



TRIP DOSSIER

AUSTRIA



'The St. Hemma Trail'

£450 per person (land only)

Single Supplement: £40

*Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, May to
October*

Grade: B

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Introduction

Traditional songs in Carinthia often sing the praises of the countryside and the friendly, good-natured people. You will soon see why when you walk along the old pilgrimage paths in Austria's southernmost province. A 'pilgrimage' translates as 'to go beyond your own limits'. Pilgrimages can be taken for any reason and inspire all types of travellers wanting a journey with meaning, perhaps finding the connection between nature and spirituality. They are currently enjoying an unprecedented renaissance and where better to take one than in Carinthia. Blessed with a sunny climate, the foothills of the Alps are ideal for exploring this region at a leisurely pace, discovering hidden treasures amongst the cultural landscape of Carinthia with its rich religious and traditional heritage.

On the restored Hemmaweg (St Hemma's Way) you will follow along 120 kilometres of old pilgrimage paths on what was once the regular Krain pilgrimage from Slovenia, over the Loibl Pass via Klagenfurt to Gurk. From the Loibl Valley you will cross into Carinthia on an ancient traders' route descending to the stunning Tschepaschlucht Gorge with its orchids and alpine flowers. On the other side of the River Drau, Celtic and Roman remains on Magdalensberg Hill provide an interesting insight into the province's history. Some of the area's best panoramic views can be found here as you make your way to Hochosterwitz, Austria's most famous fairytale castle, situated on a rocky peak towering over the Zolfeld plain. The Silber Stream on Krappfeld then guides you into the mystic mediaeval world of legends and through the Strassburg Nature Reserve before arriving at St Hemma's tomb in the crypt of Gurk cathedral, one of Austria's most important architectural monuments.

Daily walks are between 14 kilometres and 19 kilometres; Difference in altitude: 100 / 500 metres

Highlights:

- Hiking beyond the borders – hiking trails along the Loibl pass on the border of Slovenia and Carinthia
- Gunmaking centre in Ferlach – old manufacturer of guns and invaluable handmade arms
- Klagenfurt – the capital city of Kärnten, courtyards in Venetian style, Wappensaal (coat of arms hall)
- Maria Saal – historic cathedral and the Herzogstuhl (historic stone throne where the dukes of Carinthia were crowned)
- Magdalensberg – archaeological park (3 hectares), one of the largest Roman excavation sites of the Eastern Alps
- Gurk Cathedral – built in Romanesque style, one of the most important buildings for European religious art

History of St. Hemma

St Hemma was born in Friesach towards the end of the 10th century and having become a countess was to be one of the most influential women of her time. Although venerated by the local people on account of numerous miracles, she was not canonised until 1938. She founded several churches and monasteries in the region and was regarded as kind and charitable in many areas. This pilgrimage will take you to her tomb in the crypt of Gurk Cathedral. Its aim, however, is also to enjoy nature with all its spiritual connotations.

When Hemma returned home from Slovenia in the 11th century, the province's patron saint covered a total distance of 800 kilometres. The 120 kilometres of today's main route through Carinthia are identical to what was once the regular Krain pilgrimage over the Loibl Pass via Klagenfurt to Gurk. At the beginning of the pilgrimage you will be following in St Hemma's footsteps in the Loibl Valley and soon become aware of the power of light and water in the Tschepaschlucht (gorge) near Ferlach. On the other side of the River Drau, Celtic and Roman remains on Magdalensberg provide an interesting insight into the province's history. The Silber Stream on Krappfeld then guides you into the mystic mediaeval world of legends before all roads finally lead via Strassburg to Gurk. There this eventful journey may come to an end, but you can still enjoy Carinthia's renowned hospitality and have the hope that all your prayers and intercessions will be heard.

About the Country

History and Geography: The Province of Carinthia is situated in the southernmost part of Austria on the boarder to Italy and Slovenia, nestling between the highest peak in the country, the Großglockner (3798 metres), the Karawanken and Tauern Ranges. Sparsely populated, barely 560,000 people live in an area of 9500 square kilometres. Carinthia's capital is Klagenfurt, which is principally known for its picturesque old town and has an international airport and two national parks - the Hohe Tauern and the Nockberge. Austria's southernmost province is in fact the one with the highest concentration of art treasures from virtually every period. While Austria celebrated its millennium in 1996, the Province of Carinthia can boast that it is a few years older. Carinthia became an independent duchy in 976 – the oldest on Austrian soil. It is little wonder therefore that countless art treasures testify to this rich past - from the Celtic and Roman excavations on Magdalensberg to the incredibly diverse sacral art – Gurk Cathedral is one of the most significant Romanesque buildings in the German-speaking countries. Sights range from Renaissance arcaded courtyards to secular historical monuments, such as the seemingly archaic blast furnaces at Heft near Hüttenberg (19th century) that serve as an exhibition centre today. The baroque Benedictine Abbey at St Paul/Lavant Valley is a veritable treasure trove.

