at), but by early evening some services stop or become infrequent. Single tickets (€1.60), day passes (€3.20) and weekly passes (€10.70) are available from pavement dispensers and **Tabak** (tobacconist) shops. Drivers don't sell tickets – buy and validate your tickets before you board.

## AROUND LINZ

### ST FLORIAN

☎ 07224 / pop 5600

Unassuming St Florian, a market town 15km southeast of Linz, hides one of the best abbeys in Upper Austria, if not the whole country. St Florian was a Roman who converted to Christianity and was drowned in the Enns River (in AD 304) for his pains. In many Austrian churches he is represented wearing Roman military uniform and dousing flames with a bucket of water.

The centre of town is Marktplatz, just below the abbey. Here you'll find a small **tourist office** (☎ 56 90; st.florian@oberoesterreich.at; Marktplatz 2; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri), a few guesthouses and the post office.

## Sights & Activities

### AUGUSTINER CHORHERRENSTIFT

Rising like a vision above St Florian, the **Augustinian Abbey** (☎ 89 02; www.stift-st-florian.at; Stiftstrasse 1; tours adult/concession €6/5; ☎ tours 10am, 11am, 2pm, 3pm & 4pm Apr-Oct) dates at least to 819 and has been occupied by the Augustinians since 1071. The main entrance is flanked by statues and is particularly striking when bathed in afternoon sunlight.

You can only visit the abbey's interior by guided tour, which takes in the lavish apartments, resplendent with rich stucco-work and emotive frescoes. They include 16 emperors' rooms (once occupied by visiting popes and royalty) and a galleried library housing 145,000 volumes. The opulent **Marble Hall** pays homage to Prince Eugene of

Savoy, a Frenchman who frequently led the Habsburg army to victory over the Turks. Prince Eugene's Room contains an amusing bed featuring carved Turks, which gives a whole new meaning to the idea of sleeping with the enemy!

A high point of the tour is the **Altdorfer Gallery**, displaying 14 paintings by Albrecht Altdorfer (1480–1538) of the Danube School. The sombre and dramatic scenes of Christ and St Sebastian reveal an innovative use of light and dark. Altdorfer cleverly tapped into contemporary issues to depict his biblical scenes (for example, one of Christ's tormentors is clearly a Turk).

The **Stiftskirche** (admission free; ☎ approx 7am-10pm) is almost overpowering; its altar is shaped from 700 tonnes of pink Salzburg marble and the huge 18th-century organ, which is literally dripping with gold, was Europe's largest at the time it was built. To hear the organ in full song, catch one of the **concerts** (adult/concession with tour €8/7; ☎ 2.30pm Mon, Wed-Fri & Sun mid-May–mid-Oct).

Anton Bruckner was a choirboy in St Florian and church organist from 1850 to 1855; he is buried in the **crypt** below his beloved organ. Also in the spooky crypt are the remains of 10,000 people believed to be Roman, which were unearthed in the 13th century. Stacked in neat rows behind a wrought iron gate, their bones and skulls create a spine-tingling work of art.

Every little boy's dream is the **Historisches Feuerwehrzeughaus** (Fire Brigade Museum; ☎ 42 19; Stiftstrasse 2; adult/concession €2.50/1.50; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-4pm Tue-Sun May-Oct) opposite the **Stiftskirche**, housing historic fire engines, hoses, buckets and other firefighting paraphernalia.

## Sleeping & Eating

The tourist office hands out a useful accommodation booklet listing hotels and private rooms in and around St Florian.

**Gästehaus Stift St Florian** (☎ 0664-1358 243; Stiftstrasse 1; s/d €40/78) An oasis of calm, this guesthouse within the abbey's walls overlooks the cloisters and groomed gardens. The design is sleek and simple, but antique furniture and candlelight add character. The light-flooded rooms feature solid wood floors and Art Nouveau touches.

**Landgasthof zur Kanne** (☎ 42 88; www.gasthof-koppler.at; Marktplatz 7; s/d €52/86; ☎) This yellow

fronted, 14th-century guesthouse on the main square scores points for its clean, snug rooms and restaurant serving fresh produce from the Koppler family's farm.

**Zum Goldenen Löwe** (☎ 89 30; Speiserberg 9; mains €7-13; 🍴 lunch & dinner Thu-Tue) The sound of the chef pounding humungous schnitzels welcomes you to this wood-panelled restaurant opposite the abbey gates. The sunny terrace out the back overlooks rolling countryside.

### Getting There & Away

St Florian (officially Markt St Florian) is not accessible by train. There are a zillion buses departing from the main bus station at Linz's *Hauptbahnhof* Monday to Friday (€2.40, 22 minutes), but only five on Sunday.

### MAUTHAUSEN

☎ 07238 / pop 4850

Nowadays Mauthausen is an attractive small town on the north bank of the Danube east of Linz, but its status as a quarrying centre prompted the Nazis to site **KZ Mauthausen** (☎ 22 69; Erinnerungsstrasse 1; adult/concession €2/1; 🚻 9am-5.30pm) concentration camp here. Prisoners were forced into slave labour in the granite quarry and many died on the so-called *Todesstiege* (stairway of death) leading from the quarry to the camp. Some 100,000 prisoners died or were executed in the camp between 1938 and 1945.

