

# Understand Vienna

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# Vienna Today

While Vienna enjoys one of the highest standards of living in the world, the financial crisis in the euro zone has triggered moderate discussion about the wisdom of the euro. At the same time, it remains one of the world's most stable capitals, with a government committed to improving an already excellent infrastructure... oh, and the humble *Käsekrainer* sausage has been saved from extinction.

## Best in Film

**The Third Man** (director Carol Reed, screenplay Graham Greene; 1949)

One of the oldest and still most atmospheric films about Vienna.

**Before Sunrise** (director Richard Linklater, screenplay Richard Linklater and Kim Krizan; 1995) Well-crafted kitsch verging on the pathetic, but the city scenes couldn't have been done better by Vienna's tourist board.

**Letter from an Unknown Woman** (director Max Ophüls, based on novella by Stefan Zweig; 1948) Unrequited love set in Vienna, underscoring the fragility of the human psyche.

## Best in Books

**The Piano Teacher** (Elfriede Jelinek; 1983) By the Nobel Prize-winning author, about a repressed pianist and a sadomasochistic relationship, which is to say, Vienna through and through.

**The Road into the Open** (Arthur Schnitzler; 1908) The story of an affair, set in Vienna, with insights into Viennese society and culture in the early 20th century.

**The World of Yesterday** (Stefan Zweig; 1943) An autobiography of Zweig's life up to WWII, describing lots of well-known Viennese.

## Crisis, What Crisis?

Despite the woes of the euro currency, Vienna and Austria as a whole have remained in relatively good economic shape, with continuing high disposable income and a quality of life that is the envy of many other Europeans. Vienna also hasn't experienced a real-estate bubble similar to those in the US, UK and Spain, even if locals grumble about the rising cost of rental. While the country has substantial debt and banks are vulnerable to economies in eastern Europe, the Viennese mostly remain unconcerned, seeing the problems as being elsewhere.

## A Stable Government

Vienna is a city-state, which means the mayor doubles as the head of a state government. Astoundingly, the capital has been governed by the Sozialdemokratischen Partei Österreichs (Social Democratic Party of Austria; SPÖ) and headed by an SPÖ mayor uninterrupted since 1945. The SPÖ has also won an outright majority of votes in the state elections all but twice since 1945 – once in 1996, and again in the 2010 election, when the right-wing populist Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria; FPÖ) managed to scoop up 25% of the vote. While the FPÖ fought this election on its hobby horse of local 'foreigner' issues (misuse of asylum laws, assimilation of foreigners), the SPÖ successfully wooed voters on its good record and longer-term infrastructure and quality-of-life issues, and today the SPÖ governs Vienna in coalition with the Greens party. At national level, the rise of the populist euro-sceptic Frank Stronach (Team Stronach) might well pan out into fewer votes for the FPÖ at the next national election, due to be held in late 2013.