

TRANSDANUBE TRAVEL STORIES

The Danube Adventure – Legions Heading for the Danubius The river that attracted cultures. Or: A realm of thriving culture without borders

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The Danube Adventure – Legions heading for the Danubius

The Roman period on the Danube spanned more than 450 years. During this epoch, a coherent system was built to defend the Imperium Romanum to the north, a border that went down in history as “Danubian Limes”. By definition, a border is a dividing line. The *limes* was intended as a division of the north and south and was in fact a military frontier. But was it actually an insurmountable barrier? Or was it open for border crossers, cultural exchange, and for new culture to emerge?

The Danube (Lat. *Danubius*) is a flowing band that stretches from west to east across 2,888 kilometres. It flows through ten European states, and if you include water-bearing rivers, the number of “Danube states” is even higher. The route on which we shall follow in the Romans’ footsteps takes us from Germany to Serbia, through six countries with very diverse cultural histories, albeit always connected by the Danube.

In modern-day united Europe, the borders are more permeable or almost non-existent, and yet each of these countries is still surrounded by its own border. Until not so long ago, when disembarking a Danube cruiseship in Budapest, you had to queue with your passport at the ship reception and were scrutinised by stern-looking officials, but a lot has changed for the better.

“Borders? I have never seen one. But I have heard they exist in the minds of some people.” (Thor Heyerdahl). The Romans certainly did not think in such enlightened, humanistic terms when they decided to secure their empire to the north and looked for suitable places to build facilities that would serve this goal. Basically, one only has to look at a map of Europe to understand why the course of the Danube was regarded as an ideal natural border for this very purpose, since it divides Europe into northern and southern parts. Which is what the Romans probably did when they resolved to make the Danube an essential part of their *limes* – the “wet *limes*”, as it were – which was supposed to demarcate and protect their empire from the barbarians. They no doubt saw several natural advantages in doing so. When their scouts reconnoitered the river for securing measures, they were quick to realise that swampy areas, wide valleys and raging rapids surrounded by dense forests would offer excellent conditions for defending the empire and stopping peoples from the north from advancing further.

The Alpine region had already been incorporated into the Roman Empire in 15 BC and was now to be extended into the Alpine foothills. Campaigns against Germanic tribes living in the north began under the rulers Drusus the Elder and Tiberius.

The aim was to extend the Roman Empire to the Elbe (Lat. *Albis*). However, after several battles had been lost, this plan had to be abandoned and it was decided that the Danube would be the border east of the Rhineland. In 179 AD, Regensburg, or *Castra Regina* at the time, became a river fort of the Roman legion at the northernmost tip of the Danube.

The provinces *Noricum* and the adjoining *Pannonia* in the east were established and there were many small territorial shifts within the empire. Today's Vienna (*Vindobona*) and nearby *Carnuntum* initially belonged to *Noricum* and were later assigned to *Pannonia*. That period saw a number of peaceful shifts of borders within the provinces.

How the Roman culture shaped the Danube region

It is often claimed that the Roman expansion into the Danube region marked the birth of culture in the Danube Basin, but such a statement should be uttered with care, because the Romans certainly did not settle in an entirely uncultured area.

Since prehistoric times, the Danube had been an important landmark for early settlers such as family clans and groups “out of Africa” who decided to “go West” and travel upstream from the Black Sea in search of a new homeland. In a word: the Danube Basin was a destination for migrating settlers early on in history. The river was a lifeline that offered freedom of movement. The settlers acquired “the art of living and surviving on the Danube”, which makes the Danube a river of explorers and discoverers.

First settlers in the Danube region

The earliest evidence of human settlements in the area between Regensburg and Zaječar was found in the Wachau region: while the significance of the small female figurines „Venus of Willendorf“ and „Fanny of Galgenberg“ is still not quite clear, their age is estimated at 30,000 to 40,000 years (only archaeologists have the power to determine this sort of age). One thing is certain: Ice Age art is a great cultural heritage and the ladies from the Wachau region are two particularly fine specimens; in fact, they are the oldest known Palaeolithic representations of the female body. Older still – namely around 70,000 years old – is the evidence of early human

existence found in the Gudenus Cave near the city of Krems. Finds made at the foot of Hartenstein Castle, 15 km west of Krems, prove that Neanderthal people hunted here and found shelter in the cave.

