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Life in all its known and notorious forms is played out in Austria's coffee houses, the living rooms of the nation.

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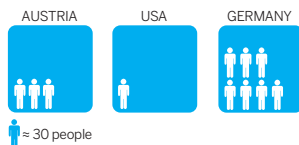
Whether it's classic Wiener schnitzel, goulash or deliciously prepared offal crowned with snail caviar, prime the palate with the low-down.

THE AUSTRIAN ALPS395

Austrians hike, climb, ski and cycle them, or they cruise them in cable cars for magnificent views: the alpine heartland.



population per sq km



Austria Today

A Country of Coalitions

Austria today enjoys the kind of economic, social and political stability many other nations would dream of. Political stability has been achieved through a string of well-balanced coalition governments, especially 'grand' coalitions involving the two major parties, the Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (SPÖ; Social Democrats) and the Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP). Since 1945, all but nine of the 26 governments have been formed by these two parties. The situation in most Austrian states is very similar. It's a remarkably robust system in which the chancellor (currently SPÖ leader Werner Faymann, b 1960) changes, but rarely the parties that form the government.

Notwithstanding, the political scene is taking unexpected directions. The SPÖ, which had governed Vienna (a city-state) alone since 1945, lost its absolute majority in late 2010 and was forced to form a coalition with Die Grünen (the Greens party), currently wracked by internal disarray. In the same election, Vienna's right-wing populist Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Austrian Freedom Party; FPÖ) under the party's national and Viennese head Heinz-Christian Strache (b 1969) triumphed on an anti-Islam and law-and-order platform.

In 2010 Austria's president, Heinz Fischer, was re-elected as an independent to this mostly ceremonial position, defeating the right-wing populist Barbara Rosenkranz (FPÖ).

Haider Gone – But Strache's Star Rises

As elsewhere in Europe, Austria is seeing a revival of populist, right-wing sentiments around the issues of Islam, criminality among foreigners, and immigration. These issues are nothing new, even if they take new expression under the resurgent FPÖ. One-time doyen of the populist right Jorg

- » Population: 8.34 million
- » GDP: €274.3 billion
- » Inflation rate: 1.7%
- » Unemployment rate: 4.5%

Etiquette

- » Dress up for classical concerts, opera and upmarket restaurants.
- » Give your name at the start of phone calls.
- » Look people in the eye when saying *Prost* (cheers). Hosts make the first toast.

- » Say *Guten Appetit* before you begin eating.
- » Generally, use the formal *Sie* form of address.
- » Don't say *Danke* while handing over cash to pay bills – this can be understood as 'keep the change'.

They Don't Say

- » 'Hey, we're just like Germans!'
- » 'Never seen a baroque church.'
- » 'No grandiose plans; let's keep it small and unbureaucratic.'
- » 'We don't use academic titles.'
- » 'I like being at sea level.'
- » 'Was Sisi really *Kaiserin*? Here? In Austria?'