**Naturally Austria: Carinthia and Styria - 3 days**

**Day 1: Villach – Ossiach – Velden (Km. 40)**

**Villach** is a nice town in Carinthia, fascinating from both a cultural and naturalistic point of view, since it’s crossed by the Drava river and its tributary Gail. The huge **Hauntplatz** square and the main church of **St. Jakob** are the very cornerstone of the guided tour. St. Jakob was built in the 15th century in Gothic style and it houses valuable frescoes. During the winter, Villach becomes a paradise for ski and resort lovers, thanks to its thermal baths as well. Proceed to the visit of the former Benedictine monastery on the **Ossiach Lake**, that hosts the most important music festival of Carinthia. The Romanesque church was reworked in a Baroque style, with magnificent soft-coloured stuccoes and the amazing ceiling painted by Romiller. The Baptisterium hosts a Gothic altarpiece, one of the most precious in Carinthia. At the end of the visit, boat ride on the lake. Overnight in **Velden**, an evocative town overlooking the largest lake of the region, the **Wörthersee**. **Curiosity**: the lake is about 17 km long and is one of the warmest in Austria, with a temperature reaching up to 27 degrees.

**Day 2: Pyramidenkogel– Klagenfurt - Hochosterwitz –Gurk – Graz (km. 220)**

Ascent of the wooden viewing tower named Pyramidenkogel, new symbol of Carinthia located at 920 metres above the sea level (including the mount on which the tower was built). From the viewing platform located at a height of 71 metres you will enjoy an astonishing 360-degree panorama on the **Wörthersee** and on the southern region of Austria, admiring the impressive peaks of the High Tauern on the north, the Karawanks on the south and the mountains drawing the border between Italy and Slovenia. Continue to **Klagenfurt**, capital of the federal state of Carinthia, placed in a lovely landscape and surrounded by small lakes that represent an important touristic attraction, as well as the lakeshore, one of the largest in Europe. Around 5000 years ago it was Italian architects who constructed the city with its palaces, the inner courts and the squares that have been well maintained until today, including **Neuer Platz**, flanked by Neoclassic buildings, the Palais Orsini-Rosenberg housing the Town Hall and the Palais Porcia, now a hotel.

**Curiosity**: According to the legend, Klagenfurt was founded in a place where a winged dangerous dragon lived, which can be found on the civic coat and which is represented in form of an impressive statue in the very downtown of the city. Due to its exemplary preservation the city was awarded 3 times the prestigious Europa Nostra Diploma of Merit. After a typical lunch based on Austrian specialties, departure for the **Hochosterwitz Castle**, one of the most impressive medieval castles in Austria. It was built on a rocky cliff as an impregnable stronghold against the raids of the Turks.

**Curiosity**: with its huge bastions the castle can be seen from a distance up to about 30km on a clear day. Proceed to the **Gurk Valley** and visit of the Gurk Cathedral, one of the most significant sacred art buildings in Europe. The crypt with its 100 columns houses the grave of Saint Hemma.

**Curiosity**: Pope John Paul II visited the magnificent Gurk Cathedral, popular destination of the Hemma Pilgrimage Trail, starting in Slovenia and inviting you to follow the footsteps of the church and monastery founder in this 800km-long road. The tradition of this pilgrimage has existed since the 17th century. Arrival to Graz for dinner.

**CARINTHIA in numbers**:

200 bathing lakes, 8,000km of rivers, 60 healing springs, 43 glaciers, 3,798 m of the Gossglockner peak, the highest peak of Austria.

**Day 3: Graz**

Visit of **Graz**: Cultural Capital of Europe, UNESCO World Heritage Site, capital of flavours, City of Design, European City for Human Rights. What features the second largest city of Austria and the capital of Styria is its thousand-years history harmoniously mixed with contemporary architecture designed by well-known Austrian and international architects. Below you find a list of the most important attractions and cultural heritage in Graz: the **Rathaus (Town Hall)**, the **Carillon** (music box) playing 3 times per day typical songs, the **Cathedral**, the **Clock Tower**, the **seat of Styria’s provincial parliament** and the **Island in the Mur**.

**Curiosity**: An island or a ship? It’s not easy to define the steel building whose showy design was projected by the New York City artist Vito Acconci; the **Island in the Mur** was commissioned in 2003, when Graz was elected European Capital of Culture. It shall be considered as a link between the river and the city, a “pedestrian island” measuring 47 metres in length and whose shape reminds a giant half-open shell.

The day ends with a walk to the **Schlossberg Hill**, on top of which you will find the castle ruins. The top is reachable by cable car, with 60% slope and a glass ceiling that allows the visitors to enjoy a magnificent view on the old town of Graz.

**Curiosity**: the city takes its name from the fortress built more than 1000 years ago on the Schlossberg Hill. The word comes from the Slavic **Gradec**, small fortress, and later changed into Graz.

**STYRIA in numbers**:

1 peak reaching 2,995m (Dachstein), 788 peaks above 2,000m, 2,000 mountain pastures (50,000 hectares), 4,546 hectares of vineyard surface with the production of 20,000 wine hectolitres (80% white wine), 5,200 hectares covered by apple crops, 17,000 hectares of pumpkin fields with the production of over 3 million litres of pumpkin seed oil.