The Romans of what is now Upper Austria were in direct contact not only with Germanic peoples, but also with the Celts. The latter did not form a tribe as such but were scattered in clans along the Danube, unlike Germanic tribes. They willingly and peacefully accepted the Roman sovereignty and even worked closely with the Romans. However, they also left behind a cultural heritage of their own, which can be studied in Mitterkirchen in the Marchland plain (Upper Austria), for example, where a Celtic settlement from the Hallstatt period (800 to 450 BC) was reconstructed.

There were also large Celtic settlements in the region around Ptuj (Lat. *Poetovio*), now Slovenia, where the Roman Emperor Vespasian was elected in 69 AD. *Poetovio*, as Ptuj was called at the time, was the largest Roman settlement in the territory of modern Slovenia and is believed to have had a larger population (up to 40,000) than Ptuj has today (24,000). Visitors can now experience the Roman city of *Poetovio* in the archeological park, guided for example, by a costumed “Roman” explaining the Roman way of life.

The Roman cultural heritage

The Romans were particularly good at forming their new borderland and its hinterland in terms of culture. Unlike in the far north, where a long wall was erected in Scotland under Hadrian, it was not necessary on the Danube to build a continuous wall or rampart. Rapids, wide and swampy valleys formed a natural barrier. Nonetheless, the Romans built city walls with magnificent gates (Regensburg), forts with adjacent military and civilian towns (Passau), trading posts such as Enns, and vibrant cities like *Carnuntum*, thus introducing Roman life to the Danube region. Or think of the impressive necropolis of Pécs with an Early Christian cemetery (UNESCO World Heritage Site), or the massive fort, magnificent villas, temples and burial grounds of *Felix Romuliana* in Zaječar, Serbia! All these sites line the Danube like a string of pearls and offer a deep insight into Roman history and everyday life on the river. They are witnesses of early urban culture, which continues to have an effect today.

Emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius also lived in the legionary camp of *Carnuntum*, where he found the peace to contemplate far from his beloved Rome. The metropolis on the Danube had about 50,000 inhabitants and boasted a harbour, an amphitheatre, bathhouses and magnificent city villas. Ancient *Carnuntum* offered classy life far from home. Every year in June, the “Roman Festival” is an excellent opportunity to visit the minutely reconstructed Roman quarter and enjoy the food and culture of ancient life. Ptuj, too, celebrates “Roman Games” for four days each year. If you ever get invited, do accept.

Wine – a cultural asset

Invitations often include delights such as wine. Naturally, it was the Romans who introduced wine to the region of beer drinkers (Regensburg). The Romans despised beer in general and regarded it as a drink of barbarians. According to Pliny, *cerevesia* from Germanic tribes was best used to pamper facial skin with its foam. Further east, in *Pannonia*, the “watered grain” (*sabaia*) was not particularly popular either. Roman legionaries were still tempted to drink it because there was

plenty of it, because it was cheap, and because inebriation was guaranteed. That's why they were prone sometimes to cross the border and visit barbarian pubs or breweries.

The only solution was to procure and grow some wine from home. On the river bank opposite from Künzing, for example, lies the market town of Winzer. It is yet to be proved that wine was already cultivated so far north on south-facing slopes before the 9th century, but why wouldn't it have been? After all, the Romans put up their camp in the immediate vicinity.

The Romans were no doubt the fathers of the great success of Austrian wines today – particularly wines from Lower Austria (the Wachau region, the Kamptal valley, etc.), Vienna, and Burgenland. The same can be said of viticulture in Hungary, formerly Serbia.

In Roman times, *Carnuntum* and all other settlements, camps and towns along the Danube were supplied with high-quality wines.

