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# Eastern Styria Wanderings - A Family Jaunt Through History and Hills

#### **History**

Eastern Styria, or Oststeiermark as the locals affectionately dub it, is that delightful pocket of Austria where the rolling hills begin to soften, and the wild, alpine spirit of the west gives way to a gentler, more bountiful landscape. They call it the 'Garden of Austria,' and for good reason – it's a veritable patchwork quilt of orchards, vineyards, and verdant meadows, all stitched together by winding rivers and dotted with hamlets that seem to have simply grown out of the earth itself. Unlike its rugged western cousins, this land whispers of fruit blossoms and wine, a place where the sun seems to linger a little longer, coaxing forth the abundance that defines its character.

But don't let its pastoral charm fool you; this corner of the world has seen its share of drama and enterprise. Long before the first vine was planted, or the first apple tree blossomed, this land was a bustling crossroads. The ancient Celts, those industrious and enigmatic folk, made their mark here, most notably at Kulm, where their industrious hands crafted a vibrant settlement and traded their wares. The Romans too, those great engineers and administrators, left their footprints, albeit lighter ones, reminding us that even then, this was a land of passage and strategic importance, connecting distant corners of their vast empire. It's a reminder that beneath the tranquil surface of today's orchards lies strata upon strata of human endeavour, each epoch adding its own unique flavour to the soil.

The medieval era truly cemented the region's character, as diligent monks and ambitious nobles began to carve out their domains from the wilderness. Majestic abbeys like Vorau rose from the earth, not just as centers of worship but as beacons of learning and agricultural innovation, turning forests into fertile fields and establishing lasting communities. Castles, grim and resolute, such as Herberstein and Neuhaus, sprang up on strategic perches, silent sentinels guarding against the shifting tides of power and the unwelcome advances from the east – for Eastern Styria was often a frontier, feeling the sharp edge of conflict, particularly during the Ottoman incursions. These stones, still standing, bear witness to centuries of resilience, of communities forged in the crucible of both peace and peril.

Through the centuries, despite wars and changing empires, Eastern Styria largely retained its agrarian soul. It never succumbed to the heavy industries that transformed other parts of Europe. Instead, it clung to its traditions, perfecting the art of cidermaking, cultivating its apples with unparalleled devotion, and nurturing its unique 'Kernöl' – pumpkin seed oil, a liquid gold of the region, renowned far beyond its borders. Today, it's a place that invites exploration not just for its scenic beauty, but for its layered history, offering a quiet charm that's as rich and complex as its landscapes, a place where the past isn't just remembered, but felt in the very air and earth, a delightful blend of antiquity and agricultural bounty.

#### **Foreword**

Now, most folks wander through Europe with a guidebook clutched like a life raft, hitting the usual big-name monuments with the grim determination of a tax collector. But you, my discerning travelers, you're cut from a different cloth. You seek the whispers of history, the quiet beauty of a land less trampled, and you've got a pint-sized adventurer and a four-legged furry philosopher in tow. So, we shan't be chasing after fame and glory; we'll be sniffing out the genuine article, the soul of Eastern Styria, at a pace suited for contemplation, or perhaps, for a toddler's impromptu nap under a blossoming apple tree.

This part of Styria, the 'Garden of Austria,' ain't about rushing. It's about soaking in the sunshine, inhaling the scent of apple blossoms, and listening to the rustle of history in the old stones. Our 'itinerary' is more a gentle suggestion, a compass bearing rather than a rigid map. Think of it as a loose confederation of delightful days, ready to bend and sway with the breeze, the weather, and most importantly, the unpredictable whims of a two-year-old and the profound, sometimes immediate, needs of a loyal canine companion. The best discoveries, after all, are often made when you least expect them, down some charming country lane not marked in any tour book.

Therefore, prepare your picnic baskets and your walking shoes, for we shall embark on a journey that promises not just sights, but sensations. From ancient Celtic digs to stately abbeys, from castle ramparts (viewed respectfully from the outside, of course, lest the dog get ideas about feudal rights to the moat) to serene mountain churches, we shall uncover the layers of this fascinating region. This is a program designed for maximum enjoyment and minimum fuss, ensuring happy faces (and wagging tails) all around, leaving you with memories as sweet as a Styrian apple strudel. Here's a possible meandering, subject to the whims of weather, toddler temperament, and canine consensus:

#### Day 1: Hartberg's Heart and Celtic Whispers

#### Overview

Today, we'll dive right into the local flavor, starting with the very ground beneath our feet, which holds secrets from millennia past, before settling into the charming medieval embrace of Hartberg itself. It's a day for gentle exploration, ancient tales, and finding a good spot for a well-deserved refreshment.

#### **Route Description**

Morning (Drive Time ~15 min from Lafnitz): Our grand expedition begins just a hop, skip, and a jump from your temporary abode. We'll set our sights on the ancient Celtic Village of Kulm (POI-01), near Pischelsdorf. This ain't some dusty museum exhibit; it's an open-air reconstruction, a place where you can almost hear the echoes of ancient hammers and feel the spirits of those early iron-workers who once thrived here. It's outdoors, spacious, and offers ample room for the little one to stretch their legs and for the dog to sniff out historical precedents amongst the reconstructed huts and palisades. Take your time wandering through the meticulously recreated dwellings and imagine life 2,500 years ago – a fine, refreshing start to our historical meanderings, far from any stuffy indoors.

Mid-morning: After absorbing the Celtic wisdom, we'll head back towards Hartberg (POI-02), a mere whisper away. This delightful little town, steeped in history and radiating medieval charm, is our next port of call. It's compact and wonderfully walkable, making it perfect for a family stroll without overly taxing little legs or furry paws. Its main square, the Hauptplatz, is particularly charming, framed by historic buildings and inviting you to simply sit and observe the local comings and goings, perhaps imagining the horse-drawn carts of yesteryear delivering goods.

Lunch: Hartberg boasts several welcoming establishments with delightful outdoor seating, ideal for our contingent, allowing both the child and the dog to enjoy the fresh air. Or, if the sun smiles brightly upon us, we can find a pleasant and secluded spot in one of the town's small parks or a quiet green patch for a picnic. There's a certain freedom in dining alfresco, especially when you're accompanied by a future explorer eager to chase pigeons and a connoisseur of fine ground scents, and the food always seems to taste better in the open air.

Afternoon: Our historical appetite will lead us to the Stadtpfarrkirche St. Martin (St. Martin's Parish Church) in Hartberg (POI-03). While the intricate interiors of many churches might be a challenge with a curious toddler and a large, inquisitive dog, the magnificent exterior of this church, with its sturdy Romanesque foundations and elegant later Gothic additions, is a compelling study in enduring stone and artistry. The adjacent Karner (Charnel House) is a fascinating, if somewhat macabre, relic of medieval times – a stark and beautiful

reminder of life's brevity, but a splendid example of Romanesque architecture from the outside. Both provide ample outdoor space for observation and quiet contemplation.

Late Afternoon: Before heading back to Lafnitz, we'll seek out a cozy coffee house in Hartberg with inviting outdoor seating. The town has a few such charming spots where you can indulge in some delectable local 'Mehlspeisen' (pastries) and savor a good, strong Austrian coffee, while the young one observes the world with wide-eyed wonder and the dog enjoys a well-deserved rest at your feet. It's the kind of quiet pleasure that washes away the dust of travel and replaces it with contented serenity, a true taste of Styrian leisure.

Return to Lafnitz: A remarkably short and pleasant drive back to your friends' home, allowing plenty of time for evening relaxation, perhaps recounting the day's historical discoveries over a leisurely dinner, and preparing for the next day's adventures.

#### Day 2: Noble Estates and Hidden Gardens

#### Overview

Today, we journey into the heart of Styrian nobility, visiting a grand castle and its renowned zoo (with a thoughtful plan for our furry friend), before admiring another historical stronghold from afar, all while enjoying the scenic routes that connect these venerable landmarks.

#### **Route Description**

Morning (Drive Time ~30-40 min from Lafnitz): Our compass points west towards the magnificent Herberstein Castle & Garden (POI-04), a truly iconic landmark of Eastern Styria. This isn't just any castle; it's a living monument, gracefully perched above the dramatic Feistritz gorge, its turrets and walls whispering tales of centuries of noble lineage. Now, a word of caution, for the diligent canine companion: the Herberstein Tierwelt (zoo), while a marvel of biodiversity, does not permit dogs, for reasons of animal welfare and, one presumes, general decorum among the exotic residents. This calls for a tactical maneuver: perhaps one of the traveling party can enjoy the castle's interior and formal gardens while the other ambles with the child and dog around the extensive (and dog-friendly) exterior grounds and the magnificent gorge trails, offering plenty of scenic paths and fresh air. Then, a strategic swap, or simply embrace the magnificent exterior architecture and surrounding natural beauty together, which are impressive enough.

Mid-morning: The castle's exterior, with its captivating blend of Renaissance and Baroque elements, is a sight to behold from various vantage points, and the surrounding parkland offers delightful walks through ancient trees and manicured lawns. Imagine the noble families who once strolled these very paths, perhaps contemplating matters of state or, more likely, what to have for dinner that evening in the grand halls. The dog will undoubtedly appreciate the spaciousness, the myriad of new scents, and the little one might enjoy chasing butterflies in the open fields, or just the thrill of being in such a grand and open place, far from the confines of everyday life.

Lunch: This area, blessed with lush greenery and stunning views, is tailor-made for a picnic. The expansive grounds around Herberstein, or indeed, the serene banks of the Feistritz River nearby, offer numerous idyllic spots where you can unfurl your blanket. Unpack your provisions, be they local cheeses, fresh bread, or sweet Styrian apples, and let the gentle sounds of nature be your dining music. There's nothing quite like a meal savored under the open sky, especially when the culinary delights are accompanied by the joyous laughter of a child and the contented sigh of a well-exercised dog, truly a feast for all senses.

Afternoon: A short, scenic drive will then bring us to the venerable Neuhaus Castle (POI-05), perched majestically above the shimmering Stubenbergsee. This one is strictly an 'outside only' affair, which, for our purposes, is just perfect. We can admire its imposing structure, a formidable guardian of the landscape, without the logistical dance of child and dog entry protocols. It's a wonderful opportunity for a leisurely walk around the perimeter, or to simply stop at a designated viewpoint to soak in the historical grandeur, allowing the centuries of history to sink in, even without setting foot inside. The views over the lake and surrounding

hills are often breathtaking, offering a tranquil backdrop to our historical musings.

Late Afternoon: As the shadows lengthen and the day begins to wane, we'll meander along some of the region's enchanting scenic routes, perhaps winding through small villages and past apple orchards, soaking in the quintessential Eastern Styrian landscape. Keep an eye out for a 'Buschenschank' – a traditional Styrian wine tavern – with welcoming outdoor seating. These establishments usually offer simple, hearty, home-style cooking, often featuring regional specialties, and local wine or cider, making them perfect for a relaxed end to the day. The atmosphere is typically informal, friendly, and wonderfully accommodating to families and well-behaved dogs, providing a true taste of authentic Styrian hospitality.

Return to Lafnitz: The drive back to your friends' place is relatively short and pleasant, ensuring we don't overdo it and arrive back refreshed, not exhausted. The goal is to return with full hearts and happy memories, ready to recount the day's noble adventures and prepare for another day of gentle exploration of this beautiful region.

