

NEIGHBOURHOODS

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To understand Vienna's urban topography, imagine a lake with concentric ripples. The ancient Romans cast the first stone into this lake when they created Vindobona, the military outpost based around Hoher Markt in central Vienna. From the 13th century Vienna was fortified by a wall with turrets and, beyond this, with sloped clearings that made approaching invaders (most famously, the Ottoman Turks) vulnerable to the city's defenders. These clearings metamorphosed into a ring road that today encircles the Innere Stadt. Each section of this ring road has its own name (eg Opernring), but the Viennese simply call it 'Der Ring' or 'Die Ringstrasse'.

Wedged between the Ringstrasse and the next major circular road, the Gürtel, are high density *Vorstädte* (inner suburbs). In medieval times, if you lived in one of these during an attack you either fled or hung around to watch your house burn. Inner suburbs such as Josefstadt and Alsergrund were ravaged by fire in the second Turkish siege of 1683.

Beyond these *Vorstädte* are today's suburbs (*Vororte*), which by European standards have less of an inner-city character. These suburbs give way to Greater Vienna, which is flanked in the north and west by the picturesque Wienerwald (Vienna Woods).

Vienna's city planners have for centuries made all this more easily governable by carving it into administrative districts, each with its own number – today there are 23.

Central Vienna (corresponding roughly to the Innere Stadt district) is a Unesco World Heritage site with medieval, Renaissance, baroque, late-19th century and modern and postmodern architectural masterpieces. Understandably, it can get overrun with visitors in summer, but quiet pockets can always be found (see p64).

Each of Vienna's *Vorstädte* has a unique character and flair – connoisseurs of inner-city life will love exploring these for interesting architecture or to dig up places for eating, drinking, shopping or high-kicking into the night.

Landstrasse – district 03 – is situated across the Wien River from Central Vienna in the southeast and hugs the Danube Canal. For the visitor, the main reason for coming here will be magnificent Schloss Belvedere or to visit the museum dedicated to Friedensreich Hundertwasser. It tends to be low on restaurants and nightlife hotspots.

The districts Wieden (04), Margareten (05), Mariahilf (06) and Neubau (07) form an extraordinarily lively ribbon south and west of the centre (Vorstadt Southwest) that is gradually experiencing 'gentry creep' as affluent Viennese move in. These *Vorstädte* are easily the most exciting in Vienna and you can expect to spend a lot of time in them. Wieden and Mariahilf are blessed with the Naschmarkt, a food market medina of stalls, and with parkland and high-profile attractions around Karlsplatz. Margareten has little in the way of heavyweight sights but exudes strong local flavour. Mariahilf has the bristling and increasingly popular Gumpendorfer Strasse, and Vienna's mainstream shopping strip, Mariahilfer Strasse. Neubau, directly north of this, is in parts alternative, in parts gentrified, such as in the quaint Spittelberg area, and in other quarters more alternative-chic. It's flanked in the east by a Vienna cultural 'must-see': the MuseumsQuartier.

Josefstadt (08) and the Alsergrund (09) in the Vorstadt Northwest neighbourhood have a lively university campus and some quality sights such as Palais Liechtenstein (Liechtenstein Museum). Outside the Gürtel, Schönbrunn (Southwest and the Gürtel) is a glorious baroque palace and gardens, whereas Leopoldstadt east of the Danube Canal – a Jewish quarter in the Middle Ages – has an unusual, oddly abandoned atmosphere and begs rediscovery. In Greater Vienna, the Vienna Woods beckon, along with wine taverns and a handful of good sights.