

WACHAU VALLEY TRAVEL GUIDE – A VIENNA DAY TRIP

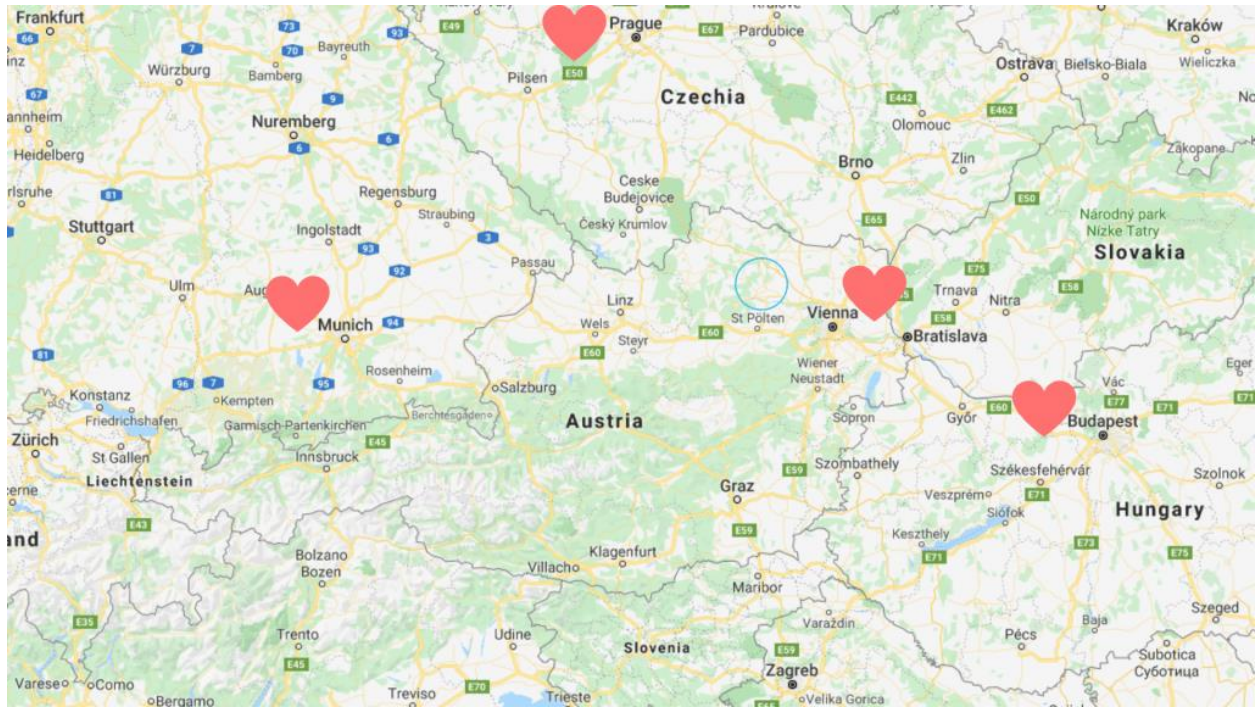


My husband and I booked flights to Vienna after using my **Google Flights Explore Map trick** and finding good deals. On our recent trip to Copenhagen, we had fallen in love with natural wines from Austria, so I looked to see if there was a wine region close to Vienna. I discovered Wachau Valley, and when I started looking into it I discovered that it was not only on the beautiful Danube river, but it was also best explored via bike. Sold. This region is specifically known for their Rieslings and Gruner Veltliners, some pretty crisp white wines. I love a crisp white wine in summer! This place is not the most well-known area so planning it proved to be a little difficult, so look here for all the information you need for the perfect Vienna day trip.

SHOULD I VISIT WACHAU VALLEY?

If you're coming from the US, you are probably not going to make some special pilgrimage to Wachau. However, if you are visiting Vienna, I think a day trip to this valley has got to be on top of your list. It was such a nice nature break for us, and we absolutely loved our day biking along the Danube and stopping for wine, snacks, and pictures along the way. The valley seemed to be pretty well-off. All of the homes were huge and impeccably maintained, the cars were nice, and there were more fine dining options than anything.

Come to Wachau if the idea of crisp white wine and biking along the Danube River with beautiful riverside views and nature to get said wine appeals to you. Wachau is obviously perfect as a day trip from Vienna, and Vienna would best be paired with some other Central European cities like Budapest, Prague, or Munich. Be like the Austrians and take a break in this beautiful valley!



WHEN SHOULD I VISIT WACHAU VALLEY?

