

Welcome to Austria

Austria is a contrast of spectacular natural landscapes and elegant urban sleeves. One day you're plunging into an alpine lake, the next you're exploring a narrow backstreet of Vienna.

Culture in Many Disguises

The cultural contours of the Habsburg empire can be felt everywhere in Austria today, whether it's while taking in a performance of Lipizzaner stallions, or crossing the Hofburg to admire a Rubens masterpiece in the Kunsthistorisches Museum. Beyond this grand historical face, the classical works of composer Arnold Schönberg, inspired by Mozart, echo atonally across the country; music festivals like Bregenzer Festspiele are staged against spectacular lakeside or mountain backdrops, and artists like Klimt, Schiele and the radical Actionists feature in Vienna's extraordinary MuseumsQuartier.

Landscapes & the Outdoors

Travel in Austria is often a meandering journey through deeply carved valleys, along roads and railways cut improbably into the rocky flanks of mountains, and around picturesque lakes. But often the landscape is simply too rugged for road or rail: hiking and mountain biking is then the best way to reach isolated alpine meadows. Sometimes cable cars or dizzying chair-lifts offer an alternative way up, and come winter they bundle skiers and snowboarders onto the slopes. Austria's plentiful lakes are ideal for summer swimming, and in winter many freeze over for skating.

Architecture

Austria is best known for its sugar-cake baroque church interiors, its historic palaces such as Schloss Belvedere and its Gothic masterpieces such as Stephansdom, but we don't often imagine it as a country with impressive contemporary architectural contours. A visit to Vienna's MuseumsQuartier, to Ars Electronica in Linz, or a stroll alongside the illuminated 'slug-like' Kunsthaus Graz casts Austria in a different light.

Food & Wine Experiences

You can taste countries – their food, their wines, their customs of years gone by. Vienna's traditional coffee houses are perfect for breathing in the dark aromas of coffee in a homely atmosphere. Traditional *Beisl'n* (bistro pubs) are laced with the smell of goulash and other traditional dishes. Outside Vienna, regions such as the Waldviertel, the Danube Valley and southern Styria are places for rustic food and wine experiences in picturesque landscapes. Traditional *Heurigen* (wine taverns) abound almost everywhere – places to explore local specialities while on trips through Austria's character-filled gourmet and wine regions.



Why I Love Austria

By Anthony Haywood, Author

One day you're riding a forestry track in Carinthia, stopping to wash down a *Brettljause* (cold platter) with a cool beer in a meadow hut, the next you're combing the atmospheric alleys of the capital. The contrasts are what I love most about Austria. It's small, but the landscape changes quickly and dramatically, offsetting one experience of a place against another – the boondocks in contrast to a large city like Vienna, or a cool alpine lake like Weissensee with the shallow-steppe Neusiedler See. And in Vienna itself, there's a stark contrast between the historic centre and the Vorstädte (inner suburbs), which I love exploring on walks at night.

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