Climate: Carinthia is situated south of the Alps so the climate is almost Mediterranean. July and August are usually dry and hot (30°C). Autumn is dry but cooler than summer and can be the best time to go to the mountains. You will soon see that Carinthia not only means enjoying a lovely warm climate and very warm lakes (28°), but also the warmth of the people who live there.

Language German although English and Italian are widely understood.

A Typical Day on Trek

Routine As this trip is self-guided it is up to you whether you start early or have a little lie-in. We do however advise that it is good to start reasonably early in order to maximise the time available during the day and to cover a fair amount of ground allowing for inclement weather.

Trekking conditions Summer in the Alps is usually warm and dry. You can expect to be walking in shorts and T-shirts. Saying this, rain is possible (so waterproofs are essential), and you will need a warmer set of clothes for the evenings. Underfoot it is generally dry. You follow tracks and paths most of the time, some of which are the old packhorse routes that linked the villages before the roads came through.

What you need to provide There is a full list of clothing and equipment at the end of this document..

Ecological considerations *We believe that we are one of the most ecologically aware tour operators. We ask for your full consideration and co-operation concerning all ecological matters, especially in the disposal of rubbish. Luckily the Austrians are a very clean and organised nation and litter along the paths is not a big problem. If you have any suggestions for improvements please inform us at Walks Worldwide on your return. It is with the tourists, the locals and the tour operators' co-operation that we can ensure that our tours are as eco-friendly as possible.*

Itinerary

Please be aware that although we will do our best to adhere to this itinerary occasionally events out of our control may prevent us from following the exact schedule. Please be assured that the clients' best interests will be foremost in any changes that may occur. A degree of flexibility is essential in travelling on such holidays!

Day 1. Fly from the airport of your choice into Klagenfurt (or Salzburg/Ljubljana) and transfer by private vehicle to the romantic valley of Bodental. You will get your detailed hiking maps and route notes on arrival at tourist board of Obervellach. **Hotel, Bodental**

Day 2. Following in St Hemma's footsteps St. Anna – Windisch Bleiberg (hiking time about 5-6 hours, 16 kilometres, 948 / 1367 metres). The oldest section of the revitalised St Hemma pilgrimage path is on the Slovenian side from St Anna over the Loibl Pass. In Roman times there was a traders' route here to Carinthia, but it was not until iron ore and silver were mined in the valleys during the Middle Ages that this north-south link became truly important economically. The hairpin bends on the long disused pass road and the breathtaking views help to make the ascent much easier. Passing old farmsteads, the route then takes you downhill and into the wooded Loibl Valley. From here there is another brief climb before you arrive at Windisch Bleiberg in the peaceful Boden Valley. **B, 3* Gasthof, Bodental**

Day 3. Tschauko Waterfall Bleiberg – Maria Rain (hiking time about 5-6 hours, 14 kilometres, 552 / 948 metres). Spectacular scenery awaits you in this section when you make your way through the Tschepaschlucht gorge to Ferlach. According to a local legend, kindly alpine goddesses who determine the fate of passers-by live between the steep rock faces rising up from the mountain torrent. If you miss them, what you will definitely see is the fantastic interplay of light and water culminating in the Tschauko Waterfall. Between orchids and other alpine flowers the wayside shrines so typical of Carinthia then guide you through the pine forest from Unterloibl until you finally reach the River Drau in the town of Ferlach, a gun-making centre. It is now only a short climb to the end of this day's walk: the pilgrimage church of Maria Rain. Originally dating back over a thousand years, it is famous for blessings. **B, 3* Gasthof, Bodental**



