

EN

CARINTHIA

Villach

A walk
through **HISTORIC**
Villach





Villach main square, ca. 1912

Villach: Modern and historical

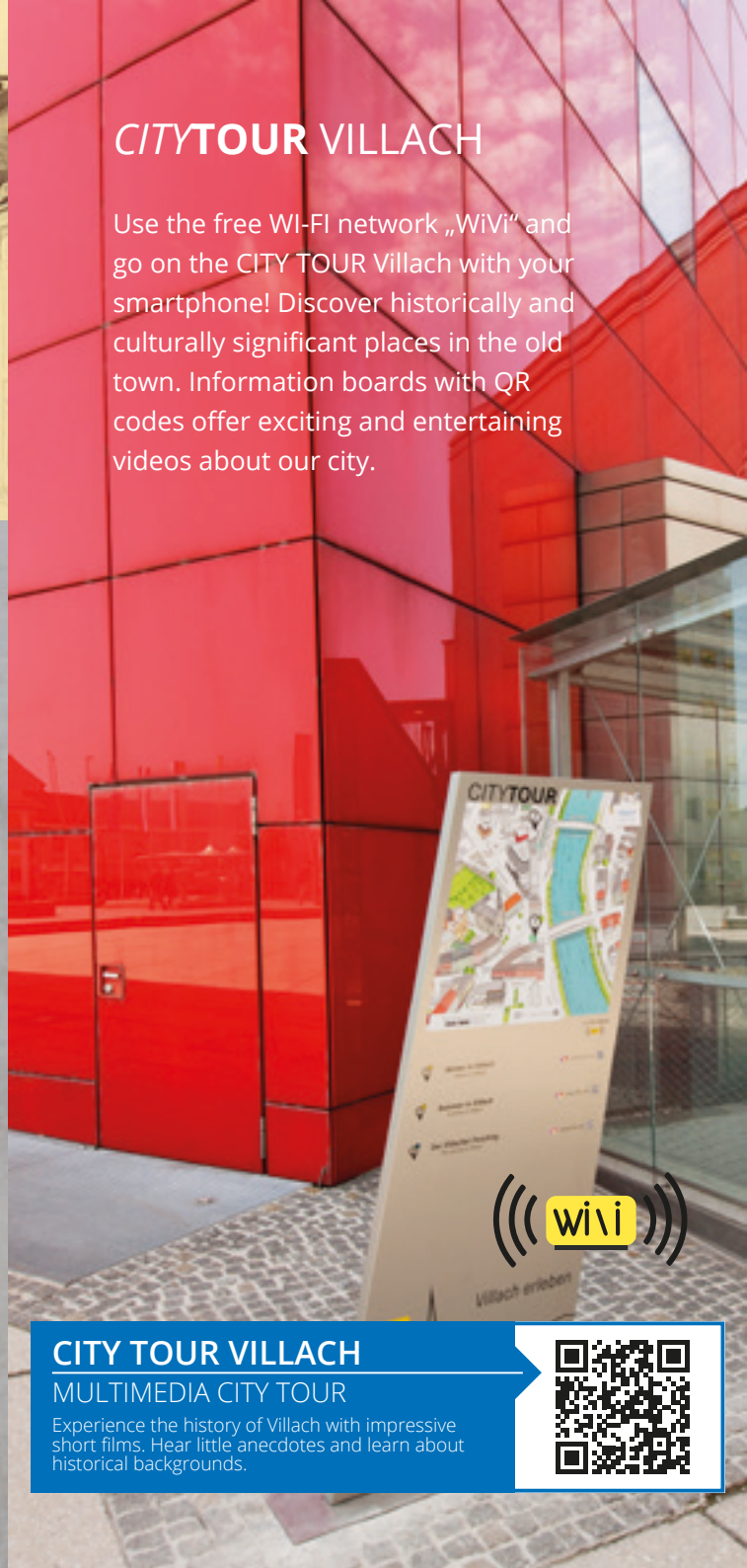
Charming Villach is Carinthia's second-largest city at 60,000 inhabitants. It is a lively city, dynamic and modern – yet steeped in history. The Romans established the important way station of “Santicum” in this convenient location on an established travelling route next to a bridge. They also appreciated the thermal springs of nearby Warmbad.

The first documented reference to Villach is from 878 as “pons Uillah”, and in 979, a royal court of “Fillac” is mentioned. In 1007, Emperor Henry II granted Villach to the Archbishopric of Bamberg in central Germany. It was not until 1759 that Empress Maria Theresa bought back the city with all its estates, which reached as far as Pontebba in modern-day Italy.