#### Day 3: Sacred Peaks and Abbey Grandeur

#### Overview

Today takes us on a slightly more elevated journey, first to a revered pilgrimage site with stunning views, then into the tranquil Pöllau Valley, culminating in a visit to a magnificent abbey that stands as a testament to centuries of faith and art.

#### **Route Description**

Morning (Drive Time ~45 min from Lafnitz): Our pilgrimage, albeit a leisurely one, begins with a picturesque drive towards Pöllauberg (POI-06). The journey itself is a delight, winding through the verdant Pöllau Valley, often referred to as the 'Garden of the Styrian Panther,' a nod to the regional crest. This entire region is renowned for its captivating landscapes, its quiet charm, and its bountiful nature. Pöllauberg itself is not just a destination; it's a glorious viewpoint, perched high above the valley, offering panoramic vistas that stretch for miles across the undulating hills and towards the distant Alps. The air up here feels cleaner, invigorated by the elevation, and the silence is punctuated only by the soft rustle of leaves or the distant bleating of sheep.

Mid-morning: The Parish and Pilgrimage Church of Pöllauberg (POI-07) is our primary draw here. While its interior is a jewel of Gothic architecture, renowned for its artistic treasures, the exterior, with its commanding presence and the breathtaking views it affords, is equally, if not more, captivating for our purposes. This is a perfect spot for a leisurely stroll around the church grounds, allowing the little one to explore the open, grassy space and the dog to enjoy the fresh mountain air and new scents. There are plenty of safe, open areas for them to roam (on leash, of course), and the elevated position makes for excellent photo opportunities, capturing both the architectural beauty of the church and the vast, inspiring natural landscape that unfolds below.

Lunch: The Pöllau Valley is dotted with quaint, inviting Gasthäuser and numerous scenic spots perfect for a delightful picnic. We'll find a place that offers welcoming outdoor seating and perhaps some local 'Brettljause' (a hearty cold platter of local meats and cheeses) or a warm, comforting, home-style meal, ensuring a true taste of Styrian hospitality. Alternatively, a picnic amidst the rolling hills, with views extending towards the distant Alps, would be a truly memorable experience, allowing for complete immersion in the serene environment. There's a certain undeniable truth in the saying that food tastes infinitely better outdoors, especially when surrounded by such profound natural splendor.

Afternoon: Our architectural curiosity and thirst for historical grandeur will then lead us further north, deeper into the Pöllau Valley, to the magnificent Vorau Abbey (POI-08). This venerable Augustinian monastery, with its impressive Baroque façade and rich, storied history spanning centuries, stands as a beacon of artistic, spiritual, and intellectual heritage. While entering the abbey proper, with its sacred spaces and delicate

artifacts, might be challenging with our full complement of travelers, the exterior, the expansive abbey grounds, and the general ambience of this venerable institution are well worth the visit. The sheer scale and historical weight of the place are awe-inspiring, and imagining the centuries of monastic life lived within its hallowed walls is a quiet, contemplative pleasure.

Late Afternoon: The drive back towards Lafnitz offers more opportunities for scenic detours, winding through picturesque villages and past flourishing farmlands. We'll take our time, perhaps stopping at a local farm stand for some freshly picked fruit, a bottle of local apple juice, or a taste of homemade cider, ensuring we're fully immersed in the region's agricultural bounty. The routes here are rarely straight and often offer delightful surprises around every bend, from ancient wayside crosses to charming vineyards clinging to sun-drenched slopes. This slower pace allows for true appreciation of the nuanced and ever-changing landscape.

Return to Lafnitz: Back to our comfortable base with plenty of time to wind down, reflecting on the historical and spiritual richness of the day, perhaps sharing stories of the views from Pöllauberg or the grandeur of Vorau, and enjoying the company of friends as the day gently fades.

#### Day 4: Green Oases and Sweet Endings

#### Overview

On our final day, we'll embrace the natural beauty that surrounds us, taking a leisurely deep breath of Styrian air, exploring a green oasis, and perhaps indulging in some local culinary delights, ensuring a relaxed departure from this charming region.

#### **Route Description**

Morning (Drive Time ~15-20 min from Lafnitz): For our last full day, let's explore a natural gem that's conveniently close to home, allowing for a relaxed start. The Rabenwald Forest, a prominent and verdant forested area north of Hartberg, offers numerous gentle walking trails that are perfectly suited for both a two-year-old on foot (or comfortably ensconced in a carrier) and a large, energetic dog. We'll seek out a well-marked, easy path (POI-09), perhaps leading to a tranquil viewpoint or a quiet clearing where the sun dapples through the leaves. The true beauty of these woods lies in their peaceful tranquility and the abundant opportunity for unhurried exploration and fresh air, a perfect antidote to the bustling world.

Mid-morning: This is an excellent opportunity for some unstructured play and genuine family time amidst nature. Children, as any keen observer knows, find endless fascination in the simplest things – sticks, stones, interesting leaves, and the general magic of the forest floor. And dogs, well, they just love to be outdoors, sniffing every intriguing scent and perhaps chasing a playfully thrown stick. We can spend a good hour or two simply wandering, breathing in the fresh, clean air, and enjoying the simple, profound pleasure of being completely surrounded by nature, far from any historical edifice or grand spectacle, truly unwinding and reconnecting.

Lunch: We'll pack a magnificent picnic today, a sort of farewell feast to Eastern Styria, savored in one of its countless beautiful spots. The Rabenwald itself offers many quiet nooks and clearings perfect for spreading a blanket, allowing you to dine amidst the gentle sounds of the forest. Or, we can drive to a scenic viewpoint overlooking the rolling hills, perhaps towards the Apfelland (Apple Land) region (POI-10), and enjoy our meal with a truly panoramic backdrop of orchards and vineyards. Pair it with some local apple juice or, for the adults, a crisp Styrian cider. There's a particular kind of satisfaction that comes from munching on good food amidst good company, with nothing but the vast sky above and the green earth beneath.

Afternoon: After our refreshing forest ramble and hearty picnic, we'll seek out a final, quintessential Eastern Styrian experience that engages the senses. This region is justly famous not only for its pumpkin seed oil ('Kernöl') but also for its delectable pastries and baked goods. We'll find a charming café or a local farm shop with inviting outdoor seating (perhaps in a nearby village like Pöllau or even back in Hartberg if a return to a known, comfortable spot is preferred) where we can sample some exquisite local treats. Perhaps a

'Kürbiskernölkuchen' (pumpkin seed oil cake) or a classic 'Apfelstrudel' (apple strudel), accompanied by a strong Austrian coffee or a refreshing local drink. It's a sweet, lingering goodbye to the region, leaving a pleasant taste in our mouths and cherished memories in our hearts.

Late Afternoon: A relaxed return to Lafnitz, ensuring we don't feel rushed at the end of our journey. This final day is intentionally lighter and more flexible, providing ample time for packing, a final leisurely chat with your friends, or even a quick revisit to a favorite spot from the earlier days if there was something you particularly enjoyed and wished to experience once more. It's about leaving with a sense of peace, fulfillment, and a desire to return, rather than exhaustion, ensuring the entire trip concludes on a high note.

Evening: Enjoy a relaxed final evening with your friends in Lafnitz, sharing stories of your adventures and perhaps planning your next Styrian escapade. This gentle conclusion allows for a smooth transition from your travels back into daily life, with the lingering scent of apples and the memory of green hills.

#### **Hints and Comments**

The Art of the Picnic: Eastern Styria, with its gentle hills, abundant orchards, and verdant meadows, seems to have been designed by nature specifically for picnics. Pack a good blanket, a sturdy basket, and fill it with local cheeses, fresh bread, regional cured meats, and plenty of crisp Styrian apples. You'll find countless quiet spots along country roads, by small streams, or on hilltops with grand, sweeping views. It's a far sight more rewarding than a stuffy restaurant, especially with a lively youngster who can explore freely and a discerning dog who can nap contentedly at your feet. Don't forget a thermos of coffee or local cider!

**Dog & Child Protocol:** Remember, a happy child and a content canine make for happy travelers. Keep daily travel times between destinations shorter than you might typically plan for adults. Frequent stops for stretching legs and exploring are essential for both the two-year-old and the large dog. Always have ample water and snacks at the ready for all members of the party. When visiting attractions, be mindful of specific dog restrictions – often, exteriors of castles and church grounds are fine for leashed dogs, but interiors are generally a no-go. For the little one, a carrier or stroller that can handle uneven terrain will be your best friend. Flexibility is your secret weapon here; a sudden nap or an unexpected burst of energy from either companion should dictate the pace.

The Call of the Coffee House and Local EatsDon't underestimate the restorative power of a good Austrian coffee house, especially one with inviting outdoor seating. It's not just about the coffee; it's about the 'Gemütlichkeit,' that unique sense of coziness and well-being, the opportunity to watch the world go by, and to sample delectable local pastries. Many traditional Gasthäuser (inns) also offer pleasant outdoor dining areas, perfect for enjoying home-style cooking and a local brew after a day of exploration. These moments of rest and culinary delight are just as crucial as the sights themselves, allowing for true immersion in the local culture.

Flexible Itinerary is Key: This itinerary is a suggestion, a friendly nudge in a delightful direction, rather than a rigid command. Think of it as a well-written script, but one that actively encourages improvisation. The weather might shift unexpectedly, the toddler might declare an impromptu nap strike that cannot be negotiated, or the dog might discover a fascinating scent trail that demands immediate, thorough investigation. Embrace these unplanned moments. The real joy of individual tourism, especially with family and pets, lies in the freedom to adapt, to linger longer where a place truly captivates you, and to follow your own nose (or your dog's, as the case may be) to unexpected discoveries.

**Architectural Appetites:** For those with a keen eye and a penchant for historical architecture, Eastern Styria offers a charming and varied blend. From the sturdy Romanesque foundations of Hartberg's church to the soaring, elegant Gothic lines of Pöllauberg's pilgrimage site, and the grand, ornate Baroque flourishes of Vorau Abbey, there's a feast for the eyes and a journey through time embedded in the stone. While interior

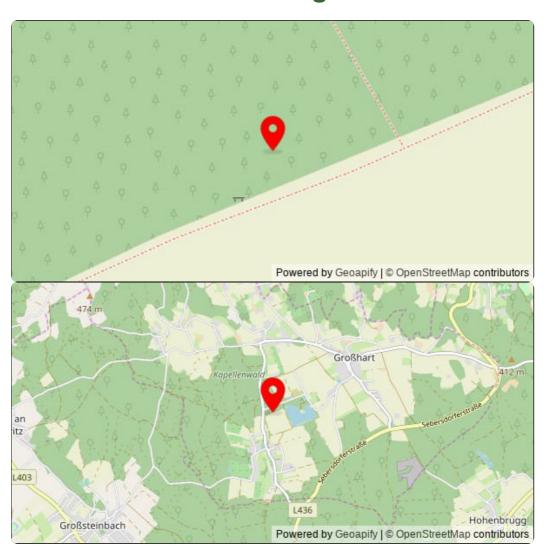
access might sometimes be limited by our companions, the sheer scale, craftsmanship, and historical significance visible from the outside often tell stories just as compelling. Keep an eye out for smaller village churches too; they often hide ancient secrets and beautiful details beneath their humble facades.

