

Way of St. James

Along the Way of St. James in South Tyrol

Ever calmer steps ...

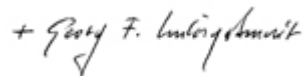
Dear Pilgrims,

Quite apart from being on one of the historical stretches of the **Way of St. James** as it runs through the South Tyrol, **Neustift Abbey**, situated at the intersection of the two main routes from North to South and East to West, would have offered board, lodging and medical care to many travellers and pilgrims soon after the founding of its hospital, but above all it would have offered spiritual refreshment.

When **travelling, walking and making a pilgrimage**, an existential human phenomenon is expressed. There is fundamental evidence, most especially in the message of the Bible, in the Old and New testaments, that man, individuals, people are on a journey, on the way to their destination, towards God. They do not go along this way, with its many twists and turns, on their own, but meet up with others and travel along the road together, led by Emanuel, “God with us”, as Jesus was called in the New Testament, who said of Himself that He is the way to God.

I hope that everyone who sets out on the **Way of St. James** in South Tyrol gets to know the character and the culture of this beautiful countryside a bit better, but I especially hope that they experience an inner awakening of their own destiny and are able to reinforce their personal objectives, through the Christian message of the **Way of St. James**.

Georg Untergaßmair
Provost and Abbot of Neustift



Way of St. James

Along the Way of St. James in South Tyrol

1st Stage: Winnebach-Welsberg



Immediately after the first section of the route across the flowery meadows of Winnebach and Vierschach we reach, if not the highest point of the South Tyrol stretch of the Way of St. James, at least one of the highest points.

Not only geographically – because, apart from Brenner, the plateau between Innichen and Toblach is the highest point in our route – but also, and most importantly, from an historic point of view. The Benedictine Abbey church of Innichen – its Italian name, San Candido, being derived from one of its two patron saints, Saint Candidus – is considered the most important example of Romanesque ecclesiastical architecture in the Tyrol (built in the 12th century, renovated in the 13th century). It was donated by the Bavarian Duke Tassilo III to Abbot Otto von Scharnitz in the year 769, with instructions to found an abbey, in order to establish here on the water's edge a bastion of Christian civilisation against the heathen Slavs infiltrating from the East. In this magnificent Romanesque church you must see, and marvel at, the late Romanesque frescoes in the dome depicting the story of the Creation, and the Crucifixion Group in the choir which is also late Romanesque and a place of pilgrimage from all over the region for centuries, the Romanesque crypt with its sculpture of St. Candidus, and finally, in the south portal, the Gothic fresco by Michael Pacher portraying the Abbot Otto II between the two patrons of the church, St. Candidus and St. Corbinian.

This plateau has another special treat in store for us: the spring of the River Drau, which the pilgrims who set out from Slovenia had followed for about 300 kilometres. You too can drink from the waters here!

The route along the edge of the forest brings us to Toblach, a village which was wealthy and important in the middle ages because two major trade and traffic routes met up. The Via Alemagna from Venice (going to Augsburg, the town of the Fuggers) meets the old Roman road from Aquileia here, the same road that we are following. The wealth of the village is obvious both from the decor of the beautiful late Baroque (1769) Parish Church of St. John, and from the numerous imposing and well cared for buildings and houses, which today characterise the village. Tourism arrived at the end of the 19th century with the construction of the first Austrian internal railway, the “Südbahn” from Vienna to Innsbruck, which ran through the Puster Valley, and which also brought further prosperity for Toblach.

A bit of Austrian history awaits us on the way to Niederdorf, when we pass “Bad Maistatt”. This is where Maximilian I, Emperor from 1493-1519, took therapeutic baths, and it is also where the composer Gustav Mahler spent his summers at the beginning of the 20th century. (It is said that his 9th Symphony was composed here.) In 1456 a hospital was established in

Niederdorf for travellers, pilgrims and the sick. The adjoining Hospital Church of the Holy Trinity still exists today.

Our feet will have to put up with asphalt for the rest of the way to Welsberg, but at least these are small, scarcely used roads and paths through the wide and sunny Puster Valley. Welsberg is the birthplace of Paul Troger, creator of the famous frescoes in Brixen Cathedral, and the three altarpieces in the parish church of his home village are also his work. The frescoes of the little Gothic shrine behind the church are, however, painted by the second great artist of the Puster Valley, Michael Pacher.