In 1060, Villach became a market town. Another milestone in its history was 1240, when it was first mentioned as a city.

CITYTOUR VILLACH

Use the free WI-FI network „WiVi“ and go on the CITY TOUR Villach with your smartphone! Discover historically and culturally significant places in the old town. Information boards with QR codes offer exciting and entertaining videos about our city.



CITY TOUR VILLACH

MULTIMEDIA CITY TOUR

Experience the history of Villach with impressive short films. Hear little anecdotes and learn about historical backgrounds.



We're glad you are here -
welcome to Villach!

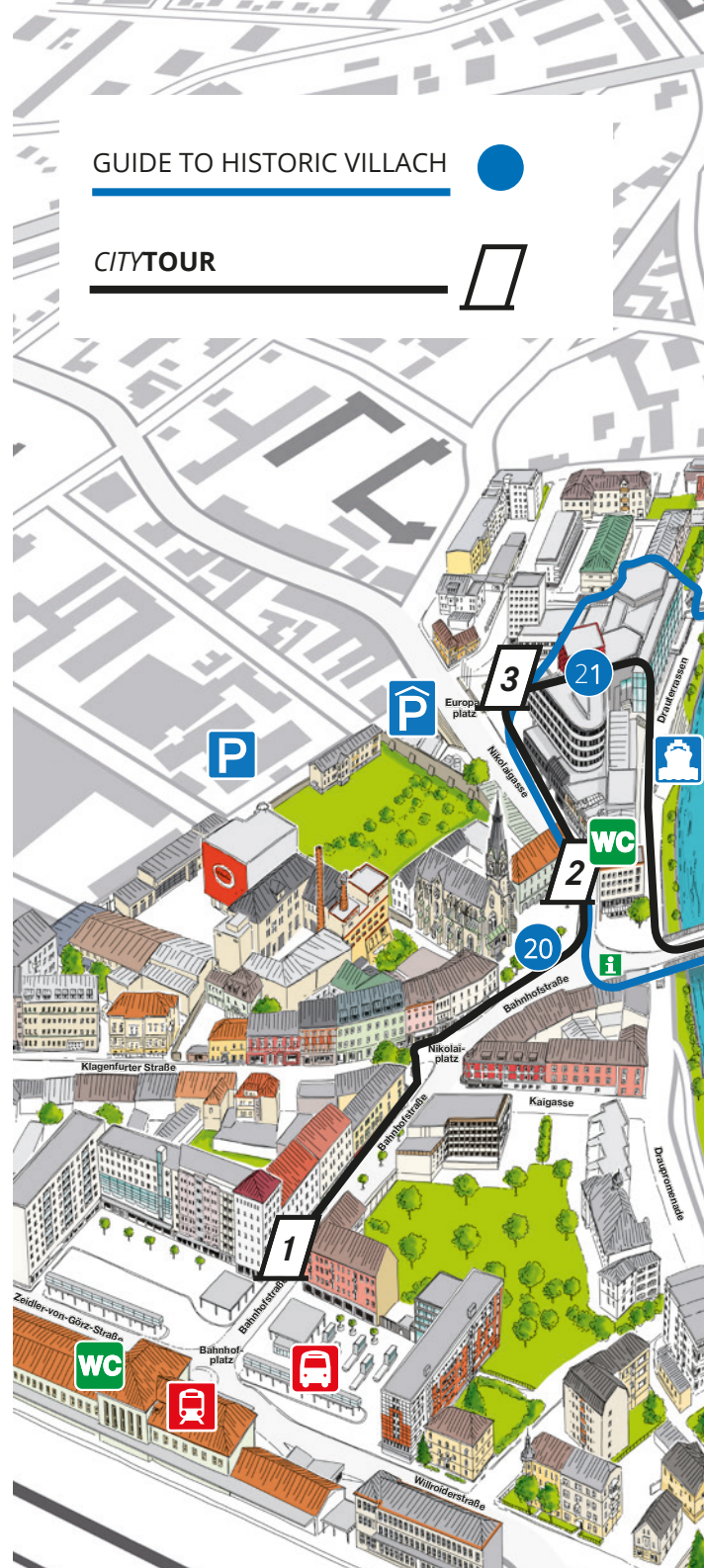
The old town of Villach is the versatile heart of our region in southern Austria, at the intersection of three cultures, namely the Germanic, Slavic and Romanesque.