"Kernöl" and Other Local Delights: You're in the very heart of 'Kernöl' country, the famous Styrian pumpkin seed oil, often affectionately called 'black gold' due to its rich color and value. Don't leave without sampling it, perhaps drizzled liberally over a simple salad, or surprisingly, even over vanilla ice cream for a unique culinary experience! Local farm shops and traditional Buschenschanken are your best bet for authentic flavors, regional specialties, and a true taste of the region's agricultural heritage. These culinary stops are not just about sustenance; they are experiences, deeply rooted in the local culture, the landscape, and the friendly hospitality of the people.

#### **Closing Remarks**

So, load up the wagon, check the tire pressure, and prepare to be charmed by the quiet, rugged beauty, the rich history, and the gentle pace of Eastern Styria. May your drives be scenic, your picnics plentiful, your coffee strong, and your adventures memorable, leaving you with stories to tell and a desire to return! Happy trails!

# POI-01: Kulm Celtic Village



# At a Glance

Туре	Open-Air Museum
Location (Lat Lon)	<u>47.1645, 15.9329</u>
Recommended Duration	1.5-2.5 hours
Best Time to Visit	May to October, especially pleasant on sunny days for outdoor exploration.
WC Facilities	Facilities are available on site.

# Need to know

Parking	Free parking is available in the immediate vicinity of the village.
Accessibility	The museum is wheelchair-accessible, and wheelchair users are very welcome.

Kid Dog Friendly	Absolutely! It's a grand place for little ones, with cute dwarf goats to charm them, and your trusty canine companion is welcome in the museum area.	
Picnic Spots	The surrounding landscape offers delightful spots for a family picnic amidst beautiful Styrian scenery.	



#### History & Highlights

Well now, if you're hankering for a trip back in time, not just a hop, skip, and a jump, but a real deep dive into the misty past, then the Kulm Celtic Village is precisely where you ought to cast your gaze. Tucked away at the foot of the Kulm mountain in Eastern Styria, it ain't just a collection of old rocks; it's a living, breathing (mostly) snapshot of how folks rustled up a living thousands of years ago. You see, the Celts, those clever chaps, were roaming these very parts, and thanks to some industrious archaeologists, we can now saunter right into their world.

This here Kulm Celtic Village is no ordinary museum, mind you. It's Styria's first prehistoric open-air museum, and it's built with such meticulous care that you'd half expect a Celt to stride out and ask you for the time. They've reconstructed ten thatched-roof huts, not just guessing, but based on what those smart folks with shovels found right here. Each hut tells a story, showcasing the daily grind and grand designs of the Celts from the late Urnfield period, somewhere around 1000 to 700 BC.

As you wander through this ancient settlement, you'll get a fair shake at understanding how our ancestors lived. From the sturdy block construction of a Hallstatt house to the humble baking hut, every detail, from the clay and chaff wall plaster to the very floor beneath your feet, is a testament to ingenious, old-fashioned living. It's a real eye-opener, making you ponder how they managed without the conveniences of, say, a good coffee machine or a comfortable armchair.

And don't you fret about things being too dusty or dull for the young 'uns. This place is set up to captivate even the most fidgety of souls. They've got museum staff, dressed in full Celtic regalia no less, bringing history to life. You might just stumble upon a craftsman plying his trade, a farmer tending his lot, or perhaps even a warrior looking rather stern. In July and August, they even offer guided tours on Saturdays, so you can get the full lowdown without having to decipher ancient runes yourself.

Now, for those of you traveling with a pint-sized human and a four-legged friend, breathe easy. The Kulm Celtic Village welcomes families with open arms, and the little ones will surely be charmed by the cute dwarf goats scampering about. As for your trusty dog, why, they're perfectly welcome to accompany you on your historical jaunt through the village, provided they're well-behaved, of course. It's a grand outing where no beloved family member gets left behind.

The village doesn't just sit there in a vacuum; it's nestled in a landscape that's as pretty as a picture. The Kulm mountain itself, sometimes called the 'Holy Rigi,' offers breathtaking panoramic views, making it a popular spot for an excursion. Imagine, after soaking in all that ancient history, finding a tranquil spot in the meadows or beneath the trees for a picnic. It's the kind of place where history and natural beauty shake hands and become fast friends, perfect for enjoying the simple pleasures with your family and pooch.

This reconstructed village serves as a window into a time when life was, by all accounts, a bit rougher around the edges, but also rich with ingenuity and community. It's a chance to see how the Celts, from their druids with their twenty-year training in science and healing, to their fierce warriors and diligent farmers, carved out an existence in this very land.

So, whether you're a history buff, a nature lover, or simply a curious soul looking for a break from the humdrum, the Kulm Celtic Village offers a program that's both educational and utterly delightful. It's a place where the past isn't just preserved in glass cases, but where it breathes, whispers, and invites you to step right in and make its acquaintance. Just try not to ask them for Wi-Fi; they haven't invented it yet.

Come discover the magic and tranquility of this Celtic 'Otherworld,' and let the reconstructed huts and the echoes of ancient lives transport you. It's a truly unique journey, where every

thatched roof and reconstructed tool tells a story, and you're invited to be part of the latest chapter.



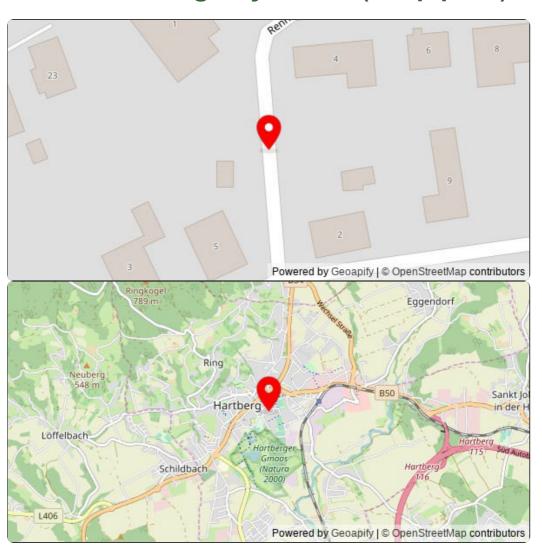
#### **Did You Know?**

- The Kulm Celtic Village is Styria's first prehistoric open-air museum.
- The village recreates life from the late Urnfield period, specifically from around 1000 to 700 BC.
- Archaeological excavations around the Kulm mountain attest to the area being a significant Celtic settlement.
- The reconstructed houses are built with traditional materials like clay and chaff mixture for walls and thatched roofs.
- The Kulm mountain is also known as the 'Holy Rigi' and offers extensive panoramic views

# **Q** Riddle Rally

- 1. I wear a roof of straw and walls of mud, depicting lives long past, with a history in my blood. What am I?
- 2. I'm a mountain that watched the Celts live and roam, now at my foot, their ancient lives find a home. What am I?
- 3. I'm a creature small and bleating, found in the village, a delightful greeting. Who am I?
- 4. I guide you through old ways, dressed in costumes of ancient days. Who am I?
- 5. I'm made of iron, used in a fight, found buried deep, bringing ancient light. What am I?

# **POI-02: Hartberg City Centre (Hauptplatz)**



# At a Glance

Туре	Historic Town Square
Location (Lat Lon)	<u>47.2801, 15.9754</u>
Recommended Duration	2-3 hours (flexible, depends on lingering)
Best Time to Visit	Late morning to early afternoon, for cafes and strolling
WC Facilities	Public toilets are generally available in town centers; check local signage or cafes.

## Need to know

Parking	Public parking garages are available with direct access to the pedestrian zone.
Accessibility	The historic center is relatively compact and pedestrian-friendly, suitable for strollers.
Kid Dog Friendly	${\bf \checkmark}\square$ Yes, with plenty of outdoor seating at cafes and a nearby city park.

**Picnic Spots** 

The nearby Stadtpark offers quiet places to relax and is suitable for a picnic.

# Images



See note 1



See note 2



See note 3

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# **History & Highlights**

Well now, gather 'round, folks, and lend an ear to the tale of Hartberg's Hauptplatz – the very heart of this dandy little town in Eastern Styria. It ain't one of those hustle-bustle big city squares where you feel like a fly on a hot griddle; no sir, Hartberg earned itself a fancy title, 'Città Slow,' which means 'Slow City.' They take their time here, much like a seasoned storyteller savors his words, and that's precisely what makes it a perfect fit for a family with a little one and a four-legged friend who appreciates a good sniff-around.

This Hauptplatz, or Main Square for us plain-spoken folks, is a veritable open-air museum, wearing its history like a comfortable, well-worn coat. You'll find yourself surrounded by historic buildings, some so old they remember when folks thought electricity was wizardry and horse-drawn carriages were the height of luxury. The Town Hall, a handsome edifice from 1898, stands proud amongst them, and you can still spot remnants of the medieval city wall that once hugged this venerable place, keeping mischief out and charm in.

Dominating the scene, like a grand old patriarch overseeing his kin, is the Stadtpfarrkirche St. Martin, the parish church. Now, this ain't just any church, mind you. Its roots stretch back further than most family trees, with the first building popping up in 1128, right on top of what used to be a Roman villa from around 200 AD. Imagine that – Romans lounging about where prayers are now whispered! Its towering spire, added later in the Baroque style, is quite the looker and a landmark that beckons you to explore.

Step inside, if you're so inclined, and you'll witness a fascinating mash-up of architectural styles. It's like a history book carved in stone: Roman foundations giving way to Romanesque elements in the tower, then a Gothic star-rib vault reaching for the heavens, and finally, a generous helping of Baroque finery in the interior. It's a testament to the ages, showing how folks kept adding their own two cents, generation after generation, turning it into a harmonious whole despite its tumultuous past, including a rather fiery incident in 1715.

Just behind the church, tucked away like a curious secret, stands the Hartberger Karner, a rather unique round charnel house. This Romanesque marvel, dating back to the late 12th century, has a certain old-world elegance, where late Romanesque shakes hands with early Gothic. While its interior, with its ancient frescoes, is often closed for viewing, its distinctive exterior and historical significance as one of Austria's important Romanesque architectural relics are worth a good look.

Now, if all that history makes your brain feel a bit like a well-used sponge, fear not! Hartberg's Hauptplatz is also a sanctuary for those who prefer the finer, slower things in life. Numerous cafes and restaurants spill out onto the square, offering inviting outdoor seating. This means you can settle down, sip a fine Austrian coffee, and watch the world (slowly) go by, all while your little one enjoys a bit of space and your furry companion stretches out contentedly by your feet, soaking up the ambiance.

Should the spirit of adventure (or simply the need for a good romp) strike your two-year-old or your dog, the Stadtpark is just a hop, skip, and a jump from the Hauptplatz. It's a lovely green space, perfect for a bit of leg-stretching, a game of fetch, or simply finding a shady spot for a picnic, making it an ideal retreat when the weather is fair and the historical contemplation has reached its limit for the day.

In essence, Hartberg isn't just a dot on a map; it's a narrative woven through centuries. From the Celtic settlements on the Ringkogel mountain to the Roman presence evidenced by the church's very foundations, and then flourishing as a medieval market town, every cobblestone seems to whisper tales of bygone eras. It's a town that manages to be both ancient and inviting, solemn and charming, all at once.

So, come on down to Hartberg Hauptplatz. It's a place where history isn't just in books; it's right there, breathing the same gentle air as you. You'll find it's a spot where the past gracefully dances with the present, offering a delightful and unhurried experience for every member of your family, including the smallest human and the largest canine. It's proof that sometimes, the best adventures are the ones you take at a wonderfully slow pace.