The Lower Danube has a longer history of wine. Wine first came here from Greece and other eastern parts. In Serbia, for example, the history of wine goes back to the Thracians and Greeks. In the 3rd century, Marcus Aurelius Probus introduced viticulture outside the Apennines, which had been forbidden by Domitian in 92 AD. This was the basis for the meteoric rise of wine. The fact that Probus lived in the imperial capital of *Sirmium*, modern-day Sremska Mitrovica in Serbia, may have been helpful. In Zaječar, after a visit to the palace complex of *Felix Romuliana* and to mosaics of Dionysus amidst vineyards, one can discuss the Dionysian and Bacchanalian principles over a glass of wine.

A Roman wine trader in Passau

Whether for inebriation or for feasts – the wine merchant Publius Tenatius Essimus from Trento made sure that Romans in the northern regions of the Empire and their guests received good quality wine from their homeland. He settled in Passau and introduced the wine trade, which was not always lucrative, across the Alps. The Brenner Pass, now an artery of tourism and cross-border trade, was the route on which this industrious man transported wines from Italy and most probably from Southern France and Spain to Passau, the “city of three rivers”. From there, Publius Tenatius Essimus would take his wines via the Inn and Danube rivers to the Roman provinces of *Raetia* (adjoining in the west) and *Noricum*. This is how a vast number of amphorae filled with wine reached the banks of the Danube from the south.

Tenatius Essimus died at the age of 57, but had clearly understood the advantages of rapid transportation by ship. His name has stood for profitable entrepreneurship and clear-sightedness ever since he left home to build a new future in foreign lands, keen to cultivate contacts across borders. His story is a success story from the *limes*.

Navigation on the Danube became commercial under the Romans. If you take a trip from Germany to Serbia, you will always come across “descendants” of former Roman winegrowers and wine merchants. Then, as now, people loved to celebrate and enjoy themselves, because it brought them together. This is a culture we inherited from the Romans.

The Danube, an impenetrable barrier?

The Danube itself was the central transport axis. Paved roads were built parallel to it, as well as roads leading from the Danube to the north and south. Remains of these can party still be seen along hiking trails in some forest areas (e.g. in the Wachau region).

At this point a question posed at the beginning comes up again: Was the *limes* an impenetrable barrier? No, it was not. On the one hand, there were plenty of gates that functioned as passages for troops on their way north. After all, the – political – goal to expand the empire had not been abandoned yet. Moreover, there was a lively civil exchange. “Barbarians” visited Roman towns and settlements to meet the foreign rulers and do business with them – and vice versa. It is safe to assume that many a love affair arose in the process. Pubs on either side of the river were meeting places for lovers and for the occasional drunken brawl. Celts north of the *limes* even worked for the Romans and took on higher administrative tasks.

In terms of economics, the Amber Road was particularly important to the Romans, who regarded amber as a highly coveted commodity. Amber was also known as the “gold of the north”, or as “tears of the sun goddess” (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* II, 340–366), and was traded at a high price. Drinking from amber vessels was pure luxury, and many rich women in Rome dyed her hair with amber. According to Pliny the Elder, the coast of Germania from where amber was introduced was about 600,000 paces (i.e. about 900 km) from *Carnuntum* in *Pannonia*. He complained that a small figurine of amber was more expensive than a slave. His geographical description clearly shows that there was a connection between the Baltic Sea and *Carnuntum*. Then the road ran further south through Sopron, Szombathely, Ptuj, Ljubljana and all the way down to Aquileia in Veneto, Italy.

The Amber Road evidences that the *limes* was not a border in the sense of a protective bulwark where armed soldiers would stand and ward off anyone who wanted to enter the empire. It was rather an open frontier for cultural and economic exchange. Border posts collected customs duties. Merchants and their helpers reached the Baltic States across the Baltic Sea and used the Danube region for business and as a welcome resting place on their onward journey south. Many personal contacts were established, which has no doubt left us with descendants across the entire Danube region.