Day 4. Beyond the River Drau Maria Rain – Maria Saal (hiking time about 5-6 hours, 17 kilometres, 552 / 505 metres). Leave the stunning Karawanken mountains behind and discover a more urban but very charming landscape. Visit the former Cistercian monastery, the Stift Viktring, which was founded in the first mediaeval decade by the first duke of Carinthia, Bernhard earl of Spanheim. It has always been an influence for the political and religious fate of the country. Walk through the capital Klagenfurt to Karnburg and past the historically important Zollfeld, the centre of the former 'Carinthian Empire', finally reaching the majestic cathedral of Maria Saal, one of the oldest stops of St. Hemma's pilgrimage. **B, 3* Gasthof, Maria Saal**



Day 5. Celtic and Roman cultures Maria Saal – St. Georgen (hiking time about 5-6 hours, 19 kilometres, 505 / 537 metres). Your encounter with Carinthia's historic past starts here on Zollfeld, a rich plain where excavations brought the former Roman town of Virunum to light. The route continues up Magdalensberg, a hill that was used as a place of worship in Celtic times. At the top there is a church that is the starting point for the four-hill hike. The site of the oldest fertility pilgrimage still surviving today, it draws thousands of faithful every year. Here one of the province's best panoramic views quickly makes you forget the earlier exertion, especially as it is now downhill all the way to the famous Burg Hochosterwitz. Overlooked by the castle, farm tracks and footpaths then take you to the end of the stage, the Abbey of St. Georgen am Längsee. **B, 3* Gasthof, St. Georgen/Längsee**



Day 6. Mediaeval legends at the Silber stream St. Georgen – Treibach-Althofen (hiking time about 5-6 hours, 15 kilometres, 537 / 714 metres). This relatively flat leg of the walk will take you from St. Georgen and the lake to the mediaeval town of Treibach-Althofen. The atmosphere turns mystical through the Wolschart Woods, which have given rise to many tales, until the seemingly endless fields of the Krappfeld stretch out before you. Here the route along the banks of the legendary Silber Stream goes from farm to farm and affords marvellous views of the fertile basin. Closer to where she lived and worked, the signs of St Hemma's benevolence also become more apparent. You can stop off at the small pilgrimage church of Maria Wolschart to ask for her blessing for the remaining journey before proceeding to the centre of Althofen with its many historic sights. **B, 3* Gasthof, Treibach-Althofen**

Day 7. All roads lead to Gurk Treibach-Althofen – Gurk (hiking time about 5-6 hours, 17 kilometres, 714 / 662 metres). On the last leg of this fascinating pilgrimage you will again discover some of the province's cultural treasures on your way to Gurk. Behind Schloss Pöckstein, the former bishop's residence, a footpath goes through the Strassburg Nature Reserve. The steady climb up to the castle of the same name tells another chapter in Carinthia's history. Finally, only the slight hill in Lieding separates you from the end of your pilgrimage: Gurk Cathedral. The most important Romanesque church was built around 800 years ago on top of St Hemma's hundred-column crypt. After a prayer of thanks, your unforgettable experience will draw to a close. **B, 3* Gasthof, Gurk**



Day 8. Transfer back to the airport for your flight home. **B**

Practical Information

Passports and visas British Citizens do not need a visa, however they do need a valid passport.

Accommodation

***inns/gasthofs: All rooms are with shower/WC,TV and telephone.

Meals provided All breakfasts are included. Breakfasts are buffet style. Lunch, evening meal and drinks are extra.

Local transport Transfers will be made by private taxi/bus to and from Klagenfurt airport. The public transport network is very efficient and it is easy to get around.

Baggage Your baggage is limited to about 20 kilos by most airlines. Please ensure that your baggage is clearly marked with your name, inside as well as outside, in case the labels get detached. We will be sending you a Walks Worldwide kitbag before departure which is ideal for the purpose.

Vaccinations and medical precautions No vaccinations are necessary for Austria and health problems in the area we visit are quite rare. The only "medical precaution" that you might like to take is a small first aid kit to cater for blisters, headaches, coughs, colds, etc. However it is always advisable to be up-to-date with your tetanus jabs. A high factor sun protection lotion is essential, as sunburn can be severe on hot days in thin mountain air. Water whilst on the trek is mostly from springs and is generally safe to drink.

Currency Euros. The exchange rate usually hovers around £1: €1.42. Please see www.xe.com. All major travellers' cheques and credit cards are accepted. Commission is not charged for changing cash or cheques, but shop around for the best rates (hotels usually have the worst rates).