Time:

Winnebach > Innichen: 1 ¾ hrs.

Innichen > Toblach: 1 ¼ hrs.

Toblach > Welsberg: 2 ½ hrs.

Distance: 25.1 km

Hight difference:

Ascent: 371 m

Descent: 397 m

Information and accommodation:

TOURISM BOARD HOCHPUSTERTAL

Pflegplatz 1 - I-39038 Innichen

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Tourist Office Toblach

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2nd Stage: Welsberg - Bruneck



We walk through Ried (upwards along the stream), avoiding the heavy traffic, and from there along a meadow and woodland path until we reach the Olang reservoir. The cycle path would be quicker but it is asphalted and also very busy.

The communities of Oberolang, Mitterolang and Niederolang are strung out behind each other and we cross them without any problem, but not without first paying a visit to see the beautiful altarpiece in the Church of St. Aegidius in Mitterolang, which was probably painted by Michael Pacher. A pilgrimage church is to be expected on a pilgrimage route. However when they are practically a day's walk apart along an ancient and important traffic route, as in our case, then the answer is obvious and it is perfectly legitimate for us to walk in the tracks of the pilgrims.

Counting the Church of St. James in Nasen, which we head for after Niederolang, we find in Strassen in East Tyrol, the third church dedicated to the pilgrims' patron. If you include the one in Dietenheim, just before Bruneck, it would be four, if that one is not too out of the way for those on foot. On the southern exterior wall of the Gothic Church of St. James (15th century) in Nasen an especially beautiful work by Simon von Taisten is visible from far away, it is of St. Christopher standing in the sea surrounded by fabulous creatures. Inside we find the pilgrims' apostle depicted in the altar screen, as well as on a keystone in the nave.

There is a different route to Nasen for pilgrims whose rucksacks are not too heavy, and who are not afraid of the extra 150 m climb involved (even though we're travelling out of the valley!), or for those who simply want to enjoy to the full the treasures of the Puster Valley. This route takes us to Taisten, home of the third great, but lesser known, artist of the Puster Valley. In the Church of St. George we discover Simon von Taisten's wonderful frescoes (and those of Leonhard von Brixen). The frescoes in the cemetery of the Gothic Chapel of St. James (the second one after Strassen in East Tyrol) were created by Simon von Taisten.

Hiking trail 21 takes us further up the mountain across the Unterrainer mountain up to almost 1400 m above sea level and then down the mountain towards Niederrasen at the entrance to the Antholz Valley. Going out of the valley from there, we reach Neunhäusern on the Pustertaler Road and rejoin the Way of St. James about 500 m further on, along which we come to Nasen. Then we traverse back along the southern slope of the valley and reach the wonderful hiking trail 3 A – we only have to use the asphalt cycle path for a short distance - to Lamprechtsburg near Bruneck, from where a nature trail through the wild and romantic Rienz gorge brings us almost into the centre of the old town area of Bruneck. This birthplace of the great Michael Pacher was founded in the 13th century by the powerful Bishop Bruno of Brixen, in order to control the heavy traffic which was even then passing through the Puster Valley. The charming old town area, which stands at the foot of the fortress-topped hill, the two together showing the town's imposing fortifications – and the four town gates which are still standing reinforcing this impression – is really worth a visit. However we will not leave without paying our respects to Michael Pacher's birthplace, and to the Gasthaus Lamm. An

entire room in the hotel is hung with paintings and sketches by the two great painters of East Tyrol, Franz von Defregger and Albin Egger-Lienz – absolutely breathtaking!

Time:

Welsberg > Niederolang: 2 hrs.

Niederolang > Bruneck: 2 ¾ hrs.

Distance:

19.3 km

Hight differenceöhenunterschied:

Ascent: 338 m

Descent: 585 m

Information and accommodation:

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3rd Stage: Bruneck - Niedervintl



The stretch from Bruneck to Ehrenburg and Kiens is not just enjoyable thanks to the beautiful trails through the wide and sunny Puster Valley. For pilgrims, which is what we are, there is the Church of St. James in St. Sigmund, and also a pilgrims' hospital – there could not be a clearer indication of the pilgrims' route.