Today, the Danube region would be called a Europe’s melting pot of cultures. Whether in prehistoric times, in the Roman period or at any other time in the course of the centuries, people have come together along the 2,888 km of the Danube’s banks. Strangers became friends, people passing through settled down, migrants found a new homeland and enriched it with their own cultural heritage, and they still do today.

One of the most popular saints of Europe, Saint Martin, was born in the Roman city of *Savaria* (now Szombathely, Hungary) in 316 AD. He left the city in his youth, but *Savaria* always cultivated his legacy nonetheless. Saint Martin spent his whole life in the spirit of love, mercy, humility and courage, and by the time he died as bishop of Tours in France, he was worshipped for his thaumaturgic feats. To this day, humanist values of the European identity including righteousness, tolerance, solidarity, and the sharing of intellectual, spiritual and material resources are linked to his name. His example goes beyond borders and generations; it pervades the history and intangible heritage of our continent and could be our guiding principle in finding a common European ethic. The most important message we can draw from the life of Saint Martin for the 21st century is that common values are precious, and that we need to share them across Europe.

The Danube welcomes new cultures, feeds on them and connects them, rather than separating them. Cultural bridges across the river and cross-border exchange have yielded a special breed of people in the Danube region. They are cosmopolitan and interested in the foreign, in the new. Even decades under the heavy Iron Curtain could not change this. This is epitomized by Vienna, a key United Nations location outside New York.

People who were sent to the Danube at the time of Rome's rule or who came on their own initiative were as varied as their motives. There was, first and foremost, the army of legionaries, who were obliged to their employer and went wherever they were sent. They were loyal subjects who hoped to become citizens of Rome or of their own country at the end of their service. But there were also those looking for challenges, or those who simply took a chance. Just think of the wine merchant of Passau, or those who took the long way from the Adriatic to the Baltic Sea on the Amber Road and cultivated contacts, traded and enjoyed the hospitality along the Danube and its hinterland.

Roman life on the Danubius

Another Roman who controlled the fate of his empire from *Carnuntum* near *Vindobona* (Vienna) was Emperor Marcus Aurelius. A large equestrian statue was erected in his honour in Tulln on the Danube, the birthplace of painter Egon Schiele (1890–1918). Marcus Aurelius can justifiably be called the philosopher among the Roman rulers. He was an emperor who abhorred the narrow mind. He taught us that “the best revenge is to be unlike your enemy”, and asked: “When you have done good and another has been its object, why do you require a third thing besides, like the foolish — to be thought to have done good or to get a return?” (Marcus Aurelius, “Meditations”, Book VII, 73). He rejected Christianity completely and preferred to live in the spiritual world of Roman gods instead, and yet he made Christian principles such as charity his own. Apparently John Stuart Mill called him the “crowned apostle of philanthropy”. His thoughts did not come to Marcus Aurelius in the beloved gardens of his birthplace, Rome (26 April 121), but on the banks of faraway Danube.

In the era of Marcus Aurelius, another very special legionary was to become important for the *Lauriacum* legionary camp in Enns – Aelius Marcellus. According to the inscription on a statue dedicated to Hercules and excavated in Enns, he was the administrator of the largest lime kiln battery on the Danube and beyond. This is to say that he was in charge of a project that was of utmost importance to camp construction. A look at the production numbers reveals that great things were achieved here. The amount of lime produced in the twelve lime kilns in *Lauriacum* (Enns) was only exceeded by industrial production in the 20th century.

Aelius Marcellus was an early innovator in the Danube region in terms of economy and craft, but who exactly was he? Born around 145 in Upper Italy, he started to train as a legionary recruit in Aquileia around 168. Thanks to his knowledge of calf-burning, he would often be exempt from the onerous duties of “ordinary” legionaries as a specialist of the legion (*immunis*). This was quite a relief for him, since duties such as standing sentry, patrolling, cooking, cleaning and especially latrine fatigue were not exactly popular.