The camp, about 3km northwest of the centre, has been turned into a museum, re-telling its history, and the history of other camps such as those at Ebensee and Melk.

Visitors can walk through the remaining living quarters (each designed for 200, but housing up to 500) and see the cramped and disturbing gas chambers. The former Sick Quarters now shelters most of the camp's harrowing material – charts, artefacts and many photos of both prisoners and their SS guards. It is a stark and incredibly moving reminder of human cruelty.

### Getting There & Away

From Linz the quickest way to Mauthausen is by train (€4, 30 minutes). You can rent a bike from the station, which eases the 5km journey to the camp (follow the KZ Mauthausen signs).

## THE TRAUNVIERTEL

Punctuated with apple orchards and sprawling *Vierkanter* farmhouses, the Traunviertel is a swathe of green and pleasant countryside; the perfect place to kick back, twiddle your thumbs and enjoy the view after a few days in Linz. Gentle hills rise slowly above fields of ripening corn as they roll south towards the Nationalpark Kalkalpen. If the thought of mingling with the locals over *Most* (cider) and drinking fresh-from-the-cow milk at breakfast appeals, overnight in one of the region's farms that offer private rooms. When you tire of all that *Gemütlichkeit* (cosiness), picture-perfect villages, spa towns and cities with cultural clout like Steyr and Wels beckon.

### SMALL PLEASURES

Getting on your bike to village-hop through Upper Austria's unspoilt countryside reveals plenty of wee treasures. In the Traunviertel, take a detour to **Adlwang's** orchards, where tonnes of ripe apples go into making juice, *Most* (cider) and schnapps. At farmhouse **Gangl** (☎ 07258-40 18; Mandorferstrasse 28), Leopold Höllhuber sells award-winning stuff that will knock your socks off.

Pedalling through the gently rolling fields of the Mühlviertel, pause in **Hirschbach** to follow a steep 13km trail up to a high-altitude herb garden, which grows 150 different types of herbs, some famed for their healing properties. Organic peppermint and melissa are among hundreds of varieties for sale at **Bergkräuter-Genossenschaft** (☎ 07948-87 02; Thierberg 32; 🍴 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri).

Further west in the misty hills of the Böhmerwald, stop off in sweet-toothed **Bad Leonfelden** for yummy homemade gingerbread. **Kastner** (☎ 07213-63 26-0; Lebzelterstrasse 243; 🍴 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) has been guarding a secret recipe since 1599; sample freshly baked fruit, nut, honey and chocolate varieties at the bakery shop.

### STEYR

☎ 07252 / pop 40,100

Undoubtedly one of the prettiest cities in Upper Austria, Steyr grew fat on the riches of the iron industry in the Middle Ages and it shows: cobbled squares fan out into a warren of alleyways stacked with houses in sweet-shop colours. When the weather warms, the locals pile into gelaterias or spill out onto pavement terraces. The turquoise Enns and Steyr rivers converge here and create a spectacular backdrop for walking and cycling along willow-fringed banks.

### Orientation & Information

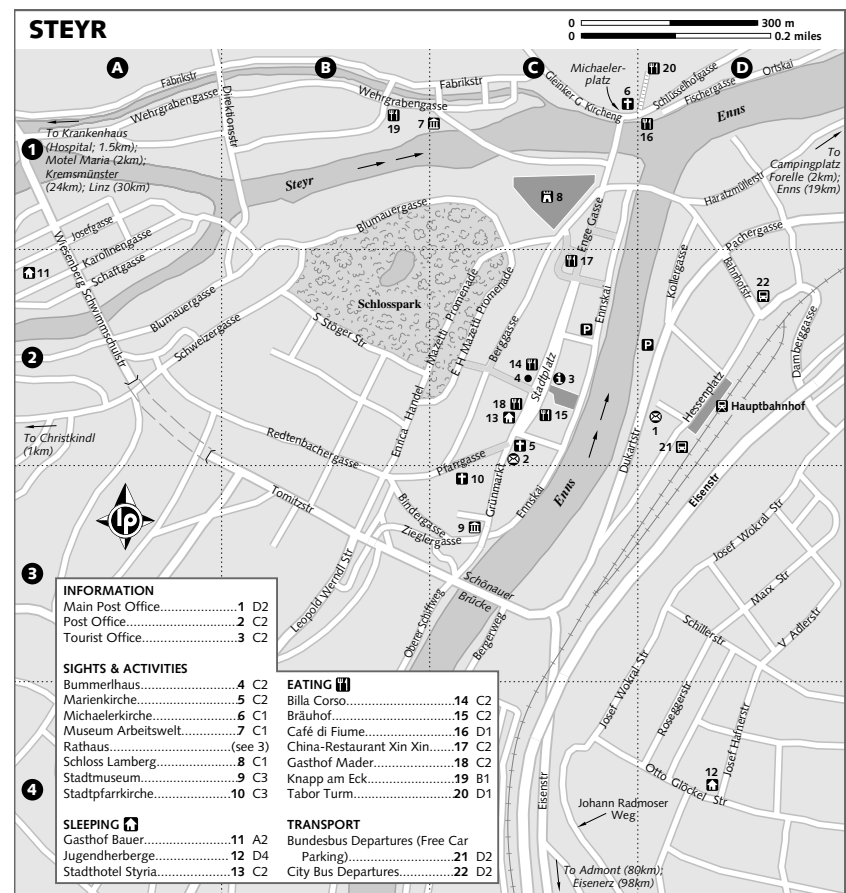
The pedestrianised town centre is caught between the ice-cold Enns and Steyr, while the

