



Vienna

POP 1,766,750 / 01

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Grand Ferdinand Hotel (p100)
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Why Go?

Few cities in the world glide as effortlessly between the present and the past as Vienna. Its splendid historical face is easily recognised: grand imperial palaces and bombastic baroque interiors, museums flanking magnificent squares.

But Vienna is also one of Europe's most dynamic urban spaces. A stone's throw from Hofburg, the MuseumsQuartier houses some of the world's most provocative contemporary art behind a striking basalt facade. Outside, a courtyard buzzes on summer evenings with throngs of Viennese drinking and chatting.

The city of Mozart is also the Vienna of Falco (Hans Hölzel), who immortalised its urban textures in song. In this Vienna, it's OK to mention poetry slam and Stephansdom in one breath. Throw in an abundance of green space within the city limits and the 'blue' Danube cutting a path east of the historical centre and this is a capital that is distinctly Austrian.

When to Go

- ➔ Vienna has such a strong range of sights and activities that any time – summer or winter – is a good time to go.
- ➔ July, August and holidays such as Easter, Christmas and New Year are the most crowded.
- ➔ Crowds are down in spring and autumn, but weather can be changeable.
- ➔ In summer catch some rays on the Danube and loll about drinking made-on-the-premises wine in the outdoor gardens of the Heurigen (wine taverns).
- ➔ Hiking among the Vienna woods in October yields a spectacular autumn view of the capital.
- ➔ In December go ice skating in front of the Rathaus (town hall) or sip Glühwein (mulled wine) at one of the capital's atmospheric Christmas markets.

History

Vienna was probably an important trading post for the Celts when the Romans arrived around 15 BC. They set up camp and named the place Vindobona, after the Celtic tribe Vinid. The settlement blossomed into a town by the 3rd and 4th centuries, and vineyards were introduced to the surrounding area.

In AD 881 the town surfaced in official documents as Wenia. Over the ensuing centuries control of Vienna changed hands a number of times before the city fell under the rule of the Babenbergs. The Habsburgs inherited it, but none of them resided here permanently until Ferdinand in 1533. The city was besieged by Ottoman Turks in 1529.

Vienna was a hotbed of revolt and religious bickering during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and suffered terribly through plague and siege at the end of the 17th century. However, the beginning of the 18th century heralded a golden age for the city, with baroque architecture, civil reform and a classical-music revolution.

Things turned sour at the beginning of the 19th century – Napoleon occupied the city twice, in 1805 and 1809. His reign over Europe was brief, and in 1814–15 Vienna hosted the Congress of Vienna in celebration of his defeat. Vienna grew in post-Napoleonic Europe and in 1873 hosted its second international event, the World Fair. The advent of WWI stalled the city's architectural and cultural development and, by the end of the war, the monarchy had been consigned to the past.

The 1920s saw the rise of fascism, and in 1934 civil war broke out in the city streets. The socialists were defeated and Vienna's city council dissolved. On 15 March 1938 Hitler entered the city to the cries of 200,000 ecstatic Viennese.

Vienna suffered heavily under Allied bombing, and on 11 April 1945 advancing Russian troops liberated the city. The Allies joined them until Vienna became independent in 1955, and since then it has gone from the razor's edge of the Cold War to the focal point between new and old EU member nations.

Sights

Innere Stadt

★ Stephansdom CATHEDRAL
(St Stephen's Cathedral; Map p66;  tours 01-515 323 054; www.stephanskirche.at; 01, Stephansplatz; main nave adult & one child €6, addition-

al child €1.50;  public visits 9am-11.30am & 1-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-4.30pm Sun;  Stephansplatz) Vienna's Gothic masterpiece Stephansdom – or Steffl (Little Stephan), as it's ironically nicknamed – is Vienna's pride and joy. A church has stood here since the 12th century, and reminders of this are the Romanesque **Riesentor** (Giant Gate) and **Heidentürme**. From the exterior, the first thing that will strike you is the glorious tiled **roof**, with its dazzling row of chevrons and Austrian eagle. Inside, the magnificent Gothic stone **pulpit** presides over the main nave, fashioned in 1515 by Anton Pilgrim.

One often-overlooked detail is the pulpit's handrail, which has salamanders and toads fighting an eternal battle of good versus evil up and down its length. The baroque **high altar**, at the very far end of the main nave, shows the stoning of St Stephen. The chancel to its left has the winged **Wiener Neustadt altarpiece**, dating from 1447; the right chancel has the Renaissance red-marble **tomb of Friedrich III**. Under his guidance the city became a bishopric (and the church a cathedral) in 1469. Note that the main nave is closed during Mass (held up to eight times a day).

Tour options include self-guided **audio tours** (adult and one child €8, additional child €1.50) and **guided tours** (adult/child €5.50/2), which include entry to the nave.

★ Hofburg

PALACE

(Imperial Palace; Map p66; www.hofburg-wien.at; 01, Michaelerkuppel;  1A, 2A Michaelerplatz,  D, 1, 2, 46, 49, 71 Burgring,  Herrngasse) **FREE** Nothing symbolises Austria's resplendent cultural heritage more than its Hofburg, home base of the Habsburgs from 1273 to 1918. The oldest section is the 13th-century **Schweizerhof** (Swiss Courtyard), named after the Swiss guards who used to protect its precincts. The Renaissance **Swiss gate** dates from 1553. The courtyard adjoins a larger courtyard, **In der Burg**, with a monument to Emperor Franz II adorning its centre. The palace now houses the Austrian president's offices and a raft of museums.

The Hofburg owes its size and architectural diversity to plain old one-upmanship; new sections were added by the new rulers, including the early baroque **Leopold Wing**, the 16th-century **Amalia Wing**, the 18th-century **Imperial Chancery Wing** and the Gothic **Burgkapelle** (Royal Chapel).