This brochure gives you a vivid insight into the history and culture of our incomparable city on the river Drava/Drau.

Here are three ways to discover Villach:

1. Visit one of our interesting and guided city tours! The charming guides will tell you the most exciting stories about Villach. Our „special“ from May to October: Every guided tour is free with the Erlebnis CARD. Just ask your host about it!
2. Use the free WI-FI network „WiVi“ and go on the CITY TOUR Villach with your smartphone! Information boards with QR codes offer you exciting and entertaining videos about our city on the river.
3. Use this folder while walking through the old town and experience Villach on your own!

Enjoy interesting and
exciting hours in Villach -
in the heart of Carinthia!





Pilgrimage church „Zum Heiligen Kreuz“



Museum courtyard



Aftermath of WW II / Reconstruction

Villach flourished in the 700 years of Bamberg reign. However, earthquakes, fires and epidemics left their mark on the city. The most devastating disaster was the great earthquake of 1348, which caused part of the southern face of mount Dobratsch to break off and started enormous fires that raged through the city, leaving large parts of it in ashes. However, despite further earthquakes, fires and even an outbreak of the plague, Villach rose from the ashes time and again.

The 15th and 16th centuries brought an economic upturn thanks to free trade with Venice and a flourishing trade in lead and iron. In this favourable economic climate, science and art thrived.

During the Reformation, Villach became the centre of Protestantism in Carinthia around 1526. When the Counterreformation came, many Protestants were driven from the city, taking their assets with them. As a result, the city's economy took a hard hit.

Napoleon and his regiment held the city from 1809 to 1813, and during World War I, Villach became a command centre and front-line city at the Italian border.

In World War II, Villach was bombed heavily by the Allies due to its strategic importance as a railway hub. 52 air raids destroyed not only the railway station and tracks but also the majority of civilian buildings in the city. Many buildings in the historic city centre were damaged as well, and the consequences of this destruction for the townscape are visible to this day.

Discover Villach's history

Today, Villach is a vibrant and modern city of culture, high tech and shopping opportunities, offering relaxation and leisure activities in a charming Mediterranean atmosphere.

The historic city centre with its slightly sloping main square and old narrow streets is the heart of a modern city on which great historical figures



View from the parish church



Street art festival



The former tollgate

such as the Khevenhüller dynasty, Thomas of Villach and Paracelsus have left their marks – some with monumental buildings, others with hidden gems and monuments that are waiting to be discovered.

Eager to discover Villach's hidden treasures?

Let this folder guide you on a walk through the history of Villach.



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Enjoy discovering all the historical treasures our city has to offer!

Italian atmosphere on Hauptplatz

Since the mid-12th century, the main square has been the beating heart of the city, used for markets and fairs. The impact of World War II can still be seen in the post-War buildings that were constructed in the gaps the falling bombs left in the historical building stock. In 1988, Hauptplatz was pedestrianised, improving the quality of life markedly. When the pleasant terraces of the cafés fill up on sunny days and the city is vibrating with energy, you might think you are in Italy.

- 1 Start of the tour: House no. 1: Today the hotel "Goldenes Lamm", this used to be the location of the provincial tollgate. Here, at the lower city gate, people would pay their toll to cross the River Drau.



Hauptplatz no. 7

House no. 13: "Neumannhaus"

Paracelsus relief / Paracelsushof

2 *House no. 7:* The magnificent "Grottenegghaus" with its single Gothic blind window preserved on the second the floor above the newer arched windows was originally built in the 14th to 15th century. Over the centuries, it was home to wealthy patrician families and even the Counts della Grotta before being used as a toll, customs and tax office by the Imperial administration.

3 *Ankershofgasse:* This narrow alley starts next to house no. 9. A characteristic feature of the narrow side streets leading off Hauptplatz are the arches between the houses, designed to provide support during earthquakes. At the entrance to the alley, you can see a heraldic stone, placed there in 1589 by an apothecary named Gregor Höll.

4 *House no. 11:* Another stone witness of the past can be found in this house. In the entrance hall, a Dr. Hedeneegg, who renovated this building, placed a memorial stone in 1579.

5 *House no. 13:* The terracotta-coloured "Neumannhaus" at number 13 was built as the townhouse of Anna Neumann von Wasserleonburg (1535-1623). A double-headed eagle carved in stone has endured the centuries in the courtyard. Because of this royal symbol, it was long mistakenly believed that Emperor Charles V stayed here in 1552 as well (see house no. 26).