*Hauptbahnhof* is situated on the eastern bank of the Enns, eight minutes' walk from the pivotal Stadtplatz. The **tourist office** (☎ 532 29-0; www.steyr.info; Stadtplatz 27; 🍴 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) is on the main square in the Rathaus.

Close to the *Hauptbahnhof* is the **main post office** (Dukartstrasse 13; 🍴 7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11pm Sat); the other **post office** (Grünmarkt 1; 🍴 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) is more handy to the Stadtplatz.

### Sights & Activities

Steyr's compact centre is best explored on foot, with most sights clustering on the Stadtplatz. First up is the 18th-century **Rathaus**, with its church-like belfry and rococo façade. Opposite is the steep-gabled, late-Gothic **Bummerhaus**



(Stadtplatz 32). In the 19th century, blurry-eyed punters to this former inn called the golden lion on the sign *Bummerl* (small, fat dog) and the name stuck. Also worth a peek is **Franz Schubert's house** (Stadtplatz 16), where he found inspiration to pen the *Trout Quintet*. The southern end of Stadtplatz is dominated by the peaches-and-cream **Marienkirche** (☎ 531 29; Stadtplatz 41; ☞ daylight hr).

Next to the Bummerlhaus, a steep passageway with overhanging arches squeezes through the old city walls and climbs up to **Berggasse**. This narrow street weaves past crumbling frescoes and sculptures to baroque-style **Schloss Lamberg**, towering high above the Steyr River and backing onto the shady **Schlosspark** gardens.

Further north, across the Steyr River, the tall steeple of **Michaelerkirche** (Michaelerplatz; ☞ daylight hr) casts its shadow almost as far as the river bank. To the west of Michaelerkirche – through cobblestoned streets with one house piled on top of the next – is **Museum Arbeitswelt** (☎ 773 51; Wehrgrabengasse 7; adult/concession €5/3.50; ☞ 9am–5pm Tue–Sun Mar–Dec). Housed in a converted factory, this excellent museum delves into Steyr's industrial past with exhibits on working-class history, forced labour during WWII and the rise of the Socialist party.

Up the hill to the west, the punctured spire of the Gothic **Stadtpfarrkirche** (Brucknerplatz 4; ☞ daylight hr) soars skywards. It shares features with Stephansdom in Vienna and the same architect, Hans Puchsbaum. Down the steps is the **Stadtmuseum** (☎ 575 348; Grünmarkt 26; admission free; ☞ 10am–4pm Tue–Sun Apr–Oct, to 4pm Wed–Sun Nov–Mar). Set in a 17th-century granary, the museum traces Steyr's culture and folklore and features an impressive collection of baroque nativity figurines.

## Sleeping

The helpful tourist office can arrange private rooms, which are a good deal if you're willing and able to venture out of the centre.

**Campingplatz Forelle** (☎ 780 08; www.forellesteyr.com, in German; Kematmüllerstrasse 1a; campsites per adult/tent/car €4.70/3/4.40; (P)) This leafy campsite on the banks of the Enns River has a playground and facilities for cyclists (take bus 1 from the centre).

**Jugendherberge** (☎ 455 80; jugend@steyr.gv.at; Josef Hafnerstrasse 14; dm €12–15) Just behind the **Hauptbahnhof** (bus 3 runs close), this HI

## SANTA'S LETTERBOX

If you happen to arrive in Steyr over Christmas, head for the suburb of **Christkindl**, to the west of the old centre. During the festive season, a special **post office** (Schulweg; ☞ 9am–5pm 28 Nov–6 Jan) is set up in the Christkindlkirche to handle the almost two million letters posted around the world.

hostel is bang in the middle of suburbia, but the dorms are totally fine.

**Gasthof Bauer** (☎ 544 41; Josefgasse 7; s/d €35/62; (P)) Situated on an island in the Steyr River, this family-run *Gasthof* has a homy ambience, comfy rooms and a chestnut tree-shaded garden. The restaurant (mains €7.50 to €9.50) uses fresh, locally sourced produce. It's 10 minutes' walk from the town centre.

**Motel Maria** (☎ 710 62; www.motel-maria.at, in German; Reindlgutstrasse 25; s/d €35/70; (P)) Set in a lovingly converted *Vierkanthof* farmhouse, 2km west of town (bus 2B stops nearby), this peaceful guesthouse offers bright, country-style rooms decorated with pinewood furniture and opening onto balconies facing the garden.