#### Did You Know?

- The Stadtpfarrkirche St. Martin in Hartberg stands on the remains of a Roman villa dating back to around 200 AD.
- Hartberg is one of only a few cities in Austria to be certified as a 'Città Slow,' an
  international recognition for towns that promote a relaxed pace of life and local
  traditions.
- The church tower of St. Martin was originally a Romanesque defense tower before it was converted into a Baroque church tower.

- The Hartberger Karner is a significant example of Romanesque architecture in Austria, showcasing a blend of late Romanesque and early Gothic styles.
- The Hauptplatz of Hartberg is not just a pretty square; it's the site of the oldest market in Styria.

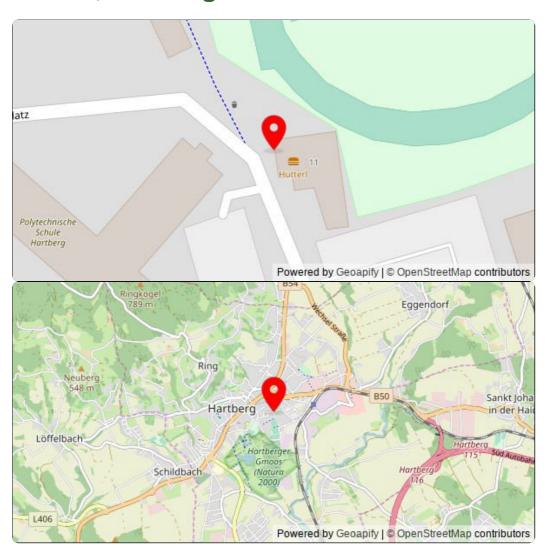
# Q Riddle Rally

- 1. I stand tall on ancient Roman ground, a house of worship where centuries are found. My tower, once a guard, now rings a sweet sound. What am I?
- 2. Behind the church, a round structure I reside, a place for bones where history can't hide. My frescoes tell tales, though often inside. What am I?
- 3. From Roman to Baroque, my styles I blend, a stone story of ages that never will end. Look closely at my walls, a message they send. What am I?
- 4. I am a city's heart, where time slows down, with cafes inviting throughout the town. For families and dogs, a gentle crown. What am I?
- 5. I stand beside the church, a silent, round sentinel of the past, filled with echoes of those who lived fast. What is my original purpose, built to last?

#### **Image Notes**

- 1. Hartberg Hauptplatz mit Mariensäule 01. From Nxr-at, 2020, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hartberg\_Hauptplatz\_mit\_Mariensäule\_01.jpg (CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0))
- 2. Hartberg-Brunnen-Hauptplatz 2. From Ufoao (talk), 2011, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hartberg-Brunnen-Hauptplatz\_2.jpg (CC BY-SA 3.0 at (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/at/deed.en))
- 3. Bürgerhaus Altes Rathaus Hartberg. From Nxr-at, 2019, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bürgerhaus\_Altes\_Rathaus\_Hartberg.JPG (CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0))

# POI-03: Stadtpfarrkirche St. Martin and Karner, Hartberg



## At a Glance

Туре	Historic Church and Ossuary
Location (Lat Lon)	<u>47.2804, 15.9774</u>
Recommended Duration	1-1.5 hours
Best Time to Visit	Any time of day; mornings offer a pleasant atmosphere
WC Facilities	Available in the town center, not directly at the church.

## Need to know

Parking	Free parking is available nearby, such as at Altstadtappartements Hartberg, just 70m away.
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Accessibility	The Karner has steps leading to its entrance. For the church, expect some steps typical of older buildings; no specific ramp information is available.
Kid Dog Friendly	The church and Karner interiors are generally not suitable for dogs, and a 2-year-old may find extended indoor tours less engaging. However, the surrounding town of Hartberg, with its parks and relaxed 'Città Slow' atmosphere, is very accommodating for both children and dogs.
Picnic Spots	Excellent picnic spots can be found in Rochuspark, a short stroll (400-500m) from the main square, which includes a pond and a small playground. The Stadtpark also offers quiet places to relax amidst historic surroundings.

# Images



See note 1



See note 2



See note 3

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## **History & Highlights**

Well now, if you've a hankering for a good old tale wrapped in stone and mortar, Hartberg's Stadtpfarrkirche St. Martin and its Karner are just the ticket. This here church, bless its ancient foundations, has been a fixture on this spot since at least 1128, though it truly began its long snooze on the very ruins of a Roman villa from about 200 AD. Imagine that – Romans struttin' about where good Styrian folk now gather, two thousand years gone! The parish itself got its first official mention in 1157, a young pup compared to those Roman ghosts, and started life as a modest Romanesque choir-square church, growing like a hardy oak ever since.

Through the centuries, this old dame has seen more makeovers than a Broadway star. Her tower, originally a Romanesque defense post, stood guard against troubles unknown, only to be transformed into a dazzling Baroque spire in the 18th century, a sight so fine it's considered one of Styria's prettiest. Inside, Gothic ingenuity gave us a star-rib vault in the main nave, with the date 1467 carved right into it, a sure sign that medieval folks knew a thing or two about leaving their mark. Then came the big fire of 1715, which put the church in a heap of trouble, but like a true survivor, she emerged from the ashes with a grand Baroque interior. And just behind her, stands the Karner, a sturdy round tower from the latter half of the 12th century, a true jewel of Romanesque architecture. This ossuary, once a tidy place for folks' departed bones (which, thankfully, are long gone), now boasts frescoes from the 13th century, uncovered from beneath centuries of whitewash, telling biblical tales to those who take the time to look.

Today, the Stadtpfarrkirche St. Martin and its companion Karner stand proudly in a town that's earned itself the 'Città Slow' certification, meaning folks here ain't in a hurry, and neither should you be. It's a place where history whispers from every stone, where Roman foundations meet Baroque splendor, and where a family, even with a restless two-year-old and a curious dog, can find peace and wonder in the town's charming square and inviting parks after a good look at these ancient structures. Take your time, soak it all in, and maybe grab a coffee in one of Hartberg's delightful cafes – there's no rush, just history waiting to unfold.



#### Did You Know?

- The Stadtpfarrkirche St. Martin stands on the remains of a Roman villa dating back to approximately 200 AD.
- The church's imposing 54-meter-high tower was originally a Romanesque defense tower before its Baroque transformation.
- The Gothic star-rib vault in the church's main nave prominently features the engraved year 1467, marking its construction.
- The Hartberger Karner is considered one of Austria's most significant art-historical relics from the 'Staufer period'.
- The 13th-century biblical frescoes within the Karner were once hidden under whitewash and only rediscovered and restored in the late 19th century.

# Q Riddle Rally

- 1. I stand tall on ancient Roman dreams, yet wear a Baroque hat. My tower once watched for foes, now for folks who chat. What am I?
- 2. Behind the church, a round structure stands, a testament to ancient hands. Though once a home for silent sleepers, now art on walls for keen observers. What am I?
- 3. My foundations recall a time of Caesar's might, yet my nave boasts a starry, Gothic light. What year, etched in stone, marks my grand Gothic stride?
- 4. I am an architectural jewel, from the Staufer's reign, with frescoes so old, they endured whitewash and rain. What am I called?
- 5. What style of spire, rebuilt after a devastating fire, gives the church its current, most beautiful attire?

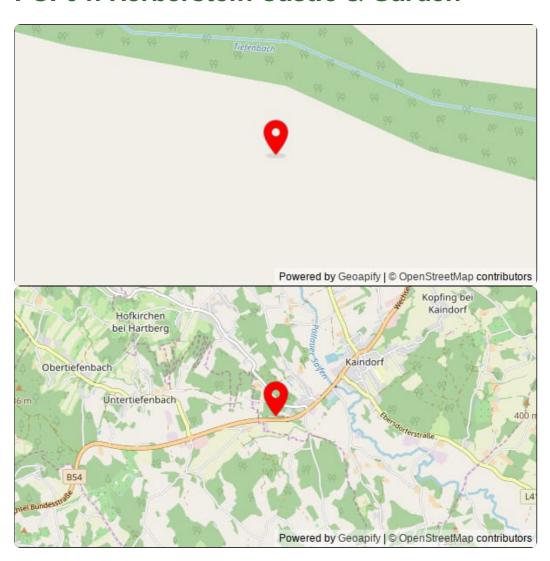
### **Image Notes**

- Hartberg Karner und Stadtpfarrkirche. From C.Stadler/Bwag, 2021, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hartberg\_-\_Karner\_und\_Stadtpfarrkirche.JPG (CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0))
- 2. Stadtpfarrkirche Hartberg Interior 34. From Iswoar, 2022, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stadtpfarrkirche\_Hartberg\_Interior\_34.jpg (CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0))
- 3. Hartberg Kirche Hochaltar. From Steindy 21:51, 16. Aug. 2008 (CEST)., 2008,

Wikimedia Commons.

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# POI-04: Herberstein Castle & Garden



# At a Glance

Туре	Castle, Gardens, and Wildlife Park
Location (Lat Lon)	<u>47.2173, 15.8942</u>
Recommended Duration	3-5 hours
Best Time to Visit	Morning, for leisurely strolls and cooler temperatures
WC Facilities	Available on-site

## **Need to know**

Parking	Free parking available (approx. 300 spots).
Accessibility	The castle itself, perched on a rock, can be challenging to access, with some areas having steep paths or steps. The wider park and zoo areas are generally more navigable, though some terrain may be uneven.

Kid Dog Friendly	Excellent for families with children, offering playgrounds and special children's programs. Dogs are very welcome in the wildlife park and gardens (on a short leash, with a €3.50 entry fee). However, dogs are not permitted inside the castle itself or the House of Biodiversity.
Picnic Spots	Ample picnic spots are available, particularly along the scenic Feistritz River and within the expansive gardens.
Food Drinks	There are restaurants, beer gardens, and taverns on-site or nearby, providing opportunities for home-style cooking and outdoor seating.

# Images



See note 1



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### **History & Highlights**

Well now, listen close, for I'm about to spin a yarn about Herberstein Castle & Garden, a place that's as old as Methuselah's britches and packed with more history than a dusty attic. Tucked away in the wild and romantic embrace of the Feistritzklamm, this fortified castle sits high on a rock, playing hide-and-seek with the landscape – you won't spot it from a distance, which was mighty clever back in the day for keeping unwanted guests at bay. The oldest parts of this grand dame whisper tales from the late 13th century, a time when knights were in their prime and castles weren't just for show. By the mid-16th century, it had a bit of a facelift, getting dolled up with Renaissance flair, turning from a stoic fortress into a more comfy residential abode. And bless their hearts, for 21 generations, the Herberstein family has called this marvel home, having once owned a significant fifth of Styria in the 17th and 18th centuries, which, in my humble opinion, makes them pretty much royalty.

But a castle, no matter how grand, is only half the story. This particular gem isn't called 'Garden Castle Herberstein' for nothing, mind you. Its impressive gardens, dating back to the 16th century, are a sight for sore eyes, bursting with thousands of blooming, sweet-smelling flowers, including some 2,500 rose bushes that'll make your heart sing like a finch in springtime. These verdant grounds are perfect for a family amble, even with a little sprout and a four-legged companion in tow – yes, dogs are welcome in the gardens and zoo, provided they're on a leash and you fork over a modest fee. There are playgrounds for the youngsters to frolic in, and if you fancy a bite amidst nature's grandeur, the riverbank offers a splendid spot for a picnic, making it a perfect spot for folks who appreciate natural monuments and beautiful surroundings.