After stations in Ločica ob Savinji in Slovenia and *Salona* (Solin) in Dalmatia, Marcellus fought under Marcus Aurelius against the Macromanni. After the fighting, he returned to the *Lauriacum* (Enns) camp in *Noricum* with the legion. He was only able to visit the capital, Rome, for a short time, because he was required as chief of the largest lime kiln battery of the empire on the Danube.

Aelius Marcellus remained on the Danube after completing his 24 years of service. *Lauriacum* became a home for him and his family. His son took over the work in the lime kiln and thus continued the family tradition. Perhaps in retirement Aelius Marcellus had more time to spend with his friend Seccius Secundinus, who had also retired from the legion and ran a tavern in the camp. He always trusted in his god, Hercules, to whom he dedicated an altar.

Others were inspired by the Christian faith. One of them was Saint Florian of Lorch (3rd c.–304), who is now the patron saint of Upper Austria and the fire brigade. He chose to withdraw to *Helium Cetium* (now Sankt Pölten) as a retired officer of the Roman army and commander-in-chief of fire fighters. He had achieved a great deal in the service of the Empire but had turned to the Christian faith, which was to become his undoing. In the era of Emperor Diocletian, the persecution of Christians flared up again, leading to the martyrdom of Florian of Lorch when he fell off the bridge at *Lauriacum*. But it was not at the hands of the Emperor's soldiers that the holy man died (they probably realized how special he was): in fact, an infuriated stranger pushed him into the river.

Saint Martin of Tours (316–397) was born in *Savaria* (now Szombathely) to a Roman military tribune and came into contact with Christianity as a child. According to his father's will he underwent Roman military training. His wish to be discharged from the service at an early age was denied, and it was not until he had completed his obligatory 25 years of service that he could devote himself fully to his vocation, the spreading of the Christian faith. After his baptism, he withdrew as a hermit, but as his discipleship grew, he built the first western abbey in Ligugé, France, in 361. Saint Martin was a helper in times of need who is also said to have performed many miracles and whose ascetic hermitism made him an ideal monk. Devotees can now follow his work along the pilgrimage stations of the Via Sancti Martini cultural trail.

“Faith turns straw into a rope”, said Saint Severin of Noricum (410–482). He was probably born in Italy to distinguished and educated parents. After his training as a monk, he first came to *Pannonia*, but was mainly active between *Carnuntum* and Passau. From the “city of three rivers” he visited Künzing and Schlögen on a regular basis. He performed numerous miracles and organized and helmed the withdrawal of legions from *Noricum* to *Lauriacum* at the close of the Roman era on the Danube when the advance of Germanic tribes became ever more pressing.

Before he died on 8 January 482 in *Favianis*, Severin of Noricum predicted the final withdrawal of all Romans from the banks of the *limes*. This is what actually happened six years later, which is when the body of the saint was also taken to Naples, unharmed, as though still alive. However, the Romans' withdrawal was not a complete one, as previously assumed. Many Romans remained on the banks of the Danube, where they had found their new home. Nevertheless, the year 488 marks the end of the Roman era on the Danube, the end of 450 years of Roman rule.

Emperor Gaius Galerius Valerius Maximianus (c. 250–311 AD) was less devout during his lifetime, but tried to balance this out shortly before his death. He had a funerary temple built near Zaječar, now Serbia, in memory of his mother Romuliana. Here, near his mother's birthplace, the *Felix Romuliana* was built as a monument to her deep faith in the ancient pantheon. Although discredited as an instigator of the persecution of Christians, he, the son, changed his mind when he fell ill and felt that death was approaching. Shortly before his death, Gaius issued an edict of toleration, allowing Christians to practice their religion and formally calling for churches to be rebuilt. A rather coarse man throughout his life, he thus paved the way for church culture along the Danube. Today, the Danube states look back at a long tradition of profound religiosity. The ringing of the bells of parish churches, cathedrals and monasteries is part of the sound of the river.