**Stadthotel Styria** (☎ 515 51; www.stadthotel.at; Stadtplatz 40; s/d €81.60/121.20; (P) (U)) The granddaddy of Steyr's plush hotels, this 400-year-old townhouse blends vaulting with modern creature comforts like a hammam and wi-fi. The frescoed Renaissance breakfast room overlooks Steyr's rooftops.

## Eating

Stadtplatz has lots to offer self-caterers; it hosts an open-air market on Thursday and Saturday mornings, has snack stands, as well as a **Billa Corso** (Stadtplatz 30).

**Café di Fiume** (☎ 871 21; Michaelerplatz 11; lunch menu €5; ☞ 8am–7pm Tue–Sat, 1–7pm Sun) Mismatching chairs, relaxed staff and views of the Enns from a sunny terrace create a chilled atmosphere in this little gem of a café. Try the excellent vegetarian dishes, organic coffee and freshly squeezed juices.

**China-Restaurant Xin Xin** (☎ 470 34; Enge Gasse 20; lunch menu €6, mains €7–12.50; ☞ lunch & dinner) Adding a touch of spice to Steyr's mix is this value-for-money Chinese restaurant with the added bonus of a peaceful, tree-shaded garden.

**BräuhoF** (☎ 420 00; Stadtplatz 35; mains €8–18; ☞ 10–1am) If you're seeking homemade Austrian

fare, this lantern-lit restaurant delivers with favourites like gooey *Kasnocken* (cheese noodles). The contemporary wine bar is the place to nibble antipasti with a glass of Rioja.

**Gasthof Mader** (☎ 533 58; Stadtplatz 36; mains €8–18; ☞ 10.30am–midnight Mon–Sat) Delicious smells waft out of the kitchen at Mader, where you can nurse a glass of wine in the cellar's red-brick vaults, or feast on fresh seabass in the arcaded inner courtyard.

**Our pick** **Knapp am Eck** (☎ 762 69; www.knappameck.at; Wehrgrabengasse 15; mains €11–19; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue–Sat, lunch Sun) Down the cobbled lane and beside the fast-flowing Steyr River is this gorgeous tavern with a boho feel. The menu places emphasis on seasonal, local produce; flavours like sage-stuffed pork and lamb with polenta are served at chunky wooden tables. By night, candles and lanterns illuminate the ivy-covered walls, trailing roses and chestnut trees in the secluded garden.

**Tabor Turm** (☎ 729 49; Taborweg 7; mains €16–24; ☞ 10.30am–midnight Wed–Sun, to 5pm Mon) A steep climb up to this gourmet haunt (occupying a former church) works up an appetite for specialities such as breast of pigeon with gnocchi. There are panoramic views of Steyr and the misty peaks of Nationalpark Kalkalpen from the terrace.

## Getting There & Away

Some trains from Linz (€6.50, 50 minutes) require a change at St Valentin; there are fewer services on Sundays. Trains then continue south into Styria. The **Hauptbahnhof** has a restaurant, a travel information office and left-luggage lockers. For Wels (€10.50, 1¼ hours, hourly), most trains and buses require a change in St Valentin.

Regional buses depart from the **Hauptbahnhof** (where there's also free car parking), while city buses leave from outside the **Hauptbahnhof** to the north. Buses run to Linz (€6.50, 70 minutes) approximately hourly Monday to Friday, less on weekends. Steyr is on Hwy 115, the road branching from the A1/E60 and running south to Leoben.

## BAD HALL

☎ 07258 / pop 5200

Situated 18km west of Steyr is the sleepy spa town of Bad Hall, where the big draw is **Tassilo Therme** (☎ 77 30-0; Kurhausstrasse 10; adult/child €12.10/6; ☞ 9am–9pm). The iodine-rich waters that gush from its thermal springs are famed for their

therapeutic properties and leave the skin silky smooth. The outdoor pool offers massage jets and views of the Kalkalpen, while inside salt rooms, Roman baths and whirlpools vie for your attention. There's a splash pool to keep tots amused and a separate **sauna complex** (adult/child €15.20/8.40; ☞ 11am–10pm Mon–Fri, 10am–10pm Sat & Sun) for those who dare to bare.

After drifting away in the spa, a walk in the sculpture-dotted **Kurpark** (☞ daylight hr) opposite is invigorating. Kids and big kids love making a noise on the *Klangskulpturen*, larger-than-life musical instruments that include a glockenspiel and wind harp. To inhale the iodized salt for free, head for the central pavilion, where 1000L of the stuff filters through twig walls every hour.

A number of family-run farmhouses and guesthouses in Bad Hall offer good-value rooms; expect to pay €15 to €20 per person. Pick up a list at the **tourist office** (☎ 07258-72 00; www.badhall.at; Kurpromenade 1; ☞ 8.30am–4pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat).

From Steyr, there are frequent buses to Bad Hall (€4, 35 minutes).