First though we must take a look at the Gothic Church of St. Nicholas in Stegen, immediately after Bruneck, where the Stations of the Cross, dating back to about 1470, are worth seeing because the frescoes of the 14 stations go around the charnel house (ossuary) as well as the church. Continuing along the woodland path we reach Sonnenburg and the previously mentioned Hospital of St. John im Spital, founded in the 12th century by the Benedictine nuns from the Sonnenburg convent, for the use of travellers, as well as pilgrims to Rome and Santiago de Compostela, on the ancient Roman road used more and more by these pilgrims.

The Roman milestone, now re-sited on the main road so that it can be better seen, used to stand on this old road which ran right past the hospital. Unfortunately the hospital chapel is almost always closed, so we will miss viewing the larger-than-life-sized 12th century Crucifix and the fresco by Simon von Taisten, which depicts a violinist kneeling at the feet of the crucified St. Uncumber.

The beautiful tracks continue across the sunny side of the valley floor and out towards the end of it and not until Ehrenburg and Kiens do we reach the banks of the Rienz. It is worth going to see the “Ehrenburger Kornmutter” or Corn Mother, (a painting from the mid 15th century) in the crypt chapel of Ehrenburg's parish church, a muchloved place for pilgrims. For centuries the farmers of the Puster Valley came to this apparent ancient Christian place of worship to pray for a good harvest – hence the “Corn Mother”.

Anyone not wanting to wait until they reach St. Sigmund to see St. James just has to look around the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul (parts of which date back to the 15th century) in Kiens where they will find him in a side altar depicted as “Matamoros” (Moor-slayer).

Hiking trail 2 on the banks of the Rienz takes us to the Gisser Hotel and then we curve north to the Parish church of St. Sigmund, whose second patron saint – no doubt as a result of the growing popularity of the pilgrimage to Santiago – is St. James. As well as various paintings of the apostle, the church is known above all for housing the oldest complete Gothic altar-piece in the Tyrol, which has not been moved since it was first made (c. 1430).

After St. Sigmund we cross over to the south bank of the river for the first time since leaving Bruneck and reach the Puster Valley cycle track to Niedervintl. (After a short distance we can if we want cross a bridge to pick up a hiking trail on the north bank leading to Obervintl. Niedervintl can then be reached along hiking trail 2 A.) The original 15th century late Gothic parish church of Obervintl is dedicated to St. Nicholas and was renovated in Baroque style in 1749. The fresco depicting St. Christopher on the outer wall also dates back to the 15th century. The little village of Niedervintl has two churches, the old parish church from the 14th

century and, inspired by Brixen Cathedral, the Baroque Parish Church of the Annunciation of Mary consecrated in 1763.

Time:

Bruneck > Kiens: 2 ½ hrs.

Kiens > Niedervintl: 2 ¼ hrs.

Distance:

25.2 km

Height difference:

Ascent: 535 m

Descent: 610 m

Information and accommodation:

TOURISM BOARD KRONPLATZ

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Tourist Office Kiens

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TOURISM BOARD EISACKTAL

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4th Stage: Niedervintl - Neustift - Franzensfeste



Proof that a church dedicated to St. James is not always to be found along a pilgrimage route is shown if we make the detour from Niedervintl up to the Church of St. James in Meransen, as long as no-one is frightened of heights. There too, even though the church is dedicated to St. James, we are greeted from afar by the second greatest patron saint of travellers, St. Christopher, depicted on the external wall standing in the sea and surrounded by fabulous creatures as he is in Nasen. It is said that he who dies on the day he sets eyes on St. Christopher will be led straight through purgatory to Heaven by the saint. This is illustrated in the gigantic paintings of St. Christopher on the outside walls of these churches, and for those going to work in the early morning in the fields, it is the first thing they see.

The path into the valley, which we share with cyclists, leads to the Mühlbacher Klause, a fortress built in 1472 by Duke Sigmund von Tirol and which, like the Lienz fortress and Bruneck castle, functioned as a border fortification. The last time it was the scene of a bloody battle was during the Tyrolean War of Independence of 1809, today the restored ruins serve as a peaceful cultural and community centre.

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Mühlbach's Gothic Parish Church of St. Helena – a very rare patronage – with its beautiful frescoes both external and internal, and the late Gothic cemetery Chapel of St. Florian, form a unique group, so beautiful it is difficult to leave it behind.

