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## Lower Austria: the largest province in Austria

**Lower Austria is the largest province in Austria, covering an area of 19,172 km<sup>2</sup> or around one quarter of the total area of the country. The province has a correspondingly extensive and unmatched range of landscapes — from high Alps and deep mountain valleys to rolling hills and wide plains.**

Traces of human settlement dating back to the Upper Palaeolithic Period (40,000 to 10,000 years before the Christian era) have been found in the province. From the year 15 BC the Danube in Lower Austria formed part of the eastern limit of the Roman Empire. The province is also at the core of modern Austria. The word “Ostarrîchi”, from which the German word for Austria is derived, was the name given to a stretch of land south of the river Enns, which today forms part of the border between Lower Austria and Upper Austria.

Lower Austria is one of the oldest cultural regions in Central Europe: it was at the heart of the old Habsburg monarchy and has often been caught between conflicting political systems. As a result it is rich in cultural treasures, monuments, castles and palaces from many different eras. This cultural and artistic diversity is also reflected in the province’s traditional cuisine.

### **Main attractions in Lower Austria**

Lower Austria is a province for connoisseurs. The wine-growing tradition is cultivated here to an extent unparalleled elsewhere in Austria. This can be experienced and enjoyed particularly during the wine autumn in Lower Austria, where old wine-related customs are revived, popular festivals are dedicated to the fruit of the vine, and restaurants devote particular attention to the wine culture. A visit or longer sojourn in Lower Austria during this season will reap its own rewards.

Those interested primarily in culture can go on a voyage of discovery in Lower Austria. The province is full of historical buildings and monuments that keep the centuries-old culture alive. There is a greater concentration of museums (600 in all) in Lower Austria than in any other province. Some fifty villages organize festivals in the course of the year, and there are three parks with cultural themes.

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For those seeking rest and relaxation, there is a wealth of health spa facilities. Many of the numerous hot springs in a line to the south of Vienna were already used by the Romans. Sport and fitness enthusiasts are also well catered for. The province has over 4,200 km of signed cycle paths, the most popular of which is the Danube Cycle Path. Cyclists can enjoy the changing countryside as they follow the course of the Danube at their own leisurely pace.

### **Tourism in Lower Austria**

Tourism in Lower Austria has a long tradition thanks to the proximity of this Austrian federal province to Vienna, the capital city. Much has changed from the country outings of the Biedermeier period to the pleasure travel of today, but certain constants have remained. The landforms of Lower Austria are unmatched in Central Europe in terms of diversity. They fill visitors with awe and often encourage them to do outdoors activities. The rich cultural legacy – from Ancient Roman ruins to sumptuous baroque castles – and the appealing calendar of cultural events are one reason many people visit pay a visit to Lower Austria. And for all visitors, Lower Austria is considered a land of enjoyment with traditions of excellent wining and dining.

Lower Austria's main strength in tourism is certainly its diverse range of holiday offerings. Three attractions are on the **UNESCO World Heritage** list: the **Semmering Railroad**, **Dürrenstein** and the **Wachau Valley**. The Semmering Railroad was built more than 150 years ago and is still considered a masterpiece of Austrian engineering. The Wachau delights visitors from around the world with its combination of terraced vineyards, fruit orchards and picturesque towns, imposing monasteries, fortresses and ruins, magnificent views and vistas.

The choice of vacation ideas is virtually unlimited. It ranges from action-packed holidays hiking, cycling or golfing to feel-good outings at spas and health facilities, from pleasure trips to wineries or country inns to cultural explorations at the many exhibitions or stunning monasteries. And of course visitors can also experience nature firsthand at the national parks and nature reserves or on farms.

## The regions

Lower Austria comprises **six distinct regions**, each with its own individual charm and character.

- **Danube Region:** March-Donauland is flat and marshy. It is well irrigated by the Danube and is home of the Donau-Auen National Park, a primeval forest and protected habitat containing many rare animal species. The Wachau – Danube Valley and Nibelungengau provide a unique symbiosis of nature and culture. The sloping vineyards, which offer the setting for magnificent abbeys and palaces, were laid painstakingly stone by stone and today bear forth grapes that go to make the most exquisite wines.
- The **Mostviertel** extends from the fertile Danube plain to the foothills of the Alps. Throughout the region are to be found the pear trees whose fruits are used to make the distinctive cider (“Most”) which gives the region its name. Also of interest in this region is the Iron Road, a trade route lined with mills and forges on which the wealth of many towns was founded.
- The **Waldviertel** is a high plain in the far north of Austria. Moors, ponds, riverlands, rocking stones and mystical locations are characteristic of this region.
- The region between Vienna and the Czech Republic and Slovakia is known as the **Weinviertel**, on account of the vineyards and wine-growing villages to be found there. The many vestiges of prehistoric times that have been discovered in this region can also be viewed in a number of museums, and stunning panoramas can be enjoyed from the hilltops.
- Rax and Semmering, two prominent peaks on the northern edge of the Alps, are the focuses in **Vienna Alps**. They are also favourites among the Viennese and were a traditional and popular destination for society seeking to escape the summer stuffiness of the imperial city — as the many magnificent parks and country houses in the region testify.
- Rolling hills and sheer cliffs, dense deciduous forests, delightful meadows and mysterious wetlands are typical of the **Vienna Woods**. Apart from offering visitors



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a diversity of natural experiences, this province also contains cultural treasures and relics of the country's varied history. For centuries it has been a popular destination for visitors seeking rest and repose as well as those interested in culture and tradition.

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