## NATIONALPARK KALKALPEN

The Nationalpark Kalkalpen is a diverse and almost untouched wilderness of jagged limestone pinnacles, high moors and pristine forest. Bordering Styria, the reserve is Austria's second-largest national park after Hohe Tauern. Its valleys and gorges cut through classic alpine landscapes, dominated by **Hoher Nock** (1963m), the park's highest peak. It's particularly popular with hikers, cyclists, rock-climbers and cross-country skiers who come to glide across the glistening snow in winter.

Information on the park is available from **Nationalpark Zentrum Molln** (☎ 07584-36 51; www.kalkalpen.at, in German; Nationalpark Allee 1; ☎ 8am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm Apr–Oct), an ultramodern, eco-friendly centre near the northern entrance to the park; staff can help with accommodation, including the 15 mountain huts within the park. A good map covering walking, cycling and cross-country skiing trails of the park is Kompass map 70 (1:50,000). Regular direct buses from Steyr to Molln (€4.90, one hour) normally only run on weekdays.

## KREMSMÜNSTER

☎ 07583 / pop 6440

Looming large above the fertile Krems Valley, Kremsmünster's bombastic **Benedictine abbey**



(☎ 07583-5275-150; www.stift-kremsmuenster.at, in German; Stift 1; adult/child/family €6.50/3/14; ☞ tours 10am, 11am, 2pm, 3pm & 4pm Apr-Oct, 11am, 2pm & 3.30pm Nov-Mar) dates to 777, but was given a baroque facade in the early 18th century. Elaborate stucco work and frescoes shape the long, low **Bibliothek** (library), where shelves creak under the weight of 160,000 volumes, and **Kaisersaal** (Emperor's Hall). The most priceless piece in the **Schatzkammer** (treasury) is the gold Tassilo Chalice, which the Duke of Bavaria donated to the monks in about 780. You can visit all three on a one-hour guided tour.

The star attraction is the 50m-high **Sternwarte** (observatory tower; adult/child/family €7.50/3/14; ☞ tours 10am & 2pm May-Oct), dedicated to numerous schools of natural history. Spanning seven floors, the mind-boggling collection steps from fossilised starfish to the skeleton of an Ice Age cave bear. It's a giddy climb up a spiral staircase to the top floor, which displays the Keppler sextant and affords a bird's-eye perspective of Kremsmünster and the gently rolling countryside.

What can be seen without greasing the palms of the abbey with silver are the **Stiftskirche** (☞ daylight hr) and **Fischbehälter** (Fish Basin; ☞ 10am-4pm). The marvellously over-the-top baroque church is crisscrossed with white stucco work, draped in Flemish tapestries and festooned with dark, brooding paintings. The Fischbehälter's cloisters are quite a surprise; built in 1690, they comprise five fish ponds, each centred on a mythological statue. The trickle of water is calming and you can feed the carp (for €0.20).

### Getting There & Away

Kremsmünster is on the rail line between Linz and Graz (from Linz €7.60, 40 minutes); the longest you'll have to wait for a train is 1½ hours. Buses from Wels (€3.30, 30 minutes, Monday to Friday only) and Steyr (€5.70, 50 minutes) run on a regular basis.

### WELS

☎ 07242 / pop 61,637

What lies on the surface is only half the story in Wels, a Roman-rooted city with hidden inner courtyards, secret gardens and a smattering of Renaissance architecture. The largest city in the Traunviertel, Wels is an excellent base to explore Linz (15 minutes away) and slip under the skin of rural Upper Austria. When the weather warms, the centre comes

alive with open-air concerts, film festivals and markets.

Information, maps and audio guides (€4) of the city are available from **Tourismusverband Wels** (☎ 434 95; www.stadtmarketing-wels.at; Kaiser-Josef-Platz 22; ☞ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri), two blocks north of the main square, Stadtplatz.

### Sights & Activities

Most of the action centres on the **Stadtplatz**, which is framed by slender townhouses that conceal arcaded inner courtyards. Pick of the bunch is the ivy-clad courtyard at Stadtplatz 18, nurturing palms, rhododendrons and Japanese umbrella trees. At the front, glance up to spy the 2000-year-old **Römermedallion** (Roman medallion) relief.

Nearby the **Haus der Salome Alt** (House of Salome Alt; Stadtplatz 24) takes its name from one-time occupant Salome Alt, mistress of Salzburg's Prince-Archbishop Wolf Dietrich. The illusionary red-and-cream Renaissance façade stretches back to the serene flower gardens fringing Burg Wels. Opposite is the refreshingly simplistic **Stadtpfarrkirche** (☞ daylight hr), where light illuminates the Gothic stained glass. The medieval **Ledererturm** tower, built in 1376, overshadows the western end of Stadtplatz.

Just behind the Haus der Salome Alt, **Burg Wels** is where Maximilian I drew his last breath in 1519. The castle **museum** (☎ 235 7350; Burggasse 13; adult/concession €4.15/1.60; ☞ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 2-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) showcases everything from canon balls to Biedermeier costumes. Must-see exhibits are the horse-drawn cider press and the cylinder-shaped room that's a shrine to traditional baking, with walls smothered in animal-shaped pastries and enormous pretzels.

### Sleeping & Eating

The friendly tourist office staff can help you find somewhere to stay. In summer, the Stadtplatz and its tributaries offer alfresco dining with a lively vibe.