If you head for the Brenner on the direct route, not visiting Neustift (and Brixen), you should carry on from the 5th Station along the Way of the Cross, which ends just before Aicha at the pilgrimage chapel in the pine forest. The "Stöcklvater" Chapel (18th century), a local place of pilgrimage especially during Sundays in Lent, gives us a chance to stop for a while. Going through Aicha (late Gothic Church of St. Nicholas) and along another track by the Franzensfeste reservoir and into the town, we come to a railway junction, important since the end of the 19th century.

If you want to visit Neustift and Brixen – and there are many good reasons for doing so – stop at the 5th Station, turn left down the mountain, and cross the bridge over the Puster Valley main road towards Schabs. Continuing along Hiking trail 8, then straight along the little road and from the Gasthof Strasser along the trail 4 down and to the right, we finally arrive at Neustift in little more than an hour. Neustift Abbey, with its famous Gothic cloister and Baroque Hospital Church, was founded in 1142 by the beatified Bishop Hartmann and was converted into a military stronghold in the 16th century from fear of the Turks. Here we can admire the early and late Gothic frescoes both in the cloisters – where incidentally the medieval Tyrolean troubadour Oswald von Wolkenstein is buried – and in the Romanesque

Chapel of St. Victor, whilst the circular Romanesque Chapel of St. Michael, also called “Engelsburg” or “Angel Castle”, built outside the abbey walls, is still a bit of a mystery. The shape of the Romanesque Engelsburg, and the fact that it is situated outside, suggests that it was built as accommodation for pilgrims.

Since we are already in Neustift, we really must visit the medieval Cathedral city of Brixen and the unique area around the Cathedral, which is only a half hour walk further on to the south. The cathedral buildings make up a fantastic work of art which absolutely must be seen, the cloisters, the Church of St. John, the Bishop’s Palace and the old cemetery combine all the architectural styles from the Romanesque to the late Baroque.

But back to the route: after the Abbey we cross the Eisack over the old bridge, turn to the right and travel along Trail 1 crossing over the main road and under the motorway, until we reach Lake Vahrn. Going around the lake’s eastern bank we come to a cycle path parallel to the motorway and take that to Franzensfeste. This place was named after the gigantic fortress, built between 1833 and 1839 by the Emperor Franz I of Austria, but which was never used for warlike purposes.

Time:

Niedervintl > Mühlbach: 1 ½ hrs.

Mühlbach > Neustift: 1 ¾ hrs.

Neustift > Franzensfeste: 1 ¾ hrs.

Distance:

16.7 km

Height difference:

Ascent: 478 m

Descent: 497 m

Information and accommodation:

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5th Stage: Franzensfeste - Sterzing



The path through the very narrow valley from Franzensfeste to Sterzing gives pilgrims the chance to contrast the stress of European transit traffic with little villages full of curious treasures, where time seems to have stood still. The consequences of modern mobility are obvious on the most important traffic crossing over the lowest Alpine pass: the Brenner. From Franzensfeste we take the old unmade agricultural road to Mittewald. We are almost alone and not disturbed by cars along the way, and even after Mittewald where it is asphalted, we only have to share it with cyclists.

An old military road through the forest before Pfulters curtails the asphalted stretch for which our feet are thankful, and a little later, after the hamlet of Niederried, to our great delight we find the Stations of the Cross going through the forest – albeit at a height of 100 m up the mountain. Anyone wanting to forego the climb, but still wanting to see the Chapel at the ancient thermal spa of Möde and the curative Peter's Spring, both on the edge of the road, should stay on the little road until they reach this unique place. For 500 years the water bubbled out of the spring in clockwise fashion. Today people collect it from the area in canisters because it is supposed to cure skin diseases. Nowadays all that's left of this late 19th century spa is the chapel, but the place still leaves a lasting impression because of its beauty and character. Continuing along the paths towards the old Gothic Parish Church of St. Peter in Stilfes visible in the distance, we will go through a magical riverscape, which we would not have expected and which is only revealed to those of us on foot. Car drivers go by too fast to notice it: here the Eisack meanders in a leisurely fashion, winding through lush, marshy pastures, home to a great number of plants and animals. A little bit of paradise! From here, a detour over the other side of the valley to Maria Trens is highly recommended, to the Maria Weißenstein, the sanctuary of Our Lady of the Assumption, the second most important pilgrimage destination in South Tyrol.