Electricity 220 volts AC, 50 Hz. As the socket outlets require continental plugs it is advisable to carry an adapter if you intend to bring any electrical items with British plugs.

Time Austria is one hour ahead of Greenwich Time (GMT+1). Daylight saving time starts in early spring and ends in late autumn.

Contact details It is not our policy to provide addresses and telephone numbers as, due to frequent changes in contact details, it is very difficult to provide an accurate list for all our tours. Your Final Joining Instructions, which you will receive 2 weeks prior to departure, will show any local contact details that are required for your tour. However we would be glad to provide you more details if you have a specific reason.

Mobile phones do work in Austria. If you have not used your mobile outside the UK before you will have to contact your operator to enable international calls. *Please ensure your phone is set for roaming if you are taking a mobile.* Please note that it is expensive to phone both to and out of a mobile when abroad. We do not however encourage mobile phone use whilst walking on any of our trips – out of courtesy to other clients please use your mobile phone discretely. If you do need to get in touch, or if anyone needs to get in touch with you, please contact the Walks Worldwide office (01524 242000) during office hours.

Tipping The usual courtesy tips *can* be left in restaurants as anywhere in Europe. However tipping is rarely necessary as hotels, restaurants and bars are required by law to include a 15% service charge. Even taxi fares normally have a service charge included.

Things to buy Cheeses, irresistible chocolates, local handicrafts and sachertorte (if you can resist not eating it before you get home!).

Maps Local maps and general walking guides are available on arrival. If you want to purchase a map of the area ahead of time they are available at The Map Shop, 15 High Street, Upton-on-Severn, Worcs WR8 0HJ (Tel: 01684 593146) www.themapshop.co.uk or Stanfords at 12-14 Long Acre, London WC2E 9LP (Tel: 0207 836 1321) www.stanfords.co.uk.

Included in the price

- All accommodation.
- Welcome drink
- All breakfasts
- Luggage Transfers
- Local assistance
- Maps and route notes
- Airport transfers

Extra expenses

- Evening meals and lunches
- Flights and taxes
- Travel Insurance.
- Drinks.
- Souvenirs and personal spending.

Flights Flights need to be arranged to either Klagenfurt (preferred airport with a transfer time of 55 minutes), Salzburg (1 ¾ hours) or Ljubljana/SLO (2 ½ hour). A number of airlines use regional airports. If you need assistance with booking flights we can help – an administration fee will be charged for this. Please advise of your flight details on booking so that we can arrange suitable transfers.

Clothing and Equipment Lists.

On trek you must not worry about how you look: comfort and protection against bad weather are of prime importance. Because mountain weather is so very variable, we recommend a number of thin layers rather than a few thick ones. Take old, well-worn clothes rather than rushing out to buy new ones, since they will probably get rough treatment on trek. We do not expect any really cold conditions, but please bear in mind that there might be chilly evenings and cooler conditions at high altitudes.

CLOTHING	NUMBER	Check	EQUIPMENT	Check
Walking boots	1 pair		Torch / spare batteries	
Casual shoes/sandals	1		Day pack	
Socks	3+		Camera, film & accessories	
Underwear	3+		A variety of plastic bags (Rucksacks are not waterproof)	
"T" shirts	3		Sunglasses	
Long trousers / skirt / trackies	1		Binoculars (optional)	
Short trousers	1		Washing & shaving kits	
Long sleeve shirt	1		Water Bottles 2 litres	
Light sweater / inner fleece layer	1		First aid kit, with blister protection	
Water / wind proof jacket	1		Walking Poles, (optional but recommended)	
Water/wind proof trousers	1			
Thermal underwear	Optional			
Sunhat and woolly hat	1			
Warm jacket / outer fleece layer	1			
Swimming costume	Optional			
Gloves	Optional			

*The following items are most useful and those **in bold type are essential***

ITEM	Check	ITEM	Check
Moisturising cream		Insect repellent	
Safety pins / sewing kit		Universal travelling adapter	
Penknife (not in hand luggage)		Small mirror	
Sweets / favourite snacks for energy		Padlock for your kitbags	
Reading material / notebook diary		Suncream - lots of it!	
Nail clippers / Scissors (not in hand luggage)		MONEY / Travellers cheques	
Cold water detergent		PASSPORT	
Spare glasses or contact lenses		FLIGHT TICKETS	
Money belt/pouch			
Matches / lighter			
'Dry' handwash/sanitiser			