**Jugendherberge** (☎ 23 57 570; jugendherberge@wels.at; Dragonerstrasse 22; dm with/without shower €13.35/11.45; ☐) A five-minute stroll northwest of Stadtplatz, this laid-back HI hostel features spacious dorms and a common room with cable TV.

**Kremsmünstererhof** (☎ 466 23; Stadtplatz 62/63; s/d €48/68; ☐) Set in a 15th-century townhouse with an inner courtyard, this three-star hotel

on the main square has large, light-filled rooms with parquet floors, sunny paint-jobs and bold poppy prints.

**Café Urban** (☎ 460 51; Schmidtgasse 20; cake around €2; ☞ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) This convivial café's glass counter is piled high with hard-to-resist pralines and pastries – try the famous *Igel*, a hedgehog-shaped meringue.

**Olivi** (☎ 91 19 00; Hafergasse 3; mains €6-9; ☞ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This popular pizzeria serves tasty antipasti and wood-fired pizza in a buzzy setting.

**Knödelwirt** (☎ 472 05; Grünbachplatz 14; mains €6-10; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) It's best not to count calories at this rustic tavern dishing up homemade *Knödel* (dumplings), including spinach, potato, strawberry and plum varieties.

**Jaxx** (☎ 911 956; Stadtplatz 52; ☞ 4pm-2am Sun-Thur, to 4am Fri-Sat) Perfect for late-night nibbles, Jaxx is a funky café that morphs into a party haunt by night. Munch Snaax open sandwiches (tasty little morsels at €1 a piece) on the terrace.

### Getting There & Away

Trains and buses arrive at the **Hauptbahnhof**, 1.25km north of Stadtplatz. The town is on the InterCity (IC) and EuroCity (EC) express rail route between Linz and Salzburg, just 15 minutes southwest of Linz (€4, several per hour). There's also a line running to Passau (€12.20, one hour and 20 minutes, hourly) on the German border.

## THE MÜHLVIERTEL

A region of misty pine forests and hills speckled with chalk-white *Steinbloass* farmhouses, you can feel you're close to Bohemia in the Mühlviertel – and not just because there's decent beer and goulash! Scratch the surface to discover a mysteriously beautiful corner of Upper Austria with abundant Gothic architecture and warm-hearted locals. Separating Linz from the Czech Republic, this offbeat region is the sort of place where you're more likely to come face-to-face with a cow than a tourist. It's pure escapism.

### FREISTADT

☎ 07942 / pop 7200

A mere hop and a skip from the Czech border, Freistadt has the best-preserved fortifications of all the medieval towns in Austria and the beer isn't bad either – the nectar-

loving locals are apparently so passionate about *Freistädter* brews that they avoid places where it isn't on tap. Beer aside, much pleasure can be had strolling the town's narrow streets to admire medieval gate towers and relax in the gardens that have taken root in the original moat.

### Orientation & Information

The Hauptplatz is the focal point of the town centre, jammed between the old city walls. Here you'll find the **Mühlviertler Kernland tourist office** (☎ 757 00; kernland@oberesterreich.at; Hauptplatz 14; ☞ 9am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sat & Sun), which provides information on the town and its surrounds. The main north-south route, connecting Linz with the Czech border, skirts the western section of the city walls; the local **post office** (Promenade 11) is located here.

### Sights & Activities

Pick up the handy *City Walk* brochure from the tourist office, which pinpoints Freistadt's key attractions. Topping the list are the sturdy 14th-century **city walls** complete with gate towers – particularly the medieval **Linzertor** and skeletal **Böhmertor** – which reflect Freistadt's past need for strong defences as an important staging point on the salt route to Bohemia. The moat encircling the town is now given over to gardens and allotments.

The elongated **Hauptplatz** has some attention-grabbing buildings with ornate façades, such as the Gothic **Stadtpfarrkirche** (☞ daylight hr) capped with a baroque tower. Waaggasse, just west of the Hauptplatz, is lined with striking architecture, including some sgraffito designs.

Just beyond the Hauptplatz is the city's 14th-century **Schloss**, with a square tower topped by a tapering red-tiled roof. Inside is the **Schlossmuseum** (☎ 722 74; Schlosshof 2; adult/concession €2.40/1.60; ☞ 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sat), exhibiting 600 works of engraved painted glass. Climb the 50m Bergfried tower for far-reaching views over Freistadt.

### Sleeping & Eating

Freistadt has a handful of decent places to sleep and eat; the following recommendations (apart from Camping Freistadt) are in the old town.

**Camping Freistadt** (☎ 725 70; Eglsee 12; campsites per adult/child/car/tent €4/2.50/3/4.50; ☐) This shady camping ground on the banks of the Feldaisth

**BUYING INTO YOUR FAVOURITE BEER**

Freistadt is a *Braucommune*, a town where the citizens actually own their brewery – buy a house and you automatically buy a share of your favourite tippel. Ownership is limited to the 149 households within the town walls, but if you have the spare change and *really* like your beer, properties sell for around €350,000. Realistically, the brewery cannot be taken over, as the business would have to buy the whole town in order to take control.

