

Understand Vienna

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Consistently topping the Mercer Quality of Living Surveys, Vienna is embracing expansion and green initiatives, even as national politics make headlines.

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The waxing and waning of Vienna's fortunes over the centuries is one of the most fascinating stories in European history.

CITY OF MUSIC 208

Vienna thrives on a tradition that includes some of the world's greatest composers, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert among them.

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The Habsburgs' obsession with the grandiose, coupled with innovative modern design, means Vienna is awash with architectural and artistic masterpieces.

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This magnificent city has long inspired writers and directors who showcase it in words and images.

Vienna Today

In 2016, Vienna topped the Mercer Quality of Living Survey for the seventh consecutive year, based on its economic and socio-cultural environment, health, pollution levels, public services and transportation. Despite political ripples affecting the country, the capital is becoming even more liveable thanks to new infrastructure and a commitment to becoming a 'smart city' integrating technological advancements with a green focus.

Best on Film

The Third Man (1949) Graham Greene's classic film noir set in postwar Vienna.

Amadeus (1984) Oscar-sweeping account of a fictionalised murder attempt on Mozart by a rival composer.

Before Sunrise (1995) Follows star-crossed lovers Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy over one night in Vienna.

Letter from an Unknown Woman (1948) Unrequited love set in Vienna, underscoring the fragility of the human psyche.

Best in Print

The Piano Teacher (Elfriede Jelinek; 1983) By the Nobel Prize-winning author, about a repressed pianist and a sadomasochistic relationship.

The Road into the Open (Arthur Schnitzler; 1908) The story of an affair, 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 many well-known Viennese figures.

City of Ghosts (Shawn Kobb; 2015) Fast-paced thriller set in current-day Vienna following an American student caught up in a crime ring.

Local Politics

Vienna is a city-state, meaning the mayor doubles as the head of a state government. 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 in state elections all but twice since 1945: in 1996, and again in the 2010 election, when the right-wing populist Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria; FPÖ) took 25% of the vote. While the FPÖ used the misuse of asylum laws and assimilation of foreigners as populist issues to gain ground, the SPÖ wooed voters on its good record and longer-term infrastructure and quality of life issues, winning again in 2015 with 49% of the vote.

Today, under Bürgermeister and Landeshauptmann (mayor and governor) Dr Michael Häupl, the SPÖ governs Vienna in coalition with the Greens party, which picked up 10% of the 2015 vote. The next state elections will be held in 2020.

National Issues

At a national level, debate rages over the refugee crisis and its social and economic ramifications. Historically, Austria has a good track record of welcoming refugees and asylum seekers. When the crisis reached its borders in 2015, Austria initially expressed solidarity. At Vienna's Hauptbahnhof, a Train of Hope was established, with volunteers helping refugees. Austria accepted 90,000 asylum applications in 2015 – one of Europe's highest per capita.

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 as unemployment continued to rise, the country capped the maximum number of migrants at 37,500. Following the first round of presidential elections in April 2016,