We went the first weekend in September which seemed to be a great month weather and crowd wise. We had warm, sunny days and cool evenings with barely anyone on the trails. I know this was approaching the harvest season where Wachau Valley shuts down to harvest grapes, and because of this a lot of the smaller villages were pretty empty. I would definitely come to the valley when it is warm enough to ride bikes because that is kind of the best part (slash the best time to drink white wine)! Shoot for May – September. I think after September the city shuts down, as mentioned above.

HOW DO I GET TO WACHAU VALLEY?

Coming from the US, you would probably be tacking this on to a central Europe trip that includes Vienna. In that case, you would be arriving via train from Vienna. We flew straight to Vienna and went to the Flughafen Wien Bahnhof station right in the airport. Purchase your tickets to Krems/Donau Bahnhof (the largest town in Wachau). There is 1 train change and the journey is about 1 hr 40 minutes. I think there are also all-day guided tours that pick you up in Vienna if you'd rather do that. The train stations are very easy to figure out with monitors everywhere to look for your platform, and the schedule is very reliable (**unlike Italy**). When you get to Krems, you can take a taxi outside to your hotel if you are staying or to a bike rental place if you are just here for a day (I read about **this bike rental company** but didn't end up using them since our hotel had bikes to rent). The taxis are cash only and ours was €6 to our hotel.

IS THERE A LANGUAGE BARRIER IN WACHAU VALLEY?

Most everyone spoke a tiny bit of English, but not much more. Most of the restaurants we stopped at did not have English menus. So yes, there was a language barrier. We only heard one other person speaking English the entire time we were there, and I think they had just gotten off a Viking river cruise. Austrians speak German, so **brush up on a few phrases** before. We didn't think to do this and definitely suffered because of it! Also make sure to download the German file on **Google Translate** to get a very crude translation with your camera of menus – I admit it's pretty useless when trying to figure out what to order, but it helps a little bit.

WHERE SHOULD I STAY IN WACHAU VALLEY?

We stayed in Krems because I wasn't sure how to get anywhere else in Wachau with our bags, but it was the perfect spot. I didn't see any AirBnB options online. There were also a few hotels in Dürnstein. I can see with the limited options that they would maybe fill up fast in the summer during the peak season. Our hotel was the **Steigenberger Hotel and Spa**, and it was very nice. We think it is a wellness retreat destination because there was a very extensive spa menu including medical exams and literally everyone at the pool and terrace bar were wearing robes and slippers. It was incredible entertaining to us to try and figure out if we were in some kind of cult. It was also funny to discover that the sauna was a naked sauna, no thanks!

HOW DO I GET AROUND WACHAU VALLEY?

By bicycle!! That's the beauty of this place. The bike route that runs along the Danube is one of the most popular bike routes in all of Europe. It is also very well signed. Sometimes it runs along the river, sometimes along the highway, and sometimes through the vines and orchards. It's magical. Krems is a walkable city for getting dinner in the evenings if your bike rental time is up, and there are abundant taxis if that is more your speed. Our hotel rented us bikes for the day for €15 each.



To cross the river, unless you are in Krems where there is a bridge, you will take a ferry. There are three ferries along the route. We crossed at Spitz for the ride back to Krems. It was €3 per person and just takes you straight across. When you get to Spitz, check the time for the next ferry. If it's not for a while, walk along the river and enjoy a glass of wine on one of the patios.

HOW MANY DAYS SHOULD I SPEND IN WACHAU VALLEY?

We spent just over 24 hours here, and this actually was enough for us. Biking from Krems to Spitz is only 1 hour if you don't stop, so you don't need 2 days to see the whole Wachau valley. That said, I'm sure we could easily spend longer here and explore each of the little villages a little more thoroughly, but we were out of vacation days and a day worked for us.

WHAT IS THERE TO DO IN WACHAU VALLEY?

There are really three things to do: bike, drink wine, and explore the villages. The great thing is that all of this can be done together. The perfect day in Wachau involves all three.

BIKE

As mentioned above, biking is the primary way to get around the valley. There are cars, sure, but how unique to be in a place where you bike along a beautiful river and through vineyards to get to the next village and discover the next wine spot? Use Google Maps "bike" option to discover the trail if you can't find it, but once you are on it you will notice the blue signs with a bicycle symbol guiding you along. The trail never ends along the entire Wachau Valley.

You have two route options as you're biking along the Danube – north of the river or south. We ended up biking west north of the river and east south of the river. The north side of the river has a majority of the villages, shops, restaurants, heurigers, and houses. Budget a majority of your day along this route. As you go from village to village, decide what you want to do as you pass it. Dürnstein is the largest of all the villages and has the most options for shops and restaurants. The route is along the river, along the highway, through the village streets, and through the vines.





