

## Brief Encounter: Vienna, Austria

*Vienna, the charming Austrian capital, was just voted the second best city to live in worldwide – and it's well deserved! A city where the architectural grandeur of the past melts together with the bustling urban spaces of today, creating one of Europe's most dynamic and beautiful cities.*

**Katharina Rettenbacher** explores.

### Must Sees

Follow in the footsteps of the Habsburg's, Austria's former monarchist family by visiting the Hofburg, the Imperial Palace which used to be the Monarchy's centre of power and is now home to Austria's president. It houses a number of museums, the Imperial Apartments and Treasury plus the Lipizzaner horses stallions. For more Habsburg glamour, head out to Schloss Schönbrunn, one of Europe's greatest baroque palaces with its lush gardens, 1,700 m2 maze and the world's oldest zoo.

The two most famous Viennese landmarks should not be missed: the gothic cathedral Stephansdom, affectionately called 'Steffl' by the locals, and the Riesenrad, the giant Ferris wheel, located within the Prater, an amusement and recreational park.

The street Ringstrasse was, in medieval times, the location of Vienna's town walls but is now a broad boulevard encircling the very centre of the city. En route, you'll find stunning buildings such as the State Opera, the Parliament and City Hall. If you've had enough of walking, just hop on the yellow city tram – it goes the whole length of the ring!

### Arts & Culture

Vienna is certainly a place for art lovers – it has more than 100 different museums on offer. Some of the best and most extensive collections can be found in the Kunsthistorisches Museum and the Albertina. The Muesumsquartier is a new art complex holding several small museums showing provocative contemporary and modern art as well as a lively mixture of restaurants, bars and cafés.

In terms of music, Vienna is one of the big players. Whether it is classic music or opera, pop/rock or jazz, one of Vienna's many stages and venues will have exactly what you are looking for. The state opera sells standing room tickets for the incredibly cheap price of two Euros on the day of the show, so if you want to glimpse some of the outstanding ballet or opera performances on offer without spending a fortune, get there about an hour before the show starts.

### Shopping

Up for a little shopping spree? Beware, it may well turn into a frenzy. Visit Mariahilferstrasse for all the major chains and flagship stores and check out the side streets for some more eccentric and funky outfits. Diamonds are a girl's



best friend and Kaerntnerstrasse, right off Stephansplatz, is the place to get them. High end boutiques and fancy jewellery stores are waiting to be admired. The Vienna Naschmarkt is an institution in itself and you can find everything from pasta to exotic fruits and aromatic spices (go there in the morning!).

### Vienna Coffee House Experiences

You've probably already heard about the unique Viennese coffee house culture: sitting down for a cup here is more than just quick refreshment, it's a way of life. If you fancy having a drink at a place where great philosophers, writers and poets used to spend their time, try Café Hawelka (Dorotheergasse 6) or Café Central (Herrengasse 14). If you want to treat yourself to some of the delightful cakes and heavenly pastries Vienna is known for, head to Café Demel (Kohlmarkt 14) for a seductive selection, or try the original Sachertorte at Café Sacher (Philharmonikerstrasse 4). More up for a fresh coffee house concept? Check out Das Möbel (Burggasse 10), where you can buy the eclectic furniture you are sitting on after having your drink!

### Night Life

Vienna's nightlife is colourful and varied, offering something for everyone from the party-hungry student crowd to the style set. Chelsea, the biggest club within the U-Bahn arches on the Gürtel, and the Flex, located right at the Danube waterside, are heaven for the indie and alternative devotees, meanwhile the Pratersauna and the Volksgarten are more for the upscale electro loving crowd, living it up to the beats of some of the hottest DJ's of the moment.

### Useful Information

**Language:** German

**Currency:** Euro

**Getting there:** 16 minutes from the centre by CAT train, 30 minutes with regular S-Bahn train

**Going out:** Average prices for coffee and cake EUR 7, main courses from EUR 8, beer EUR 3.50

**Where to stay:** Hostel Ruthensteiner

**Free booking at** [www.famoushostels.com](http://www.famoushostels.com)