The arrangement started way back in 1777 when the brewery opened. In the ensuing centuries the lucky owners would receive their share of the profits in liquid form, which would be distributed in *Eimer Bier* containers holding 56L. Each owner might get up to 130 containers! Nowadays, for better or worse, owners get a cash payment of equivalent value (which, on Friday and Saturday nights, often goes straight back to the brewery).

Practically every bar in town serves the local brew, so it's not hard to see why the brewery remains a profitable business. If you'd like to learn more about Freistadt beer, there are **tours** (☎ 7577; Promenade 7; www.freistaedter-bier.at; brewery tours €7.50; 🕒 tours 2pm Wed) of the brewery; three small beers are thrown in with the price of the tour. Call ahead if you'd like to take a tour.

River is five minutes' walk northeast of the centre. The great facilities include table tennis and a sauna.

**Pension Pirkbauer** (☎ 724 40; pension.pirkbauer@aon.at; Höllgasse 2-4; s/d €25/42) Nudging up against medieval Linzertor is this charming pension. Christine is a dab hand at making her guests feel at home: from the rooftop terrace to country cottage-style rooms with pinewood, floral fabrics and squeaky-clean bathrooms.

**Hotel Goldener Adler** (☎ 721 12; goldener.adler@hotels-freistadt.at; Salzgasse 1; s/d €49/78; 📞 📺 📺) Polished stone slabs, wrought iron banisters and vaulted passages crammed with antique wagons and spinning wheels give the Goldener Adler its unique edge. Unwind in the sauna and whirlpool, or tuck into the famous beer-marinated Bohemian pork shoulder in the beer garden (mains €6-16).

**Vis à Vis** (☎ 742 93; Salzgasse 13; pizzas €6-7; 🕒 9am-2am Mon-Fri, 5pm-2am Sat) Pretzels dangle on racks at the bar at this cheery local haunt with a sunny conservatory. The kitchen whips up tasty pizzas (including vegetarian options), salads and generous portions of Austrian fare.

**Getting There & Away**

Freistadt is on a direct rail route from Linz (€7.70, one hour, hourly). This line then wriggles its way north to Prague; Czech rail fares are lower than those in Austria, so you can save money by waiting and buying (in Czech currency) your onward tickets once you've crossed the border.

Highway 125, the main route to and from Linz, runs adjacent to the walled cen-

tre and then continues its way northwards towards Prague.

**KEFERMARKT**

☎ 07947 / pop 2100

It's silent enough to hear a pin drop in the tiny village of Kefermarkt, home to the **Pfarrkirche St Wolfgang** (☎ 62 03; Oberer Markt 1; 🕒 approx 7am-8pm). The pilgrimage church's main claim to fame is its breathtaking Gothic *Flügelaltar* (winged altar). A masterpiece of craftsmanship, the limewood altarpiece towers 13.5m, with latticework fronds rising towards the ceiling. At the centre are three expressive figures, carved with great skill (left to right as you face them): St Peter, St Wolfgang and St Christopher. The wings of the altar bear religious scenes in low relief.

**our pick Schlossbrauerei Weinberg** (☎ 71 11; Weinberg 2; s/d €29/50; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun; 📞) Perched on a hill overlooking the forest and Schloss Weinberg's red turrets is this brewery guesthouse, 10 minutes' walk from Kefermarkt. The affable owners serve homebrews and specialities like beer-drenched goulash, beer-battered schnitzel and fresh-from-the-pond trout in the vaulted restaurant (mains €6-10) or on the chestnut tree-shaded terrace. After a beer (or three), you'll sleep like a baby in one of the quiet rooms with porthole-like windows that afford snapshot views of the castle.

Four daily trains (more on weekdays) travel between Kefermarkt and Freistadt (€1.60, 10 minutes). The church is about 1km north of the train station.

**THE INNVIERTEL**

Ping-ponged between Bavaria and Austria over the centuries, the Innviertel is a fertile farming region sliced in two by the Inn River, whose banks are a drawcard for cyclists in summer. As well as beautiful baroque and Gothic architecture in Schärding and Braunau, the region has a few other surprises worth sticking around for: from overnighting in a treehouse (p218) to splashing around in a Caribbean lagoon.

**BRAUNAU AM INN**

☎ 07722 / pop 16,700

A stone's throw from Germany, Braunau am Inn is a favourite pit-stop for cyclists pedalling the Inn Trail to Innsbruck (p78). This border town has achieved unwanted attention as the birthplace of Hitler, though it would prefer to be described as *die gotische Stadt* (the Gothic city).

The long main square, **Stadtplatz**, is lined with elegant homes in pastel shades. At the northern end is the **tourist office** (☎ 626 44; www.tourismus-braunau.at; Stadtplatz 2; 🕒 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat), while its southern end narrows to the **Torturm**, a 16th-century gate tower. To the west of Stadtplatz rises the spire of late-Gothic **Stadtpfarrkirche St Stephan** (Kirchenplatz; 🕒 daylight hr). At almost 100m, it's one of the tallest in Austria.