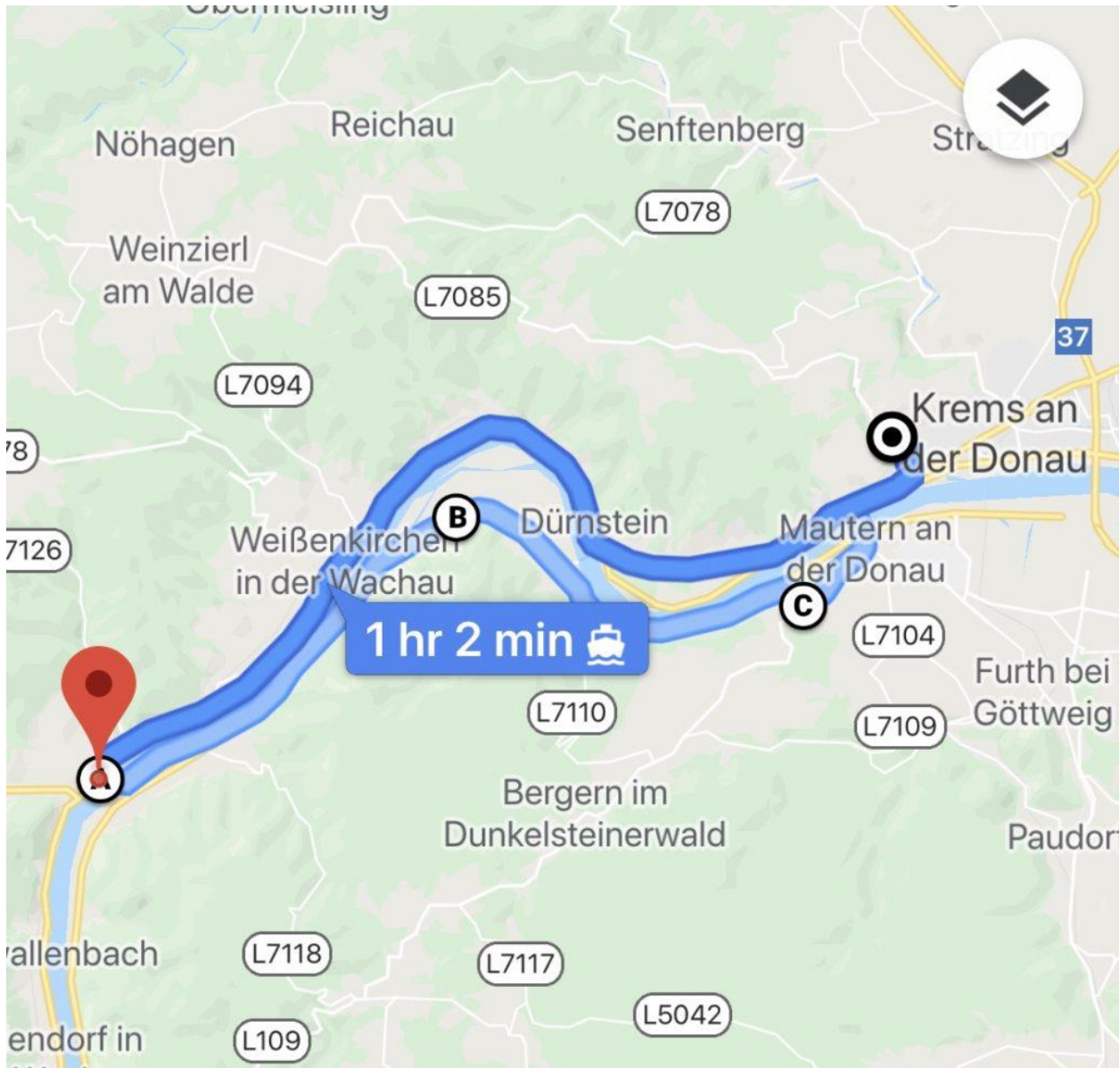


The south side of the river mainly had gorgeous views of the villages on the north side. There are also a few places to stop. The route along the south side is a lot flatter and mainly just hugs the river. We did pass through one village that was completely empty and then meandered through rows and rows of grape vines and apple trees. Do note that after Dürnstein, you are just riding along the highway until you cross the bridge at Krems and it's not as enjoyable.