6 *House no. 18:* Across the square next to Seilergasse, a memorial plaque marks the entrance to a carefully restored Renaissance courtyard. Here, the famous physician, alchemist and philosopher Paracelsus – born Theophrastus von Hohenheim – spent his childhood and youth. Two marble relief medallions on the eastern side of the courtyard depict Paracelsus and his father Wilhelm von Hohenheim.

7 *House no. 22:* Hidden behind the austere façade of this post-War building is Hirscheeggerhof, a beautiful courtyard with Tuscan columns.



Parkhotel



Trinity Column



Hotel Post



North Portal



Sculpture on the nave



Parish church and Trinity Column

8 **Trinity Column:** This magnificent monument built to invoke divine protection for the city located in the upper third of the slightly sloping main square dates back to 1739. Later, statues of the Virgin Mary, Saint Florian, patron saint of firefighters, and Saint Roch, protector against the plague, were added in memory of the plague.

9 **House no.26:** The chronicles of this magnificent residence of the Khevenhüller family recorded a famous visitor in 1552: Emperor Charles V, fleeing from Maurice of Saxony, stayed here for seven weeks. Between 1748 and 1875, the building was used as post house and coaching inn. Today, it is a hotel with a beautiful courtyard and an interior with Gothic vaults. The highlight of the impressive façade is a Renaissance bay window bearing the coats of arms of the former owners, the Widmann-Ortenburg and Khevenhüller families.

Between 1748 and 1875 the house was used as a post office and a tavern. Today it houses the „Romantic Hotel Post“. Its beautiful renaissance oriel shows the coat of arms of the Widmann-Ortenburg and the Khevenhüller-Welzer families. The interior boasts Gothic vaults and columns.

Landmark and view: The parish church of St. Jacob

10 St. Jacob's Church is the city's most important architectural monument and also its emblem. The first documented church in this location was a Roman basilica mentioned in 1136, which was destroyed in an earthquake in the 14th century. Reconstruction of the chancel began in 1360, followed by the nave, which was built in the Gothic style. In 1526, St. Jacob's became Carinthia's first Protestant



Old city wall

church, only to become Catholic again in 1594. Inside the church with its decorative rib vault ceiling, you can discover works of art such as the Renaissance pulpit that dates back to when it was a Protestant church, the high altar built in the rococo style, the burial chapel and funerary monuments of the Khevenhüllers, and a late Gothic fresco of Saint Christopher.

The bell tower was destroyed in an earthquake in 1690. It was rebuilt, but not completed until 1847. Like the Italian campanile, it was originally a free-standing bell tower. Only later was it connected to the church proper.

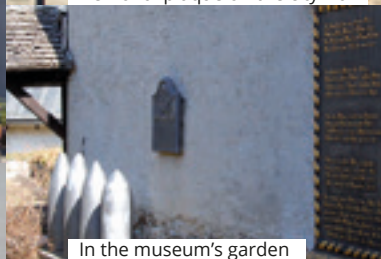
If you climb the 240 steps to the top of Carinthia's highest tower (94m), you will be rewarded with a magnificent view of the picturesque historic city centre of Villach.

The old market centre: Widmannngasse

- 11 On the western side of Oberer Kirchplatz next to the church is the start of Widmannngasse. This street is among the oldest in Villach. It was the site of the first markets, and indeed its old names "Rindermarkt" (cattle market),



Memorial plaque on the city wall



In the museum's garden



City Museum

"Salzgasse" (salt lane) and Leiten ("slope") tell us about its different uses and describe its incline down to the river. In 1879, it was named after the Widmann family, respected patricians and merchants of Villach.

A detour to the city wall

At the upper end of Widmannngasse lies Hans-Gasser-Platz, with a statue of the Austrian sculptor Hans Gasser surrounded by beautiful houses built around the turn of the 19th to the 20th century.

Set back from the square, on its northern side, you can see a piece of history: the only remaining part of the old city walls with an enormous bastion tower. The recent redesign of the square draws the eye to it. The old curtain wall, first mentioned in 1233, was damaged in the great earthquake of 1348. Although it was partially rebuilt, it was later nearly completely demolished during the French occupation of the city.



„Eschey-Hof“



Exhibition room at the castle



The castle—at its core Villach's oldest building

Cross the modern footbridge and step through the gate in the wall. Behind a fence, you will see a memorial plaque and anti-aircraft projectiles from World War II – exhibits of the City Museum. Turn right into narrow Schanzgasse to get back to Widmannngasse.