And just when you think you've seen it all, Herberstein throws another surprise your way: its very own Wildlife Park. This ain't no ordinary zoo, folks, it's a journey around the globe in a single afternoon. Started way back in the 17th century with a few fallow deer, it blossomed into a public zoo in the 20th century, now showcasing over 130 species from every corner of the Earth. They even boast the largest cheetah park in Europe, which is faster than a politician changing his mind! For those with a hankering for culture beyond critters and roses, the Gironcoli Museum, housed within the castle complex, displays the fascinating works of the important 20th-century sculptor Bruno Gironcoli, a curious blend of old-world charm and modern artistic expression. So whether your fancy leans towards Gothic nooks, Renaissance grandeur, Baroque flourishes, a wild safari, or simply a spot for a good picnic, Herberstein serves it up with a generous helping of charm and history.



#### **Did You Know?**

- Herberstein Castle has been continuously owned by the same family for 21 generations.
- In the 17th and 18th centuries, the powerful Counts of Herberstein controlled approximately one-fifth of Styria.
- The Herberstein Wildlife Park, now home to over 130 animal species, originated in the 17th century with fallow deer brought from Italy.
- The castle is a remarkable architectural fusion, showcasing Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque styles.
- Within the castle grounds, visitors can explore the Gironcoli Museum, dedicated to the works of influential 20th-century Austrian sculptor Bruno Gironcoli.

# Q Riddle Rally

- 1. I cling to a rock, hidden from afar, but my oldest stones date back to the late 13th century. Which fortified Austrian dwelling am !?
- 2. My name suggests a floral bounty, and indeed, my historical grounds boast hundreds

- of these fragrant beauties. What kind of castle am I?
- 3. Within my expansive grounds, you'll find creatures from across five continents. Which part of Herberstein is famous for having Europe's largest area dedicated to cheetahs?
- 4. Though my grand halls recall centuries of noble life, a modern art museum dedicated to a 20th-century sculptor resides within my domain. Who is this artist?
- 5. I offer playgrounds for the little ones and ample space for four-legged friends on a leash, though my innermost historical chambers are off-limits to them. What dual attraction am I?

#### **Image Notes**

- Schloss Herberstein. From Zeitblick, 2013, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schloss\_Herberstein.JPG (CC BY-SA 3.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0))
- 2. Gärtnerhaus Herberstein 01. From Liuthalas, 2019, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gärtnerhaus\_Herberstein\_01.jpg (CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0))

# **POI-05: Neuhaus Castle (exterior view)**



# At a Glance

Туре	Historic Castle Ruin
Location (Lat Lon)	<u>47.2515, 15.8118</u>
Recommended Duration	1-1.5 hours
Best Time to Visit	Late morning or early afternoon for optimal light and clear views
WC Facilities	Not explicitly specified for exterior view, likely available in nearby villages.

## Need to know

Parking	Limited direct parking, likely roadside or designated area nearby.
Accessibility	Uneven terrain possible due to the nature of a renovated ruin; stroller accessibility may be limited on some paths. Exercise caution with a child.

Kid Dog Friendly	✓ Yes, excellent for walks around the exterior grounds and enjoying views. Dogs must be kept on a leash.
Picnic Spots	Abundant scenic spots in the surrounding Feistritz Gorge and Stubenberg basin offer ideal picnic locations.

# Images



See note 1



See note 2



See note 3

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## **History & Highlights**

Now, hold on a minute, folks, and let me spin you a yarn about Neuhaus Castle—not some fancy-pants, perfectly preserved palace, mind you, but a proper old Styrian survivor. Perched up high above the Feistritz Gorge like an eagle on a crag, this old fort has seen more sunrises and sunsets than a centenarian tortoise. It stands there, a magnificent sentinel, offering panoramas that could make a painter weep with joy—stretching across the Stubenberg basin, over to southern Burgenland, and if the air's clear enough, you might even catch a glimpse of Graz and the distant Alps. It's the sort of place that tells you a story without uttering a single

word, just by the sheer stubbornness of its stone.

This venerable pile first saw the light of day in the mid-14th century, put up by the Stubenberg family, who I reckon knew a thing or two about picking a prime piece of real estate. It weathered a mighty fire in 1551, then got itself reinforced in the 17th century when those pesky Turks and Kurucs were causing a ruckus. But time, as it always does, played its own tricks. Around 1800, a bolt of lightning, swift and unforgiving, turned a good chunk of it into a ruin, and for two centuries, it just sat there, contemplating its past glory. But lo and behold, the Vetter von der Lilie family, bless their determined hearts, decided it was high time to bring it back from the brink. They've been toiling away for some thirty years, and what you see today, especially that towering medieval keep, standing 32 meters tall, is a testament to their grit—they say it might just be the oldest high-rise in all of Styria!

So, while you can't go traipsing through the interior, a stroll around the castle's venerable exterior is mighty fine for the soul, and for those little ones and furry companions of yours. The wide-open spaces and the jaw-dropping views make for a perfect ramble, giving your two-year-old space to toddle and your large dog room to sniff out every historical scent. Just imagine unrolling a picnic blanket somewhere in the scenic surroundings of the Feistritz Gorge, with this old castle looking down on you like a wise old patriarch. It's a place where history and nature shake hands, offering plenty of fresh air and grand vistas for a family looking for a bit of accessible adventure without overly long journeys. This isn't just a castle; it's a chapter of history etched in stone, waiting for you to admire its enduring spirit.



#### **Did You Know?**

- Neuhaus Castle (Styria) was originally built by the Stubenberg family in the mid-14th century.
- It suffered a significant fire in 1551 but was rebuilt shortly after.
- The castle was reinforced in the 17th century due to threats from the Ottoman Turks and Kurucs.
- Around 1800, a lightning strike caused a major fire, leaving the castle largely in ruins for two centuries.
- Its medieval tower house, standing 32 meters high, is considered perhaps the oldest high-rise building in Styria.

# Q Riddle Rally

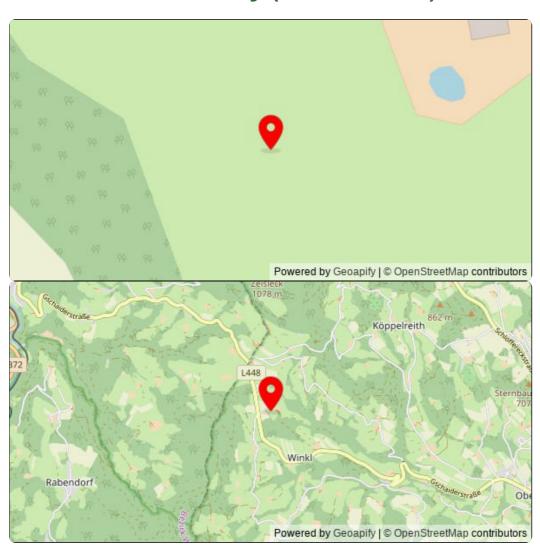
- 1. I stand tall where I was once a ruin, rebuilt with mighty stone. What force from the heavens once brought me low around 1800?
- 2. I offer grand views of a basin and a lake, from my perch above a gorge. What is the name of the gorge below me, famed for its narrow beauty?
- 3. My tallest part reaches 32 meters, a 'high-rise' of old. What noble family began my construction in the 14th century?
- 4. Though I once defended against Turks, my decay was long and slow. What family has dedicated three decades to my painstaking restoration?
- 5. You can't go inside my ancient walls, but you can see a vast stretch of land. Which major Styrian city might you spot on a clear day, westward from my view?

### **Image Notes**

- 1. AT Steiermark Burg Neuhaus Panorama-2. From Thomas Wozniak, 2018, Wikimedia
  - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AT\_Steiermark\_Burg\_Neuhaus\_Panorama-2.jpg (CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0))
- Burg Neuhaus Styria TdD 01. From Nxr-at, 2018, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Burg\_Neuhaus\_Styria\_TdD\_01.jpg (CC BY-SA

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  3. Burg Neuhaus 2. From Zeitblick, 2013, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Burg\_Neuhaus\_2.jpg (CC BY-SA 3.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0))

# POI-06: Pöllau Valley (scenic drive)



# At a Glance

Туре	Nature Park / Scenic Route
Location (Lat Lon)	<u>47.3333, 15.75</u>
Recommended Duration	2-4 hours (flexible)
Best Time to Visit	Spring (blooming orchards) or Autumn (harvest, Hirschbirne)
WC Facilities	Available at various villages and eateries along the route

## **Need to know**

Parking	Ample parking in villages and designated viewpoints
Accessibility	Primarily by car; gentle walks and picnic spots are accessible
Kid Dog Friendly	✓ □ Excellent – plenty of outdoor space and gentle activities
Picnic Spots	Numerous idyllic spots among orchards and meadows

Food Options	Local inns, coffee houses with outdoor seating, organic farm shops offering regional specialties	
Flexibility Notes	Program easily adaptable to weather; short, leisurely drives are ideal for families with young children.	

# Images



See note 1



See note 2



#### History & Highlights

Well now, gather 'round, and let me spin you a yarn about the Pöllau Valley, a slice of Eastern Styria so agreeable it'll make a body think twice about ever leaving. It ain't one of those grand, jaw-dropping canyons that yell for attention, no sir. This valley's got a guieter charm, like a kindly old aunt who always has a fresh-baked pie cooling on the windowsill. It's a Nature Park, you see, since '83, which means folks here have been mighty careful to keep it looking as pretty as a new dime, with nary a hair out of place.

Your journey here is less about a single monument and more about the sweet, winding road itself. Imagine a canvas painted with every shade of green, where gentle hills roll like a sleepy ocean and orchards dot the landscape like sprinkles on a grand cake. It's a place where the air smells of blooming pear trees in spring and promises of a bountiful harvest in autumn - the kind of drive that makes a two-year-old snooze soundly in the back, and a good dog sigh contentedly from the passenger seat. There's nary a harsh turn or a jarring view, just a smooth, harmonious flow that calms the very soul.

Now, when you're touring with a wee bairn and a four-legged companion, the Pöllau Valley is a proper godsend. This isn't one of those places that demands you hike up a mountain before breakfast. Instead, it invites you to take your time, stretch your legs in a sun-dappled orchard, or find a perfect little spot for a picnic, where the only critics of your sandwiches will be the contented chirping of birds. The trails here are more like meandering strolls than strenuous treks, perfect for little legs and paws that prefer a good sniff over a steep climb.

The heart of this valley, so to speak, beats to the rhythm of the 'Hirschbirne' pear, a local celebrity if ever there was one. This gnarly old Styrian pear variety is more than just a fruit; it's the very soul of the landscape, standing proud in orchards and transforming into everything from fine brandies to luscious juices and jams. You'll see these stout trees, looking like wizened old philosophers, scattered across the hills, particularly come May when their little white flowers, with their fetching carmine-red stamens, make for a picture postcard sight.

And speaking of sights, this scenic drive offers up views that are as varied as a politician's promises, but a heap more honest. From the quiet stretches where only the wind whispers through the pear leaves to elevated points that give you a panoramic sweep of the entire valley, it's a constant feast for the eyes. This landscape, a mix of forests, meadows, fields, and those beloved fruit trees, shifts and changes like a grand tapestry, always inviting you to pause and take a deeper breath.