The Danube, a river of European freedom

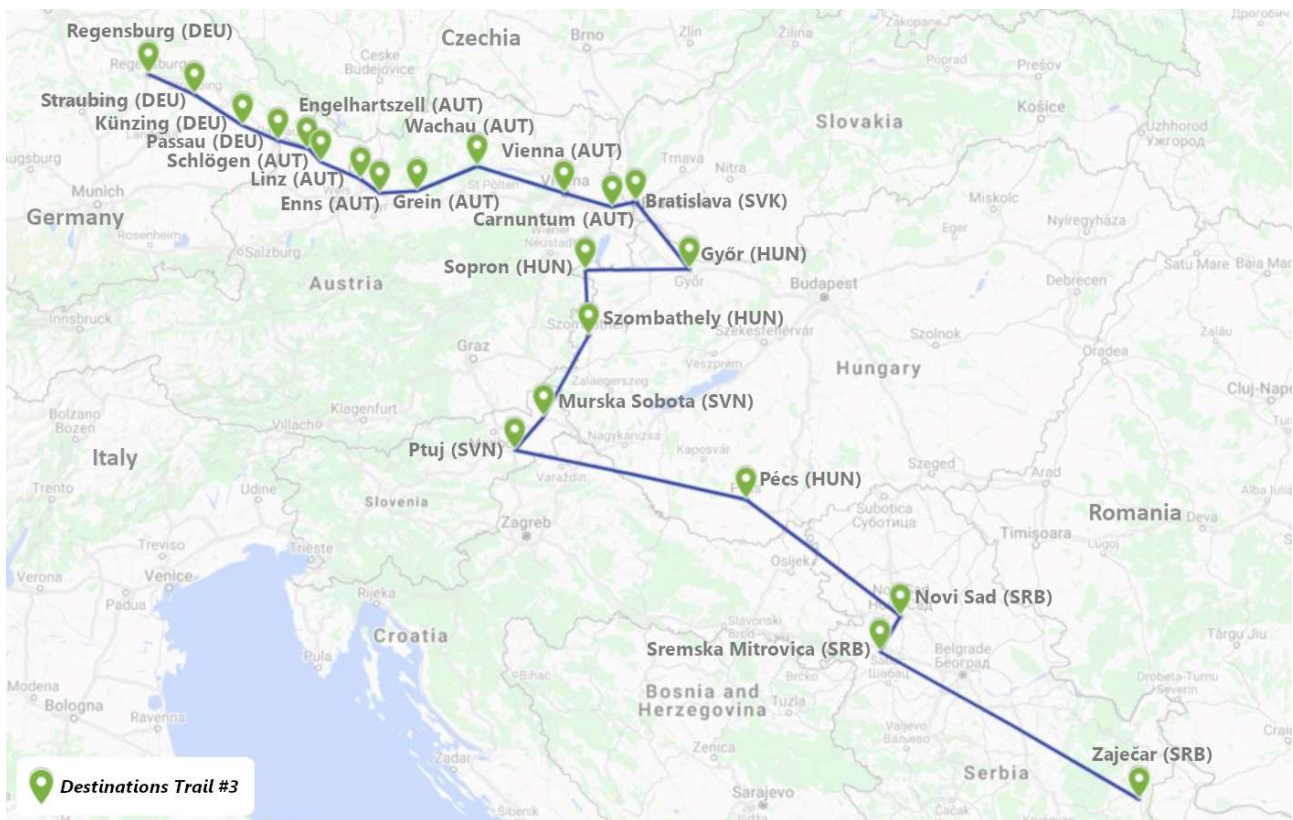
It was quite a feat for the Romans to build the *limes* and rule for over 450 years. However, the Danube's love of liberty was not restricted by the *limes*, because the people on its banks always found a way to overcome barriers.

Cultures met and still meet on the banks of the Danube. A brief encounter can become a lasting relationship. Foreign influences are received with great interest and always enrich the heritage and cultural life. In a word: the Danube is a river where cultures meet.

