

# Understand Austria

## **AUSTRIA TODAY.....346**

Contemporary Austria has one of the world's highest standards of living. But what's on the minds of ordinary Austrians today?

## **HISTORY .....348**

Austria was once the last word in global politics and power. Travel the historical contours of the nation.

## **ARCHITECTURE .....364**

From sugary baroque to upbeat contemporary design – explore the masters and their masterpieces.

## **VISUAL ARTS & MUSIC.....370**

Colourful frescoes, Klimt and the expressionists vie for attention with Mozart, Haydn, Falco, Naked Lunch and others in music.

## **KAFFEEHÄUSER – AUSTRIA'S LIVING ROOMS .....376**

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

## **THE AUSTRIAN ALPS .....378**

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

# Austria Today

With resurgent extreme-right politics getting a grip on the nation, unemployment creeping steadily up and voting irregularities forcing Austrians to the polls twice in the 2016 presidential elections, the country is living turbulent times. But it isn't all bleak: there has been a boom in tourism and Vienna is topping quality of life surveys once again. Not to mention the forward-thinking chancellor and foreign minister – all little rays of hope that suggest the country can weather the storm.

## Best on Film

**The Third Man** (1949) Classic film noir set in Vienna.

**The Piano Teacher** (2001) Masterpiece directed by Michael Hanecke about a masochistic piano teacher.

**Metropolis** (1927) Industry and prescient futuristic grunge by director Fritz Lange.

**Amour** (2012) Michael Hanecke directed and wrote the screenplay of this film about an elderly couple's tested love.

**The Dreamed Ones** (2016) Ruth Beckermann's literary film homes in on the love of poets as expressed through passionate postal exchanges.

## Best in Print

**Radetzky March** (Joseph Roth; 1932) Chronicles the decline of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

**The World of Yesterday** (Stefan Zweig; 1942) Posted to his publisher the day before he committed suicide, Zweig's moving memoir as a Jew in exile is set against the rise of Nazi power.

**Danube** (Claudio Magris; 1986) Italian travel journal covering the river's length.

**Last Waltz in Vienna: The Destruction of a Family 1842–1942** (George Clare; 1982) Autobiographical account of a Jewish family's fate.

## Tables Turn on Immigration

As elsewhere in Europe, the hot talking point of the moment is the migrant crisis and its social and economic ramifications. Historically, Austria has a good track record of welcoming refugees and asylum seekers, for instance during the Balkans War in 1995 when thousands fled here from war-torn Yugoslavia. When the crisis reached its borders in 2015, Austria initially expressed its solidarity by assisting refugees who entered the country via Hungary with their onward journey. At Vienna's Hauptbahnhof, a Train of Hope was set up, with volunteers helping refugees. In tune with neighbouring Germany's open-door policies, Austria accepted 90,000 asylum applications in 2015 – one of Europe's highest per capita. Then in August 2015, public opinion changed following the grim discovery of a truck containing the badly decomposing bodies of 71 migrants in the east of the country.

By 2016, the tables were turning. No longer able to cope with the influx of migrants and struggling to successfully integrate and find jobs for them amid rising unemployment, the country capped the maximum number of migrants at 37,500. Following the first round of presidential elections in April 2016, it introduced a highly controversial bill to allow 'a state of emergency', permitting the rejection of the vast majority of refugees at borders should numbers suddenly surge. A 4km fence was erected on the Slovenian border, and talks are in the pipeline about building further fences on the Hungarian and Italian (Brenner Pass) borders. The UN and asylum experts have condemned such actions as flouting human rights laws.

## Presidential Elections: A Nation Divided

Another big talking point is the presidential elections (the role of Austria's president, however, is largely ceremonial). For the first time since WWII, neither of the country's