Should your stomach begin to rumble louder than a distant thunder, fear not! The Pöllau Valley

is dotted with friendly inns and coffee houses, many boasting outdoor seating perfect for keeping an eye on a restless toddler or a napping dog. Here, home-style cooking reigns supreme, serving up hearty, authentic Styrian dishes that'll stick to your ribs and warm your spirit. Think of it as soul food for the road-weary traveler, often made with ingredients grown just a stone's throw away.

The valley itself is a testament to the old-fashioned notion of 'protection through use,' where traditional agriculture works hand-in-glove with nature conservation. It's a living, breathing example of how humans and the good earth can get along, producing both stunning vistas and delicious sustenance. And if you're a history buff, don't imagine this valley is just pretty faces and pears; the Pilgrimage Church of Pöllauberg, a significant High Gothic masterpiece, stands sentinel nearby, a reminder of centuries past.

So, whether the sun's shining like a gold coin or the clouds are gathering for a quiet contemplation, this scenic drive offers flexibility that's as welcome as a cool breeze on a hot day. You can make it a quick ramble or a leisurely all-day affair, stopping whenever the mood strikes to picnic, explore a charming village like Pöllau, or simply soak in the tranquil beauty. It's an antidote to the hustle and bustle, a gentle invitation to simply be, surrounded by natural splendor.

In essence, the Pöllau Valley isn't just a route; it's an experience, a slow dance with nature and tradition that'll leave you refreshed and a little bit wiser about the simple, profound joys of life. It's got enough history, natural beauty, and good grub to please any traveler, from the smallest adventurer to the most seasoned explorer, and even a discerning dog. You might just find yourself wishing you could pack this whole valley up and take it home with you.



#### **Did You Know?**

- The Pöllau Valley has been officially designated as a Nature Park since 1983, highlighting its unique landscape and commitment to conservation.
- The region is renowned for the 'Pöllauer Hirschbirne' pear, an old Styrian pear variety that is a flagship product and protected by a PDO quality seal since 2015.
- The name 'Hirschbirne' (deer pear) actually comes from 'Herbst' (autumn), referring to its late harvest time in mid-October.
- The Nature Park Pöllau Valley boasts over 180 kilometers of well-maintained circular hiking trails suitable for various fitness levels, including family-friendly routes.
- The Pöllau Valley is home to 'natural jewels' such as the Pikeroifelsen Pöllauberg and the Schönauklamm gorge, highlighting particularly species-rich habitats.

## **Q** Riddle Rally

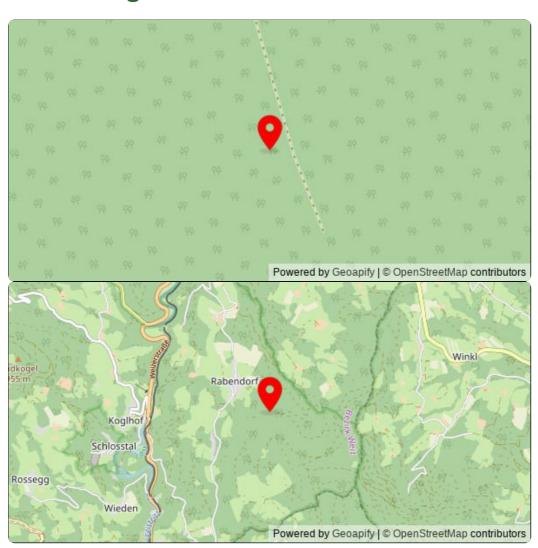
- 1. I'm a pear that lends my name to the valley's pride, but my true origin is autumn, where secrets I hide. What am I?
- 2. This valley's beauty earned a special title in '83, making it a place of nature, for all to see. What honor was bestowed upon it?
- 3. You'll find me in orchards, standing tall and old, my little white flowers a sight to behold. What kind of tree am I, a valley's treasure?
- 4. When hunger strikes and a good meal's your quest, I offer outdoor seating and homestyle cooking, putting your taste buds to the test. What kind of establishment am I?
- 5. I'm not a single mountain, but a winding way, revealing a diverse landscape day by day. What type of attraction am I in the Pöllau Valley?

#### **Image Notes**

 Steiermark Poellauer Tal 2. From Marion Schneider & Christoph Aistleitner, 2006, Wikimedia Commons.

- https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Steiermark\_Poellauer\_Tal\_2.jpg (CC BY-SA 2.5 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5))
- 2. Pöllauberg Kirche (0). From C.Stadler/Bwag, 2021, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:P%C3%B6llauberg\_-\_Kirche\_(0).JPG (CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0))

# POI-07: Parish and Pilgrimage Church of Pöllauberg



## At a Glance

Туре	Pilgrimage Church
Location (Lat Lon)	<u>47.3197, 15.7171</u>
Recommended Duration	45–60 min
Best Time to Visit	Late morning or early afternoon for best light and views
WC Facilities	In nearby village facilities or local eateries

Parking	Available nearby at designated areas
Accessibility	Partially accessible; interior may have steps, outer areas and themed gardens are generally stroller-friendly.

Kid Dog Friendly	Dogs are generally welcome in outdoor areas, including the themed gardens and walking paths, but are typically not permitted inside the church itself. A toddler can enjoy the surrounding green spaces, but the church interior might be a short visit.
Picnic Spots	Ample green spaces and benches within the themed gardens surrounding the church offer charming picnic opportunities.
Coffee Houses	Local establishments in Pöllauberg or nearby Pöllau offer traditional Styrian home-style cooking and coffee houses with outdoor seating.

## Images



See note 1



See note 2



See note 3

#### **History & Highlights**

Well now, gather 'round, folks, and let Uncle Mark tell you a tale about a spot in Eastern Styria that's as grand as a steamboat on a smooth river: the Parish and Pilgrimage Church of Pöllauberg. Perched high on a spur of the Masenberg Mountain, at a respectable 752 meters above sea level, this venerable edifice isn't just a church; it's what they call the 'sun and view terrace of Eastern Styria.' And let me tell you, it earns that title with views that stretch out like a generous yawn across the whole eastern Styrian hill country, all the way to Slovenia and even into the Hungarian plains. You'll feel like you're standing on the top of the world, or at least a

mighty fine chunk of it.

This magnificent High Gothic structure, one of the most splendid in all of Styria, started its journey around the mid-14th century, with construction running from about 1339 to 1377. It was founded by none other than Katharina von Stubenberg, who clearly had an eye for putting important places in truly inspiring spots. The very first whisper of devotion here, however, dates back even further, to around 1160, when folks began venerating an image of the Virgin Mary at a local spring. Imagine, nearly a millennium of piety bubbling up from that ground! While the original design was a marvel of Gothic architecture, time, like a persistent housepainter, added its own touches. The Gothic bell tower, for instance, had a rather electrifying encounter with lightning in 1674 and was subsequently replaced with a Baroque one in 1678, with a tower dome added in 1744. So, you've got a bit of that grand old Gothic solemnity mixed with a dash of Baroque flourish, a real architectural gumbo.

This Pöllauberg church isn't just a pretty face; it's one of the oldest and most significant pilgrimage sites in Styria, drawing thousands of pilgrims each year, as reliably as a river flows to the sea. The pilgrimage truly picked up steam in the 15th century, with letters of indulgence and a lively atmosphere around the church, where pilgrims would congregate, perhaps enjoying a bit of local refreshment after their spiritual journey. And speaking of journeys, you'll find it nestles charmingly within the Pöllauer Tal Nature Park, a region renowned for its natural beauty and culinary delights, especially the 'Hirschbirne' (autumn pear). The village of Pöllauberg itself has been awarded the 'Most beautiful flower village' multiple times and was even named the 'Most beautiful spot of Styria' in 2009. So, not only will your soul feel uplifted by the history and architecture, but your eyes will be delighted by the sheer prettiness of the place, and your stomach, well, that's another story, best told at a local pub.



#### **Did You Know?**

- The Parish and Pilgrimage Church of Pöllauberg is considered one of the most magnificent High Gothic churches in all of Styria.
- The pilgrimage tradition at Pöllauberg dates back to approximately 1160, with the veneration of a Marian image at a local spring.
- The church was founded by Katharina von Stubenberg, a significant figure in its early development.
- Pöllauberg has been repeatedly honored as the 'Most beautiful flower village' and was even dubbed the 'Most beautiful spot of Styria' in 2009.
- The original Gothic bell tower was struck by lightning in 1674 and subsequently replaced with a Baroque tower in 1678.

## Q Riddle Rally

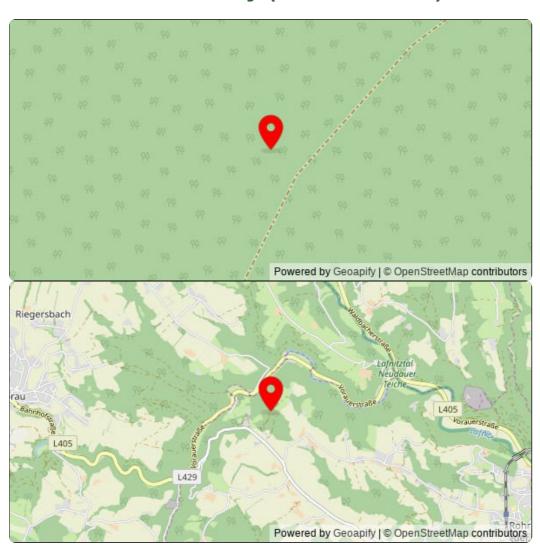
- 1. I stand high, gazing far, a jewel of Gothic art. My founder, a noble lady, gave me my start. What is my name?
- 2. A 12th-century whisper, a spring's gentle plea, sparked the devotion that grew round me. What early belief is tied to my sacred ground?
- 3. My tower once touched the sky, a Gothic spire proud and tall, but a flash from above brought about its fall. What natural force caused my change?
- 4. I'm not just a church, but a canvas of green, praised for my blooms, a beautiful scene. What special title does my village often glean?
- 5. From my elevated perch, you see plains so wide, Styria, Slovenia, where landscapes collide. What panoramic distinction do I proudly bear?

#### **Image Notes**

 Pöllauberg - Kirche (0). From C.Stadler/Bwag, 2021, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pöllauberg - Kirche (0).JPG (CC BY-SA 4.0

- (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0))
- 2. Maria Pöllauberg interior. From Herzi Pinki, 2008, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maria\_Pöllauberg\_-\_interior.jpg (CC BY-SA 3.0 at (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/at/deed.en))
- 3. Pöllauberg Wallfahrtskirche Pöllauberg 2022 09 12-7b. From Ewald Ehtreiber, 2022, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pöllauberg\_-\_Wallfahrtskirche\_Pöllauberg\_-\_2022\_09\_12-7b.jpg (CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0))

## POI-08: Vorau Abbey (exterior view)



## At a Glance

Туре	Historic Abbey
Location (Lat Lon)	<u>47.4042, 15.9392</u>
Recommended Duration	1-1.5 hours (exterior exploration)
Best Time to Visit	Any time, flexible for weather; mornings for good light.
WC Facilities	Public restrooms are available within the abbey complex, open 24/7.

Parking	Ample free parking is available directly at the monastery.
Accessibility	The exterior grounds and courtyard are generally accessible, though some paths may be uneven. Internal tours may involve stairs, but for an exterior focus, it's manageable.