Not far from the Torturm is **Hitler's Geburtshaus** (birth house); born in 1889, he only spent two years of his life here before moving with his family to Linz. The inscription outside his birth house simply reads *Für Frieden Freiheit und Demokratie, nie wieder Faschismus, Millionen Tote Mahnen* (For peace, freedom and democracy, never again fascism, millions of dead admonish).

**Sleeping & Eating**

**Jugendherberge** (☎ 816 38; int.osternberg.braunau@aon.at; Osternbergerstrasse 57; dm €15; 🕒 Feb-Nov; 📞) Directly on the Inn-Danube cycle path, this hostel 1km south of the Stadtplatz is well set up for cyclists.

**Hotel Mayrbräu** (☎ 633 387; Linzer Strasse 13; s/d €39/62; 📞) This four-star hotel's large, warm rooms are good value. A vaulted gallery full of contemporary art and a vine-clad inner courtyard add flair to the place.

**Bogner** (☎ 683 43; Stadtplatz 47; mains €7-10; 🕒 9am-1am) Supposedly Austria's smallest brewery,

**STANDING BY YOUR NAME**

In the far western corner of the Innviertel stands a tiny village with a big name, Fucking (pronounced 'fooking'). Naturally the name has caused a few giggles, and a few problems along the way (signs go missing all the time), but the village is *stolz* (proud) of its unique name. Recently residents were asked to vote on a name change but decided to stick with it; village spokesman Siegfried Hoeffl stated that 'Everyone here knows what it means in English, but for us Fucking is Fucking – and it's going to stay Fucking.' The name derives from a certain Herr Fuck who settled in the area some 100 years ago.

Bogner is a rustic pub-restaurant with solid Austrian fare and several home-brewed beers to guzzle.

**Getting There & Away**

By train, at least one change is normally required from either Linz (€15.40, 2¼ hours) or Salzburg (€11.10, 1½ hours) by train. From Wels, there are two daily direct trains (€13.80, 1½ hours).

**SCHÄRDING**

☎ 07712 / pop 5200

Schärding is an easy-going town on the Inn River, with peaceful riverfront walks and a baroque centre studded with merchants' houses in myriad pastel shades.

The **tourist office** (☎ 43 00-0; www.schaerding.at; Innbruckstrasse 29; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri & 11am-3pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar), near the bridge spanning the river into Germany, is a mine of information on the town. Look no further than the **Silberziele** (silver row), a line of richly coloured houses with identically shaped gables, for accommodation and food. **Pension Lachinger** (☎ 22 68; Silberzeile 13; s/d €29/48; 📞) and **Haus Mayr** (☎ 30 80; Silberzeile 8; s/d €30/52) are two uncomplicated pensions with comfy rooms and friendly staff.

If you have your own transport, the approach to Schärding from Linz, via Engelhartzell along the Danube, is beautiful and certainly off the beaten track. A more leisurely alternative is a boat trip between Passau (see p208) and **Schärding** (☎ 73 50; www.innschiffahrt.at, in German; Kaiserweg 1; adult/child one-way

### HIGH ABOVE THE TREETOPS

Tarzan wannabes shouldn't miss the chance to take a head-spinning walk above the treetops at **Baumkronenweg** (☎ 07763-228 92-0; www.baumkronenweg.at; Kopfing; adult/child €6/3.50 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Oct), a new canopy boardwalk in Kopfing, 21km east of Schärding. Stretching 2.5km, the trail is billed as one of the longest in the world and it's certainly a stunner – snaking high above misty spruce trees and comprising lookout towers, hanging bridges and platforms that afford bird's-eye perspectives over the forest. For a room with a view, check into the 10m-high **Baumhotel** (r €62-80), six pine-built tree houses perched on stilts. After some quality shut-eye, you'll awake to birds twittering in the treetops. Hotels don't get much greener than this...

€6/3, return €9/4; 🕒 11am, 2pm & 4pm Apr-Oct). Trains connect Linz with Schärding (€12.20, 80 minutes) roughly every hour.

### GEINBERG

☎ 07723 / pop 1350

Sandwiched between Braunau am Inn and Schärding, Geinberg is making waves with **Therme Geinberg** (☎ 85 00-0; www.therme-geinberg.at; Thermenplatz 1; 4hr ticket adult/child €13/9.30 Mon-Fri, €15/11.30 weekends; 🕒 9am-10pm Sat-Thu, to 11pm Fri), one of Austria's top spas. In the heart of rural Upper Austria, it's a surreal experience to soak in a bath-warm Caribbean saltwater lagoon,

as underwater music plays and palms sway, but it certainly beats a chilly dip in the Inn. In the adjoining complex, saunas imitate a starry sky or smell deliciously of coconuts. After a steam, the icy sleet shower is quite a shocker. For those who want to be pampered, the Vitalzentrum offers an arm-long list of treatments, from hot stone therapy to underwater massage.

Trains operate roughly every hour between Braunau am Inn and Geinberg weekdays, less frequently at weekends (€4, 20 minutes). There are several trains daily between Schärding and Geinberg (€7.30, one hour).