Crossing the Sterzing marshlands and passing Reifenstein castle, for many years owned by the Teutonic order of knights, we reach Sterzing, town of merchants, knights and pilgrims. Coming from the Penser Joch road we cross over the Ridnau road and going along the agricultural road we reach St. James Church in Thuins opposite us. (For Sterzing go back the same way, but cross the motorway and immediately after turn right along the path through the meadow to the parish church.) Thuins was the home of a brotherhood of St. James founded at the beginning of the 16th century, and also the site of the Church of St. James from the same time, because the old road above Sterzing passed through Thuins. However the pilgrims' hospital of St. John of Jerusalem and the Teutonic Order of Knights were to be found in Sterzing, as were frescoes depicting the pilgrims' apostle painted on the outer walls of private houses (one on the Geizkoflerstraße, the other on the main road in the direction of Gossensaß). The "Deutschhaus" (the living quarters of the Knights) very close to the parish church, which is well worth seeing (the first pillar on the left was donated by the brotherhood of St. James) and the "Johannisstüberl" in the old part of the town (in the former hospital chapel) are still a reminder today of the two military Orders of Knights so important to pilgrimage routes throughout Europe. In the town's coat of arms our eyes can't fail to see the

“Sterzl” shrouded in legend. Perhaps it is this devout pilgrim with rosary, and supported on crutches, who has lent his name to this historic town.

Time:

Franzensfeste > Mittewald: 1 Std.

Mittewald > Niederried bei Stilfes: 2 Std.

Niederried bei Stilfes > Sterzing: 2 Std.

Distance:

28.5 km

Höhenunterschied:

Aufstieg: 656 m

Abstieg: 442 m

Information and accomodation:

www.eisacktal.info

Tourst Office Vipiteno/Sterzing

Stadtplatz 3 - I-39049 Vipiteno/Sterzing

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www.infosterzing.com - info@infosterzing.com

6th Stage: Sterzing - Brenner



We leave the town by the Zwölferturm (which divides the “new town” from the “old town”) along the Mühlgasse, cross the Eisack, cross the main road and the railway and turn immediately to the left on to Hiking trail 21, which later becomes 21B.

Through Niederried and Oberried (from where it again becomes trail 21) and past the ruins of Straßberg Castle (built to control the traffic across the Brenner), we come to a farm above the motorway. Crossing it and going down we reach the mining village of Gossensaß (in the Middle Ages more than 1,000 miners worked in the mines in this area). From the Pfarrgasse we climb up the steep steps to the parish church and to the Chapel of St. Barbara built by the miners in 1510.

Walking through the cemetery we reach the church path and along that the former plague chapel now the Lady Chapel, and further on upwards past the now empty railway workers’ residence. Shortly afterwards it starts to go downhill again and after less than 300 meters on the main road we discover the historic Passstraße in Pontigl.

We follow it upwards alongside the stream on the left bank, until it finally ends and we can reach the other bank over a small footbridge, and then climb up to the disused railway line. We have reached approximately the same altitude as the Brenner Pass and can now quicken our pace to the border either along the railway tracks or (from Brennerbad) on the existing cycle path.

Shortly before Brenner a small track branches off to the right, which leads us to a mystical modern installation (“84 Steps”). This small “observation bunker” from the Second World War has a view out over the area.

The Brenner is not only one of the busiest of the Alpine passes, but it is also Europe’s border of fate and destiny with a colourful past. It is a magical place radiating an austere romanticism. We line up, one of millions – pilgrims, merchants, soldiers, popes, kings, emperors and sun loving tourists – who have crossed this lowest Alpine pass over thousands of years. The late Gothic parish church (14th century, the choir is also from this time), dedicated to St. Valentine, a missionary bishop from early Christian Rhaetia, and patron of paths and health, is exactly the right place for us to bid farewell to this wonderful stretch of the Way of St. James through South Tyrol.

Time:

Sterzing > Gossensass: 1 ¾ hrs.

Gossensass > Brennerbad: 1 ¾ hrs.

Brennerbad > Brenner: 1 hrs.