Kid Dog Friendly	✓ Yes. Dogs on leash are welcome on the abbey grounds and outdoor areas. A 2-year-old will enjoy the open space and perhaps a short walk around the perimeter.
Picnic Spots	The expansive abbey grounds offer pleasant spots for a spontaneous picnic. For a more formal bite, consider the Stiftstaverne in the inner courtyard or other local eateries in Vorau offering home-style cooking.

## Images



See note 1



See note 2



See note 3

## ★ History & Highlights

Well now, gather 'round, because if there's one thing old Austria knows how to do, it's stack stones with conviction and then keep stacking 'em for centuries, often with a fresh coat of paint and a new architectural fashion. And nowhere is this stubborn devotion to grandeur more evident than at Vorau Abbey. This venerable establishment, perched majestically on a broad hill between the Wechsel massif and the Masenberg, ain't just a building; it's a living, breathing history book, even when you're just admiring its stout exterior.

Imagine, if you will, the year 1163. That's when Margrave Ottokar III of Styria, a man clearly thankful for the arrival of his son and heir, decided to plant this spiritual seed. He handed over these lands to Archbishop Eberhard I of Salzburg, and before you could say 'Amen,' the Augustinian Canons Regular had set up shop. Mind you, Styria back then was a bit like a rowdy frontier town — constant invasions from Hungarians, Slovenes, and Turks meant this monastery had to be more than just a place of prayer; it had to be a fortress.

And a fortress it became! By 1458, they'd walled it in tighter than a drum, complete with defensive features like a moat and iron bars at the entrance. Why, this old abbey boasts a grand total of 15 towers, more than any other monastery in Austria! Just picture the locals, scurrying inside those sturdy walls when trouble came knocking, finding refuge in the very heart of their spiritual home. It's a testament to good, solid bricklaying and a healthy dose of determination.

Now, when you gaze upon its façade today, you'll be treated to a vision of uniform Baroque splendor. It's like the 18th century rolled in, tipped its hat, and said, 'Let's make this place fancy!' But don't let the Baroque trimmings fool you; this beauty has seen many a facelift. After a rather spirited fire in 1237, the first Romanesque church was rebuilt. Then came the Gothic era, adding its own elegant touches.

But the big transformation, the one that gives it its current distinguished look, happened between 1660 and 1662. A Swiss architect named Domenico Sciassia got his hands on it, tearing down the old Gothic basilica, but wisely kept those medieval towers standing – a nod to the past peeking through the newfangled Baroque. Then, around 1700, Matthias Steinl, an imperial engineer, gave it the final Viennese High Baroque flourish.

From the outside, you'll marvel at the sheer scale and harmonious design, a magnificent blend of centuries of ambition. Even from a distance, the towers stand sentinel, silent witnesses to a rich and sometimes tumultuous past. It's the kind of architecture that makes you want to sit on a bench, sip some local brew, and conjure up images of monks bustling about their daily duties, perhaps wondering if they ever snuck a little apple strudel after evening prayers.

While the full glories of the interior, with its opulent frescoes, lavish gilding, and the famed 'Höllensturz' (Descent into Hell) in the sacristy, require a guided tour, the exterior itself offers a profound sense of history. There's a certain quiet dignity about these ancient stones that whispers tales of perseverance, faith, and the enduring spirit of Styria.

For our traveling party, with a lively 2-year-old and a loyal canine companion, the abbey's exterior is an ideal spot. The open grounds around the monastery allow for a pleasant stroll, giving your little one space to stretch those legs and your dog to sniff out all the important news from the local squirrels. The Chorherrenweg, a family-friendly circuit around the abbey walls, is perfect for a leisurely walk.

After soaking in centuries of history, you might fancy a delightful picnic on the monastery's green lawns, or if the weather turns a bit grumpy, seek out a cozy coffee house or a traditional Styrian pub nearby. Many offer outdoor seating, providing a comfortable spot to savor some home-style cooking while keeping an eye on your little adventurer and your furry friend. Vorau Abbey stands ready to impress, a true jewel in the crown of Eastern Styria, waiting to unfold its story, one impressive stone at a time.



#### **Did You Know?**

- Vorau Abbey was founded in 1163 by Margrave Ottokar III of Styria as a gesture of gratitude for the birth of his son.
- It boasts 15 towers, more than any other monastery in Austria, a testament to its long history as a fortified bulwark against invasions.
- The collegiate church, while largely Baroque today, originally began as a Romanesque structure after a fire in 1237, and later incorporated Gothic elements before its 17th-century rebuild.
- The abbey's library holds a world-renowned collection, including the 'Vorau Folk Bible,' a UNESCO cultural heritage site, and the oldest collection of Middle High German poems.
- The sacristy within the abbey is famous for its impressive frescoes, particularly the dramatic 'Höllensturz' (Descent into Hell), painted by Johann Cyriak Hackhofer.

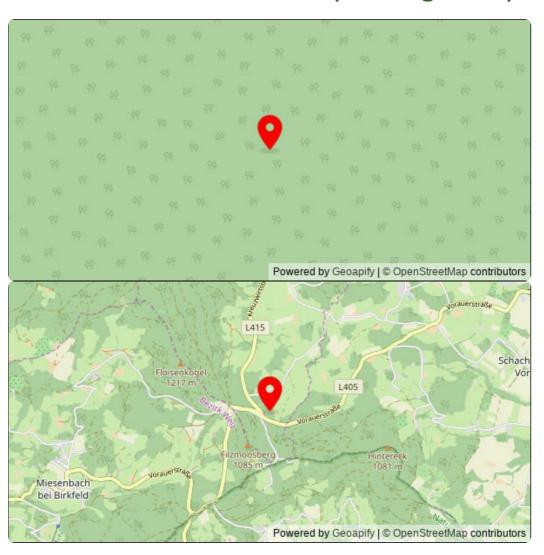
## Q Riddle Rally

- 1. I was built for thanks, a sanctuary grand, with walls to protect this Styrian land. What year did my foundation first begin?
- 2. More towers than any other Austrian cloister claim, I stood strong through many a hostile game. How many sentinels guard my historic fame?
- 3. My church wore Romanesque, then Gothic dress, but a grander style brought Baroque success. What architectural fashion reigns supreme outside today?
- 4. Deep in my heart, a treasure lies untold, a famous Bible, stories of old. What UNESCO cultural heritage is found within my learned halls?
- 5. A local painter, with brush and wit, depicted scenes of hell, a masterpiece quite fit. Who frescoed my sacristy walls with such a fright?

#### **Image Notes**

- Vorau 294A0009 Styria. From Christian Pirkl, 2024, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vorau\_294A0009\_Styria.jpg (CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0))
- 2. Stift Vorau Interior 02. From Nxr-at, 2019, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stift\_Vorau\_Interior\_02.JPG (CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0))
- 3. Stift Vorau, sacristy ceiling. From Schobelix, 2013, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stift\_Vorau,\_sacristy\_ceiling.jpg (CC BY-SA 3.0 at (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/at/deed.en))

## POI-09: Rabenwald Forest (walking trails)



## At a Glance

Туре	Natural Monument / Walking Trails
Location (Lat Lon)	<u>47.38, 15.8</u>
Recommended Duration	Flexible, from short strolls (1-2 hours) to half-day hikes (3-4 hours)
Best Time to Visit	Year-round, with spring blossoms and autumn colors being particularly enchanting.
WC Facilities	Available in nearby towns like Pöllau or Anger; limited facilities directly on trails.

Parking	Designated parking areas are available at various trailheads.
Accessibility	Trails vary in terrain; while some sections are gentle and suitable for carriers or sturdy strollers, many paths involve uneven surfaces and inclines. Choose shorter, well-maintained loops for easier access.

Kid Dog Friendly	✓ □ Yes, highly recommended for families and dogs. There are family-friendly trails, such as sections of the Hirschbirn hiking trail, perfect for a toddler and a leashed dog. Remember to keep dogs leashed as per forest regulations.
Picnic Spots	Abundant, with numerous scenic clearings and charming orchards within the Pöllauer Tal Nature Park offering ideal spots for a delightful family picnic.



#### m History & Highlights

Well now, listen close, and I'll spin you a yarn about the Rabenwald Forest, a genuine jewel nestled in the bosom of Eastern Styria, often hailed as the 'Green Heart of Austria'. This ain't just any patch of timber; it's a place where Mother Nature puts on her finest gown, adorned with every shade of green you ever did see. Situated within the grand embrace of the Pöllauer Tal Nature Park, this forest offers a quiet majesty, a reprieve from the hurly-burly, and a whole heap of fascinating tales etched into its ancient trees and very earth.

You see, this here Pöllauer Tal, spanning a generous 124 square kilometers, is a diverse landscape, a veritable tapestry woven with gentle hills that roll like an old man's chuckle, and orchards bursting with life. A stroll through Rabenwald is like stepping into a peaceful, leafy cathedral, where the only sermons you'll hear are whispered by the wind through the branches and chirped by the forest's unseen inhabitants. It's a place where a fellow can stretch his legs, fill his lungs with honest-to-goodness fresh air, and feel the dust of civilization brush right off his boots.

For those of you with little tykes and faithful hounds in tow, fear not a minute! While some trails in these parts can test the mettle of a seasoned hiker—like the 'Hirschbirn hiking trail' with its impressive 12.4 km stretch and 4 hours of wandering-there are plenty of shorter, more leisurely loops that are just the ticket for a two-year-old and a rambunctious dog. These paths, often labeled 'family-friendly', are designed for ambling, for sniffing out new smells, and for discovering the world at a child's pace, with every fallen leaf and crooked root a grand adventure.

Now, if you're a connoisseur of nature's artistry, the Rabenwald won't disappoint. The Pöllauer Tal Nature Park is a treasure trove of biodiversity, boasting species-rich orchards that are home to peculiar birds like the little owl and the hoppoe. The forests themselves are a botanical marvel, with common Styrian trees such as European beech, sycamore, and various pines standing tall, their ancient roots delving deep into the earth. Keep your eyes peeled, and you might spot a rare orchid peeking from the undergrowth or even glimpse the elusive hazel grouse.

But here's where the story takes an unexpected turn, a wrinkle in time, if you will. This tranquil forest, with its gentle slopes and rustling leaves, holds a secret beneath its verdant carpet: a history of industry. Rabenwald sits atop one of the largest talc deposits in all of Europe. Talc, that softest of minerals, was once considered 'white gold' or 'feather white' by the local populace, a treasure dug from the very ground.

Imagine, if you will, the bustling scene centuries ago. As far back as the 9th century, this 'white gold' from Rabenwald was being hauled along old Roman salt roads all the way to Venice, destined for the construction of furnaces. Then, in 1809, humble farmers began scratching at 'talc outcrops' on their land. By the turn of the 20th century, the mining had gone underground, creating countless tunnels through the hard labor of the 'shift workers' who would trek up from the valley at ungodly hours, their lanterns bobbing in the pre-dawn gloom.

Today, the underground mining has largely ceased, replaced by open-pit operations, but the land itself bears witness to this industrious past. The good folks here, however, are as keen on conservation as they are on enterprise. They've made a remarkable effort to re-cultivate the excavated areas, replanting over 190,000 trees to blend the industrial scars back into the natural landscape, proving that even a miner's hand can eventually work in harmony with nature's.

