

# Welcome to Austria

*No country waltzes so effortlessly between the urban and the outdoors as Austria. One day you're cresting alpine summits, the next you're swanning around imperial Vienna.*

## Cue High Culture

You'll still feel the immense wealth of the Habsburg culture reverberating through Austria today – be it watching Lipizzaner stallions prance at the Spanish Riding School, or crossing the Hofburg to eyeball Rubens masterpieces in the Kunsthistorisches Museum. The work of classical pop stars such as Mozart, Strauss, Mahler, Haydn and Schubert echo as loudly as ever at lavishly gilded concert halls, and music festivals like Salzburg Festival and Bregenzer Festspiele are staged against uplifting lakeside or mountain backdrops.

## River Deep, Mountain High

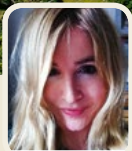
The journey really is the destination in Austria. Perhaps yours will be a meandering one through deeply carved valleys, on railways that unzip the Alps to thread improbably along sheer mountain flanks, past glaciers and through flower-flecked meadows. Such lyrical landscapes may have you itching to leap onto a bicycle saddle or lace up hiking boots to reach those enticingly off-the-radar corners of the country. In winter, the slopes hum with skiers and boarders, while summer beckons white-water rafters and canyoners to glacial rivers and lakes that sparkle like gemstones. *Der Berg ruft* – the mountain calls!

## Baroque & Beyond

Austria might conjure visions of baroque churches, palatial Habsburg headquarters like Schloss Schönbrunn, and Gothic crowning glories like the Stephansdom. But the country is more than pomp and palaces. A fresh breath of architectural air and a feel of new-found cool is sweeping through the cities, bringing with it a happy marriage of the contemporary and historic. Some of the most eye-catching icons are actually the newbies: Vienna's MuseumsQuartier in re-vamped imperial stables, the colour-shifting giant Rubik's Cube of Ars Electronica in Linz and the sci-fi ready Kunsthaus Graz.

## Food at the Source

Guess what? There's more to Austrian cuisine than schnitzels and dumplings. The country has come on in culinary leaps and bounds, while staying true to its ethos of careful local sourcing. Vegan, organic, foraged, Slow Food: they are more than just buzzwords. Whether you're at a farmers market, a retro-style deli, a cool new brunch spot or a Michelin-starred restaurant, the love of the land shines through time and again. Asparagus in spring, *Marille* (apricots) in summer, mushrooms, game and new wine in autumn – Austria likes its food to swing with the seasons and taste of the source.



## Why I Love Austria

By Kerry Christiani, Writer

Austria looks small on the map, but most of it is vertical, so there's always another hairpin-riddled lane, off-the-radar village or knockout alpine view to discover. As a hiker, I'm never happier than when dangling off a 2000m precipice on a trail in Tyrol or Salzburgerland – watching the spring-time eruption of wildflowers, say, or the last light creep down immense peaks of limestone.

*Alpenglügen*, they call it. Then there are Vienna's fabulous coffee houses and phenomenal art, the romance of the vine-laced Wachau, the crystal-clear lakes of Salzkammergut and Carinthia's medieval villages, not to mention the castles, abbeys and cakes everywhere. What's not to love?

**For more about our writers, see p416.**