12 *House no.38*: The City Museum. If you are interested in Villach's history, you should make time for an extensive tour. The building itself is of interest as well: The interior dates back to the 16th century, and in its Renaissance courtyard you can see the city's medieval pillory. The museum's fascinating collection spans the time from the Neolithic to the city's Roman history, the Middle Ages and Paracelsus up to the present.

13 *House no.30*: The "Eschey-Hof" courtyard with its columned arcades now houses a popular Italian restaurant.

14 *Mary's Column*: Watching over the lane from a patch of grass on the side is the baroque St. Mary's Column, built in 1740. From here, Widmannngasse slopes steeply downwards to the River Drau.

15 *House no.10*: The music school is a harmonious marriage of the old and the new: This historical patrician house, which belonged to the city's first mayor in the 16th century, was extended in 2008 with a modern annex. You will have the best view of it from Kunigundengasse, which turns west just past the school. Follow it to our next stop, the Villach castle.

A stroll along the River Drau and to the northern bank

16 *Castle*: The castle, or "Burg", was once the seat of the administrators of the Bamberg Archbishopric, which ruled over Villach for over 700 years. It was not until 1759 that Empress Maria Theresa bought the estates back from them.

The core of the castle makes it the city's oldest building. During recent renovations on the castle and its Old Catholic chapel of Saint Henry and Saint Cunigunde, precious historical finds were discovered, which you can view in an exhibition room.



Nikolaiplatz



Bronze sculpture of a carnival jester



St. Nicholas Church and the town bridge

17 Lederergasse: Following the River Drau, we arrive at Lederergasse, the city's oldest guild street (streets were named after the tradespeople who had their workshops there – this one after tanners). A plaque on house no. 12 at the first corner recalls the high-water mark of the catastrophic flood of September 1882. House no. 25, in turn, bears the high-water marks of more recent floods in 1965 and 1966. The regulation of the River Drau in 1981 diminished the risk and the river banks have become a popular place for leisure activities.

18 Kaiser-Josef-Platz: From Lederergasse with its inviting bars and cafés turn into Bambergergasse and walk to Kaiser-Josef-Platz. This charming little square is named after a statue of Emperor Joseph II from 1888. At Karlgasse 10 on the eastern corner of the square you can admire a remarkable late Gothic entrance hall with a central column. Walk beneath the arches of Karlgasse back to Hauptplatz and turn north towards the river.

19 Town Bridge: A “pons Uillah” was first mentioned in records in 878, giving Villach claim to the oldest bridge in Carinthia. The tollbooth on Hauptplatz collected a toll from anyone wishing to cross the bridge, providing the town with a steady income until 1903. Until 1858, it was a simple wooden bridge. The subsequently built picturesque arch bridge was replaced with the modern bridge you see today in 1960.

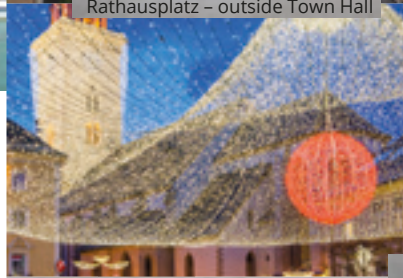
20 Nikolaikirche (St. Nikolas Church): On the other side of the river, Nikolaiplatz welcomes you with its charming cafés and bars, a model showing the city in 1649 and a sculpture of a carnival jester symbolising the famous “Villacher Fasching”. A statue of Saint Francis of Assisi is located in front of the neo-Gothic Nikolaikirche (St. Nicholas Church) with a Franciscan monastery founded in 1629.



Congress Center Villach and boat landing



Rathausplatz – outside Town Hall



Courtyard of the old Town Hall

21 *Congress Center Villach:* In Nikolai-gasse, the historical town gives way to modernity with the striking new Congress Hotel and Congress Center. The enormous red cube of the Congress Center with its large conference hall hosts not only conferences but also cultural and social events: Carinthia's largest and best-known music festival, "Carinthian Summer", is held here every year, as are Villach's legendary carnival shows.

Back to the historical centre

22 *Pedestrian Bridge:* Turn back to the river. The pedestrian bridge is a popular place for photographs, as it affords a breath-taking view of the rose-coloured pilgrimage church "Zum Heiligen Kreuz" (built 1726-1738) against the backdrop of the majestic Karawanken mountain chain. The church is one of Carinthia's most beautiful baroque buildings.