So, whether you're chasing the sunbeams through the canopy, listening to the gentle murmur of a hidden stream, or simply finding a perfect spot under a 'Hirschbirne' pear tree for a picnic, Rabenwald Forest offers a flexible escape. Its varied program adapts kindly to the whims of the weather, allowing for anything from a brisk morning walk to a languid afternoon spent communing with nature. And when your wanderings are done, delightful local taverns and wine houses nearby offer a chance to sample some home-style cooking, the perfect end to a day well spent.

In short, Rabenwald Forest isn't just a collection of trees and trails; it's a living storybook, with chapters on ancient earth, human endeavor, and the enduring beauty of the natural world. It invites you, your little ones, and even your four-legged companion to turn its pages and discover a piece of Styria's authentic heart.



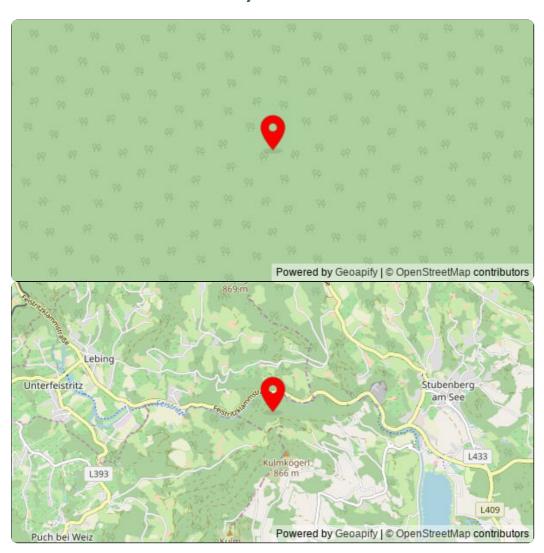
#### **Did You Know?**

- Rabenwald Forest sits atop one of the largest talc deposits in all of Europe.
- Talc from Rabenwald was traded as early as the 9th century and transported on Roman salt roads all the way to Venice.
- The Pöllauer Tal Nature Park, which encompasses Rabenwald Forest, is famously known as the home of the unique 'Hirschbirne' pear variety.
- Styria, often called the 'Green Heart of Austria', is the country's most densely forested province, with nearly 63% of its land covered by forests.
- Modern mining operations in Rabenwald include significant re-cultivation efforts, with over 190,000 trees having been planted to restore the landscape.

## Q Riddle Rally

- 1. I'm softer than powder, yet built old ovens with might. What ancient treasure hides in Rabenwald's light?
- 2. I lead you through orchards and forests so grand, named for an autumn fruit, plucked by hand. What family-friendly path winds through this land?
- 3. This forest, they call me the 'Green Heart' of Austria, a title I wear with pride. What percentage of this Styrian land do my leafy comrades hide?
- 4. From my depths came 'white gold', carried far and wide, on ancient Roman roads, where merchants would stride. What city was my distant Venetian bride?
- 5. I hop and I hoot, a feathered friend in these trees, sharing the orchards with pears and the breeze. Who am I, small and wise, if you please?

## POI-10: Apfelland Scenic Viewpoint (e.g., near Puch bei Weiz)



## At a Glance

Туре	Scenic Viewpoint
Location (Lat Lon)	<u>47.2415, 15.7672</u>
Recommended Duration	45-60 min
Best Time to Visit	Late afternoon for golden light, or a clear morning for crisp views
WC Facilities	No dedicated facilities; available in nearby Puch bei Weiz

Parking	Limited roadside parking or small designated areas; inquire locally in Puch bei Weiz.
Accessibility	Generally accessible paths around the viewpoint; some gentle slopes may be present. Stroller-friendly for views, but specific trails might vary.

Kid Dog Friendly	✓ Yes. Excellent for a family with a 2-year-old, offering open space and beautiful views. Dogs are welcome but must be kept on a leash to respect local agriculture and other visitors. Please remember poop bags.	
Picnic Spots	Absolutely! This is an ideal spot for a picnic, especially at a place like the Hochgartl in Puch bei Weiz, with breathtaking views of the orchards.	

## Images



See note 1



See note 2



See note 3



#### History & Highlights

Well now, folks, if you've been meandering through Eastern Styria, dodgin' historical markers and ancient stones, you'll reach a point where the very air smells of sunshine and promise, and that's the Apfelland. It's here, near the charming village of Puch bei Weiz, that you stumble upon a scenic viewpoint, not unlike finding a perfectly ripe apple hanging just within reach. It ain't a grand mountain peak, mind you, but a gentle rise that offers a vista so wholesome, it'll make your soul feel like it just had a good, honest breakfast.

This particular neck of the woods, known as the Apfelland-Stubenbergsee region, boasts the title of Austria's largest orchard, and let me tell you, it lives up to the billing. From this vantage point, the landscape unfolds like a patchwork quilt of green and gold, dotted with countless apple trees stretching to the horizon. It's a sight that whispers tales of industrious farmers, of sun-drenched days, and of the simple, unadulterated joy of a crisp, Styrian apple.

The view itself is a balm for the weary traveler's eye. You'll see the gentle undulations of the Eastern Styrian hills, the neat rows of orchards, and perhaps the glint of distant waterways. It's a place where the eye can stretch itself out and wander, unfettered by grand structures or bustling cities. Just nature, doing its humble best to impress, and succeeding admirably, I might add.

Now, they say the apples from this very region have a special something to 'em, an intense aroma you won't find just anywhere. That's thanks to the unique climate around Puch, where the warm days and cool nights conspire to give these fruits their legendary flavor. So, when you're standing up here, breathing in that clean country air, just remember you're in the very heart of apple paradise, where three out of four Styrian apples get their start.

For families with a little one in tow, like your two-year-old, this viewpoint is a godsend. It's not some arduous climb that'll have your toddler demanding piggyback rides five minutes in. Instead, it's an easy, accessible stop where the little sprout can stretch their legs, point at the trees, and maybe even get a whiff of that apple-scented air. It's a moment of gentle tranquility for all concerned.

And speaking of tranquility, this spot is practically begging for a picnic. Imagine spreading out a blanket amidst this scenic beauty, a basket overflowing with local delights. You can find some fine home-style cooking nearby, perhaps even some apple strudel or a bottle of regional cider. It's the kind of place where a sandwich tastes like a gourmet meal, simply because of the company and the view.

Even your loyal canine companion will appreciate a stretch of the legs here. While they won't be chasing squirrels up apple trees (we insist on leashes, mind you, for the sake of the orchards and fellow travelers), the open air and new scents will be a welcome change from the confines of a car. Remember to keep Fido on a leash and carry those indispensable little bags – we aim to keep this paradise pristine for generations to come.

It's moments like these, simple and unadorned, that truly stick in the memory. You don't need a grand cathedral or a roaring waterfall to feel a sense of wonder. Sometimes, it's just a quiet hilltop in the middle of an apple orchard, where the sun shines warm and the world seems to make perfect sense. It's proof that beauty often hides in plain sight, waiting for a discerning eye to find it.

So, take your time, breathe it all in, and let the gentle rhythm of the Apfelland seep into your bones. This viewpoint isn't just a place to see; it's a place to feel. It's a little slice of Austrian charm, ripe for the picking, and a perfect reminder that sometimes, the best adventures are the quietest ones.



#### **Did You Know?**

- The Apfelland-Stubenbergsee region is proudly home to Austria's largest orchard.
- Puch bei Weiz, where this viewpoint is located, is often considered the heart of the Styrian Apple Road and the largest apple-growing community in the country.
- Nearby Kulm, also known as the 'Holy Rigi,' was a significant settlement for the Celts, with archaeological findings represented in the Kulmkeltendorf Celtic village.
- The famous Austrian writer Peter Rosegger once described his visit to the apple village (Puch) as 'A journey into paradise'.
- The 'Hochgartl' in Puch bei Weiz is a well-known spot explicitly recommended for picnicking with views over the apple gardens and the local church.

## Q Riddle Rally

- 1. I offer views of green and red, where Austria's biggest apple bed is spread. What am
- 2. What famous Austrian writer, upon visiting this apple village, called it a 'journey into paradise'?
- 3. Three out of four Styrian apples hail from near here, ripe and juicy, year after year. Which specific fruit am I praising?
- 4. You'll see a 'Holy Rigi' nearby, where ancient Celts once lived beneath the sky. What is this 'Rigi'?
- 5. I'm a beloved companion, with wagging tail and happy bark, but in these orchards, I must stay on a what?

#### **Image Notes**

- Puch bei Weiz Apfelland. From Nxr-at, 2020, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Puch\_bei\_Weiz\_Apfelland.jpg (CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0))
- 2. Kulm seen from Puch. From Herzi Pinki, 2008, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kulm\_seen\_from\_Puch.jpg (CC BY-SA 3.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0))
- 3. Kirchenanlage Puch. From Zeitblick, 2013, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kirchenanlage\_Puch.JPG (CC BY-SA 3.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0))

## **Q** Riddle Rally Answers

#### **Kulm Celtic Village**

- 1. One of the reconstructed Celtic huts
- 2. The Kulm mountain
- 3. A dwarf goat
- 4. A museum staff member in Celtic costume
- 5. A Celtic weapon

#### Hartberg City Centre (Hauptplatz)

- 1. The Stadtpfarrkirche St. Martin in Hartberg.
- 2. The Hartberger Karner (charnel house).
- 3. The Stadtpfarrkirche St. Martin, with its blend of architectural styles.
- 4. Hartberg City Centre (Hauptplatz), a 'Città Slow'.
- 5. An ossuary, a resting place for bones.

#### Stadtpfarrkirche St. Martin and Karner, Hartberg

- 1. The Stadtpfarrkirche St. Martin
- 2. The Karner (Ossuary)
- 3. 1467
- 4. The Karner (Ossuary)
- 5. Baroque

#### Herberstein Castle & Garden

- 1. Herberstein Castle
- 2. Garden Castle Herberstein (or Herberstein Castle & Garden)
- 3. Herberstein Wildlife Park/Zoo
- 4. Bruno Gironcoli
- 5. Herberstein Castle and Wildlife Park/Zoo

#### **Neuhaus Castle (exterior view)**

- 1. Lightning
- 2. Feistritz Gorge (Stubenbergklamm)
- 3. The Stubenberg family
- 4. The Vetter von der Lilie family
- 5. Graz

#### Pöllau Valley (scenic drive)

- 1. The Pöllauer Hirschbirne.
- 2. Nature Park.
- 3. A Hirschbirn tree (autumn pear tree).
- 4. A local inn or coffee house (Gasthaus/Café).
- 5. A scenic drive.

### Parish and Pilgrimage Church of Pöllauberg

- 1. The Parish and Pilgrimage Church of Pöllauberg
- 2. The veneration of a Marian image at a spring
- 3. Lightning
- 4. Most beautiful flower village

5. The 'sun and view terrace of Eastern Styria'

## **Vorau Abbey (exterior view)**

- 1. 1163
- 2. 15 towers
- 3. Baroque
- 4. The Vorau Folk Bible
- 5. Johann Cyriak Hackhofer

#### Rabenwald Forest (walking trails)

- 1. Talc
- 2. The Hirschbirnweg (Deer Pear Trail)
- 3. Almost 63%
- 4. Venice
- 5. The little owl or hoopoe

## Apfelland Scenic Viewpoint (e.g., near Puch bei Weiz)

- 1. Apfelland Scenic Viewpoint
- 2. Peter Rosegger
- 3. The apple
- 4. Kulm mountain
- 5. Leash