Many of the historical events described here come to life during visits to excavation sites and preserved ancient buildings. The above-mentioned figures from Roman times prove that the Danube region has always invited friendship. Attempts to prevent friendship politically, sometimes including even armed conflict, have failed not least because of the positive stubbornness of the population living on the river, from the river, and with the river. In the years of the pandemic (2020/2021), people along the river have found it hard to accept that another attempt was made to separate them by closing borders. They demanded that borders open at least for local traffic. This culture of encounter, rapprochement and exchange was inherited from the Romans. In a word: the river Danube is a melting pot.

Almost all sites on the Danube at which Roman archaeological remains were found want to be discovered during a stroll or hike or bicycle tour through the beautiful landscape. Many sections of the river have not been straightened or built over yet but are still in their original, unspoilt state. Many scenic outposts must have been reconnaissance posts of Roman legionaries. An excursion into nature is therefore also an excursion into the long history of the banks of the Danube. The Danube is a river where every breath you take contains a whiff of history. Its views have charmed us and helped us find our inner peace for generations.

APPENDIX – Trail destinations & points of interest



A) Points of interest (POI)

B) Things to do

Regensburg (Germany)

- A) *Porta Praetoria* and Roman Museum
- B) Drink beer like the Romans.

Straubing (Germany)

- A) Roman treasure of Straubing at the Gäubodenmuseum – Sorviodurum (Straubing): a former military camp and Roman Danube port with a civilian settlement.

Künzing (Germany)

- A) Quintana Museum

Passau (Germany)

- A) Roman fort Boiotro; historic district; history of the Passau wine merchant Publius Tenatius Essimnus.
- B) Guided tour and personal conversation with the city archaeologist; Roman snacks; you might even persuade a confectioner to create a Roman cake or chocolate; current wine growing in Passau (Passau winery).

Engelhartszell & Oberranna (Austria)

- A) Roman castle of Oberranna; landscape along the Danube water gap.
- B) Experience the nature in one of the most beautiful parts of the Upper Danube; Engelhartszell Abbey.

Schlögen (Austria)

- A) Roman bath and Roman park Schlögen, Sankt Agatha, natural sight: the Schlögen Meander.
- B) Hike to the scenic outpost overlooking the Schlögen Meander.

Linz (Austria)

- A) Schlossmuseum; Römerberg excavation sites.

Enns (Austria)

- A) Museum Lauriacum and excavations of Roman lime kilns; the story of Hercules in the lime kiln and the foreman Aelius Marcellus.
- B) On the trail of the Roman kiln master.

Grein (Austria)

- A) Roman rest areas on the Danube Cycle Path. There are 20 of these rest areas in Upper Austria. Each offers information about the Roman era along the Danube Cycle Path, as well as power to recharge your batteries.

Wachau (Austria)

A) Roman watchtowers in the Wachau region (Bacharnsdorf, church of St. Lorenz, Rossatz-Windstallgraben, St. Johann im Mauerthale, Favianis fort in Mautern, Augustianis fort in Traismauer including a detour to the Roman Museum in Tulln); Venus of Willendorf and Fanny of Galgenberg.

B) A short hike in the Dunkelsteinerwald forest near Mauternbach to the remains of a Roman road; hike to the Gudenush caves; hike to the summit of Buchberg from Spitz. Heurige taverns: Heurige go back to the Roman wine culture. Meet the winegrowers, e. g. the Riede vineyard on Galgenberg south of Stratzing (which is where Fanny of Galgenberg was found). Excursion to the LOISIUM wine centre in Langenlois.

Vienna (Austria)

A) Roman Museum at Hoher Markt with remains of the floor heating system of a tribune's house; Albrecht Fountain with an allegory of the river god Danuvius and the city of Vindobona; excavations on Michaelerplatz.

B) City walk along the Roman path; modern-day street layout on the old Roman ground plan.

Carnuntum (Austria)

A) Carnuntum is an extraordinary Roman town structure on the limes connected to the Amber Road.

B) Roman life and culinary delights: eat like the Romans!

Bratislava (Slovakia)

A) Devín Castle

B) Experience the landscape and taste the famous currant wine of Devín.