This is the route that we took:



DRINK WINE

My research into where to drink wine was not very helpful, so we decided to wing it. The main thing you need to know is that the place to drink wine is at heurigers which roughly translates to cottages with gardens and stone walls where wine is served. However, I also got vague internet guidance that you can't rely on them all being open – there is some law that they are only open for 3 months or something like that. Which maybe explains why some villages felt quieter than others? But if you see one, and it looks nice, stop and have a glass.

Domaine Wachau is the largest winery in the region. You will pass their giant building on the trail. We went in and it's just a shop with lots of bottles of wine for sale, and not much more. It's not like wineries in the US where they have lovely terraces and tables to do a wine tasting and enjoy the view. Most of the heurigers are along the river so they don't have much of a view being at low elevation.

Weinguts are also a place to drink wine, and they are a little bit bigger than heurigers. We passed a cool one called Weingut Hermenegild Mang that we walked around but didn't get wine at. The village that this was in and the village after, Joching, were super cute.



EXPLORE THE VILLAGES

In Dürnstein, there are souvenir shops that are fun to poke around. There's also a beautiful monastery that is not free to go in – you won't miss the bright blue and white tower though. I think there is a castle you can visit up the hill too.

In Joching and the village before, there are cute painted houses, colorful alleyways, and lots of beautiful ways to get lost.

Krems has lots of character on the cobblestone roads off of the river. There are shops, heurigers, and restaurants.

The most important thing to know is that this is not a tourist destination – you will not find trendy coffee shops or “you must go to” wine spots. The whole place is just cute and colorful, and it is up to you to choose what places speak to you.







WHERE DO I EAT IN WACHAU VALLEY?