Distance:

16.1 km

Height difference:

Ascent: 612 m

Descent: 201 m

Information and accommodation:

TOURISM BOARD EISACKTAL

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Way of St. James

Along the Way of St. James in South Tyrol

All pilgrims' hostels are denoted by a special sign, and as such they fulfil particular criteria stipulated by pilgrims:

position and proximity to the Way

reasonably priced single accommodation without price supplement

Food & drink:

Restaurants along the Way of St. James provide simple Pilgrim Menus for travellers at reasonable prices

Pilgrims' hostels and restaurants

1st Stage: Winnebach - Welsberg



Camping Olympia

Camping 1

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3rd Stage: Bruneck - Niedervintl

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4th Stage: Niedervintl - Neustift - Franzensfeste

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Hotel Brückenwirt ***

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I-39040 Neustift
Tel. +39 0472 836 692
Fax +39 0472 837 587
info@brueckenwirt.it
www.brueckenwirt.it

Punterhof

Eisackstr. 42
I-39040 Vahrn
Tel. +39 0472 834 726
Fax +39 0472 834 726
info@punterhof.com
www.punterhof.com

5th Stage: Franzensfeste - Sterzing



Hotel Post Reifer ***

Bahnhofstraße 1

I-39045 Franzensfeste
Tel. +39 0472 458 605
Fax +39 0472 458 828
info@hotelpostreifer.it
www.hotelpostreifer.it



Hotel Wieser ***

Stilfes 55
I-39040 Freienfeld
Tel. +39 0472 647 116
Fax +39 0472 647 500
info@hotel-wieser.it
www.hotel-wieser.it

6th Stage: Sterzing - Brenner



Gasthof Klammer **

Brennerstraße 42
I-39049 Sterzing
Tel. +39 0472 765 186
Fax +39 0472 766 792
info@gasthof-klammer.com
www.hotel-klammer.com



Hotel Restaurant Zoll ***

Ried 30
I-39049 Sterzing
Tel. +39 0472 765 651
Fax +39 0472 765 315
info@hotel-zoll.com
www.hotel-zoll.com



Hotel Thuinerwaldele ***

Thuins 68
I-39049 Sterzing
Tel. +39 0472 765 760
Fax +39 0472 763 099
info@thuinerwaldele.it
www.thuinerwaldele.it

Gasthof Nussbaumer **

Romstraße 3
I-39040 Gossensass
Tel. +39 0472 632 317
Fax +39 0472 632 298

A Pilgrims' Pass is required in order to enjoy all the benefits and privileges available.

Pilgrims' pass



The pilgrims' pass is one of the most important documents that a pilgrim needs to carry. It is, of course, possible, as anywhere else, to walk the Way of St James without a pass. But then without it pilgrims would not be eligible for many of the main benefits (e.g. inexpensive meals and accommodation in the pilgrims' hostels). We strongly recommend that all pilgrims obtain a pass.

How do I get a pilgrims' pass?

JAKOBSGEMEINSCHAFT TIROL

Domplatz 6

A-6020 Innsbruck

Tel. +43 (0) 512 583 902

Fax +43 (0) 512 583 902-17

jakobsgemeinschaft.tirol@dibk.at

JAKOBSGEMEINSCHAFT TIROL SEKTION SÜDTIROL

Bildungshaus Kloster Neustift

Via Abbazia / Stiftsstraße 1

I - 39040 Vahrn/Varna

Tel. +39 0472 835 588

Fax +39 0472 838 107

peter.sader@kloster-neustift.it

Information addresses



Tourism Board Hochpustertal

Pflegplatz 1

I-39038 Innichen

Tel. +39 0474 913 156

Fax +39 0474 914 361

info@hochpustertal.info

www.hochpustertal.info

Tourism Board Kronplatz

Michael-Pacher-Str. 11/a

I-39031 Bruneck

Tel. +39 0474 555 447

Fax +39 0474 530 018

info@kronplatz.com

www.kronplatz.com

Tourism Board Eisacktal

Großer Graben 26 A

I-39042 Brixen

Tel. +39 0472 802 232

Fax +39 0472 801 315

info@eisacktal.info

www.eisacktal.info

Jakobsgemeinschaft Tirol - Sektion Südtirol

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