Győr (Hungary)

A) During Roman times, the settlement of Arrabona was a military camp located in the present-day urban area of Győr (the German river name Raab derives from Arrabona); remains of the fort on Széchenyi Square.

Pécs (Hungary)

A) Pécs, called Sophiana in Roman times (2nd century), later Quinque Ecclesiae (“Five Churches”), was an important centre in Pannonia and the capital of the province of Valeria. Remains of that period:

Roman ruin in front of the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul;

the early Christian cemetery from the late Roman period (necropolis of Pécs, 4th century) is a UNESCO World Heritage Site; burial chambers similar to Roman catacombs with motifs from the Old Testament, probably created by wandering Roman artists; mausoleum with wall paintings and a marble sarcophagus. The impressive visitor centre (Scene István tér, Pécs) offers access to several burial chambers and monuments from the period of the World Heritage Site.

Sopron (Hungary)

A) Sopron boasts the Roman city of Scarbantia, ruins of the forum and the Scarbantia Fóruma Museum. This was an important Roman place on the Amber Road.

Szombathely (Hungary)

A) In Szombathely, the Roman Colonia Claudia Savaria, structural remains and partial reconstructions of the magnificent former settlement can be seen in the István Járdányi Paulovics Ruin Garden. It is safe to assume that this was the oldest Roman town in Hungary and that it owed its wealth in particular to the fact that, like Sopron and Carnuntum, it was connected to the Amber Road (visit the north and south gates through which the Amber Road led, the ancient street pavements, the reconstruction of the Iseum temple, as well as burial grounds).

Szombathely is also the birthplace of Saint Martin of Tours (c. 316/317–397).

B) Explore the beautiful countryside from here, hiking to Murska Sobota (Slovenia), where the Romans also passed through for sure.

Murska Sobota (Slovenia)

A) A Roman temple is said to have stood in Murska Sobota on the site of the Cathedral of St. Nicholas in the 2nd/3rd centuries (see the Roman tombstone of Viator in the cathedral). Visit the regional museum in the castle as well.

Ptuj (Slovenia)

A) Slovenski square boasts one of Slovenia’s oldest open stone collections from the Roman period. Also see the five-metre-high Mithras Memorial Stone (2nd century) in memory of

Marcus Valerius Verus (mayor of Ptuj), which was used as a pillory in the Middle Ages, and an archaeological park under construction. "Roman Games" are held each year for four days.

Novi Sad (Serbia)

A) Petrovaradin: Under the Romans, the Cusum bastion was built on this site in the 1st century. It was destroyed in the 5th century during the invasion of the Huns, but was then expanded in the 18th century into the present Petrovaradin castle complex. You can still visit parts of the catacomb system. Also see the Museum of Vojvodina with an overview from the Stone Age to the 20th century.

Sremska Mitrovica (Serbia)

A) Sirmium, once a Celtic, then an Illyrian settlement, was conquered by the Romans in 14 AD and grew to become the capital of the Roman province of Pannonia. It was also a seat of bishops. Emperor Marcus Aurelius had a headquarter in Sirmium during the Macromannic Wars. Claudius Gothicus (214–270), Roman Emperor from 268 to 270, spent most of his life here. In 296, under Maximus Thrax, the Romans launched campaigns against the Sarmatians from the city. During the reign of Emperor Diocletian (290), the palace of Sirmium also became the imperial residence of Galerius, Licinius, and Constantine the Great, and developed into one of the four capitals of the Roman Empire. Constantine lived in Sirmium for 500 days between 317 and 324. Visit the City Museum.

Zaječar (Serbia)

A) Approximately 7 km southwest of Zaječar is the Galerius Palace of the ancient Felix Romuliana, which became a World Heritage Site in 2007. Galerius was a Caesar under Diocletian from 293 to 311, had it built as a retirement residence and named it after his mother Romula, who had been born in the nearby province of Dacia; his tomb and that of his mother can be found on the Magura hill. The complete curtain wall has been preserved, including 20 mighty towers up to 15 m high, which reflect the imposing character of the fortification.