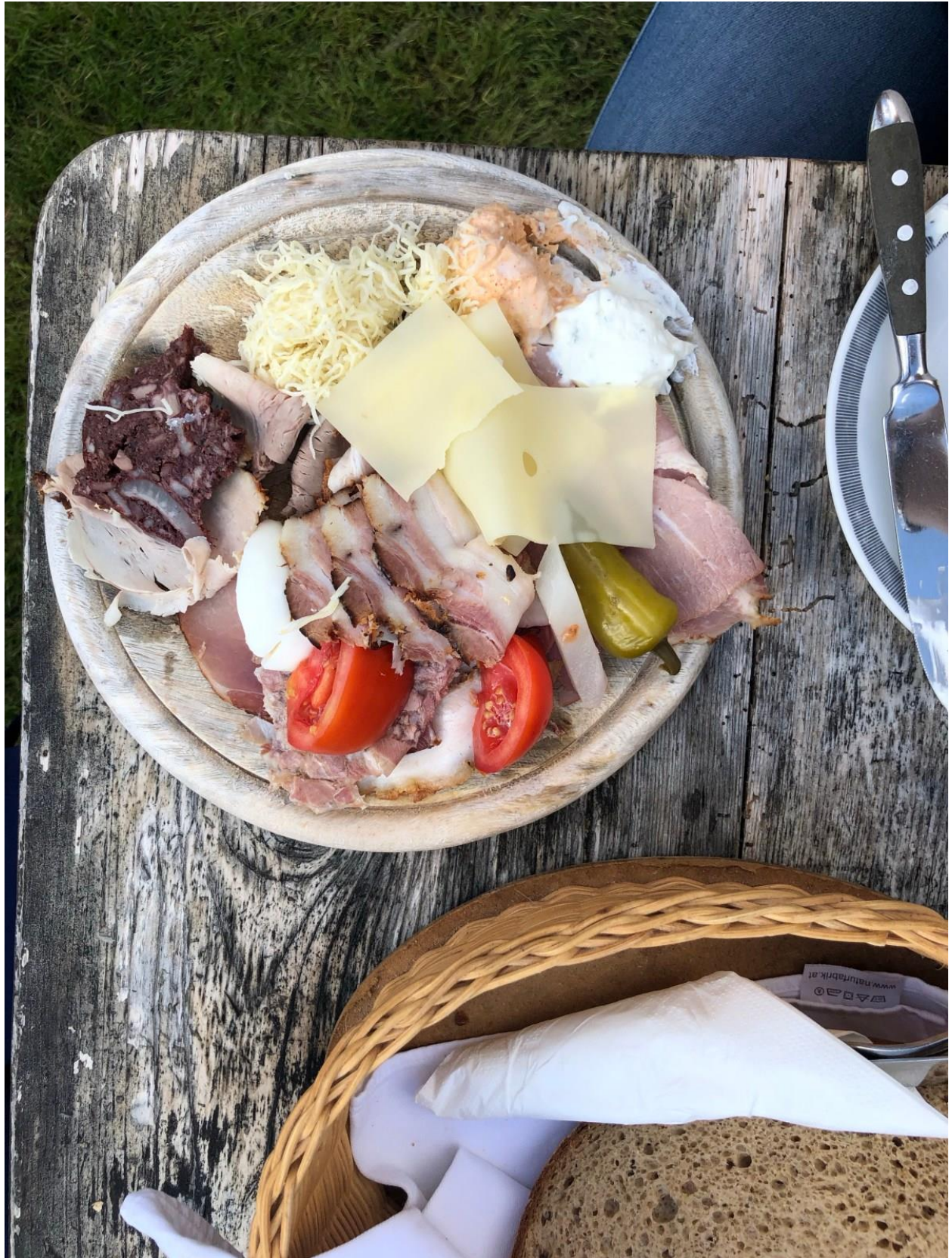
LUNCH IN DÜRNSTEIN

If you are starting your bike ride from Krems, it'll probably be about lunchtime when you get to Dürnstein. This is good because Dürnstein has well marked restaurants which can't be said in the other villages. Most places do not open until noon and some not until 12:30.

We had a really yummy lunch at **Alter Klosterkeller** on the terrace of Wiener Schnitzel and this roast pork dish with dumplings and speckkraut. There was no English menu so try and find a server that speaks some English to help you order. We didn't really know what we ordered but it was delicious. Note that bread is not free in Austria! If you eat it, you will pay. There were several good looking restaurants in town. One was in the hotel that didn't open until 12:30.

SNACKS ON THE TRAIL

We stopped at a really great place south of the river called **Pulker's Heuriger**. There are heurigers everywhere that are basically wine shops, and most of them serve snacks as well. All the snacks look pretty similar if you look at photos – a plate of ham, more ham, some cheese, some spreadable dip things, some marinated vegetables, unidentifiable ham looking things that weren't ham, and some grated horseradish (not to be confused with grated cheese because we did and it was hot).



DINNER

We were dead tired after a day of biking so we just went to a place nearby called 2Stein that actually ended up being delicious. It's known for their burgers (that Europeans eat with a knife and a fork and I just can't handle), but I got this dish off of their all-time favorites menu that I wish I had all the time. Look for the meat dumplings. The fries were also super innovative – they do this cut that kind of cuts a U down the middle giving them double the crunch – they were so crunchy!! Can you tell I liked them? In Krems, there are several fine dining restaurants that we just weren't up for. One on the water looked extra cool called Wellen.Spiel. In Dürnstein there were also some great looking places including Küffer Keller and the hotel restaurant which opened for lunch at 12:30. I'm sure there are other cute places sprinkled throughout Wachau that would probably be best reached by a taxi in the evening.

WHAT SHOULD I PACK FOR WACHAU VALLEY?

The trails were pretty hot when the sun was out. Most people were wearing actual outfits everywhere we went and not activewear. I would wear something you are comfortable in for sure – I opted for jeans and a linen top, and some shoes you can bike around in all day – sneakers or espadrilles.

At night it got chilly, so I had a light jacket and also a summer scarf.

If your hotel has a pool like ours, bring your bathing suit! Even though it might not be allowed in the sauna (lol).

I would also bring a water bottle that you can fill up along the route. Our bikes had little cages for purses so I just strapped my purse to the back.

HONESTLY, HOW MUCH DID YOU SPEND?

2 nights

Total for 1 person – \$513

Flights – \$151

Hotels – \$156

Trains and Cabs – \$103

Food and Wine – \$87

Bikes – \$16

MY PERFECT 1 DAY ITINERARY IN WACHAU VALLEY

DAY 1

Either head to Krems from Vienna or wake up and eat breakfast if you are already here. We left Vienna at 9 AM and were on our bikes by 11:30 AM.

Start your bike tour of the Wachau Valley by biking to Dürnstein and plan to spend your time here until lunch. Stop into some shops, scope out some menus, climb to the castle, visit the monastery, or enjoy a glass of wine in a heuriger. Lunch in Dürnstein with a crisp glass of Gruner Veltliner or a Riesling.

Continue biking along the Danube all the way to the ferry in Spitz, stopping wherever and whenever you fancy. There is a water-filling station close to the ferry.

Cross at Spitz and ride back on the south path. Stop along the way at Pulker's Heuriger for a snack board and wine.

Enjoy your hotel or the town you are staying at and eat something caloric to celebrate biking 20+ miles.

Either head back to Vienna or spend a relaxing evening on your terrace drinking some fine Wachau Valley wine.