If you would like to explore the region from the river, join the boat tours on the Drau which leave next to the bridge.

23 *Freihausplatz:* Walking up from the footbridge, we cross Gerbergasse (named, like Lederergasse, after a tanners' guild) and along Freihausgasse to Freihausplatz. Narrow alleys connect it to Hauptplatz.

24 *Town Hall:* Where Khevenhüllergasse opens out into Freihausplatz next to the old elementary school, you will see the back of the Town Hall, which faces towards Hauptplatz. After the old Town Hall – the "Khevenhüller Stadtpalais" – was heavily damaged in World War II, the new building was built in 1952. Only the impressive 16th-century portal of the civil registry office remains to remind us of the building's past splendour.



Bronze couple in local costume



Parkhotel and St. Jacob's Church



Protestant Church

25 **Parkhotel:** Walk along Freihausgasse to the impressive Parkhotel from 1911. It no longer serves as a hotel – during its renovation in 1998, it was converted into offices and function rooms. When it was opened, the hotel's café with its beautiful old park quickly became a popular meeting place of Villach's society – and it remains so to this day.

26 **Hauptplatz:** Cross 8.-Mai-Platz with its bronze statue of a couple in traditional local costume. The statue was placed there in 2008 when the square was redesigned to commemorate the centenary of the "Bauerngman", the initiators of the Villacher Kirchtag fair which takes place every year at the beginning of August. This takes us back to the upper part of Hauptplatz, the start of our tour.

A short additional tour:

27 If you would like to discover more of the city, turn south from 8.-Mai-Platz instead of going back to Hauptplatz. Follow 10.-Oktober-Straße, which is lined by impressive buildings amid green gardens. The street opens out into a beautiful park with a pretty Protestant Church, built in the neo-Gothic style between 1901 and 1903.

28 As you walk back up 10.-Oktober-Straße, turn right at the Peraugymnasium school, past impressive 19th and 20th century mansions to Schillerpark. In the small park, you can admire busts of famous poet Friedrich Schiller and composer Thomas Koschat, who made Carinthian folk songs popular internationally. The biggest attraction of Schillerpark, however, is Europe's largest indoor geographical plastic relief model – a stunning 3D model of Carinthia on a 1:10,000 scale.

Who is who in Villach's history

Bishopric Bamberg

Emperor Henry II granted Villach to the Bishopric Bamberg in Germany, who governed the city for over seven centuries, from 1007 to 1759. Their administrative centre was in the city's castle on the Drau. In 1535, Bamberg had to place its estates, which reached all the way to Pontebba in Italy, under the sovereignty of the local ruler. It lost further rights in 1674. In 1759, Empress Maria Theresa bought back Villach and the attached estates for one million guilders for the House of Habsburg.

Thomas of Villach (ca. 1445-1530)

Among experts, the late Gothic frescoes and panels of this artist from Villach, which are found across Carinthia, are highly valued. Some of his most famous works can be admired in the Monastery of St. Paul in Lavanttal and in the rural churches of Thörl and Gerlamoos. He is considered one of the preeminent representatives of the "Villacher Werkstätte" school of painting, which developed in Carinthia in the 15th century. The collection of the City Museum also includes some of his panels.

Theophrastus Bombastus v. Hohenheim, better known as Paracelsus (1493-1541)

Paracelsus made history as a famous physician, ground-breaking alchemist, innovator of medical science, father of balneology and religious philosopher. When he was nine years old, he moved to Villach from Switzerland with his father, a widower. Here, he attended the Latin school. He learned much about the art of medicine from his father Wilhelm, who worked as a physician in Villach for 30 years, before traveling extensively. In the Paracelsushof courtyard in Seilergasse you can see a memorial to Paracelsus and his father.

The Khevenhüllers

Few dynasties have left their stamp on Carinthia like the Khevenhüllers: They owned and built castles and palaces, factories and town residences. Their most spectacular property was Hochosterwitz, still considered the most magnificent castle in Carinthia. They moved to Villach from Franconia in the 14th century. Although not originally of noble birth, they served the Emperor and were soon ennobled. They were famous for their entrepreneurship and skilfully increased their fortune over the years. Christoph Baron of Khevenhüller granted Charles V refuge in his residence for seven weeks in 1552 when the latter was fleeing from Maurice of Saxony. The building still remains on Hauptplatz 26, now as the Romantik Hotel Post.



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