

48 HOURS IN VIENNA

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let the journey begin

With its ice rink, art galleries and markets, Austria's capital is always worth a visit – and even better when it's carnival month. **Neal Bedford** reports

WHY GO NOW?
Because other tourists are scarce and, with any luck, the cityscape will be blanketed in snow. Plus Fasching, Vienna's version of the carnival, peaks on Ash Wednesday, 21 February – expect colourful costumes and drunken revelry.

TOUCH DOWN
Fly to Vienna's Schwechat airport from Heathrow on Austrian Airlines or British Airways or from Birmingham or Manchester on BA. Fares for non-stop flights from Heathrow start at £110 through www.opodo.co.uk. The low-cost operator is FlyNiki from Stansted. From Vienna's airport, 17km east of the city centre, the quick way is in aboard the CAT (City Airport Train) which leaves every half-hour to **Wien Mitte/Landstrasse station** (1), taking just 16 minutes; €15 return (£11). A taxi to the city centre will cost about €45 (£32). Other no-frills airlines use Bratislava airport, about 60km east across the border in Slovakia. Ryanair and SkyEurope fly from Luton; easyJet flies from Stansted. Buses from Bratislava airport to Vienna take around 90 minutes. Fare €11 (£8).

GET YOUR BEARINGS
Austria's easterly capital is split into two unequal halves by the Danube. Most attractions lie to the west, and most visitors will focus on the city's heart, the 1st district – hemmed in by the Danube Canal to the east and by the Ringstrasse (Ring Road) on the other sides. Vienna's 22 remaining districts spiral out from the 1st. The **main tourist office** (2) is on Albertinaplatz (00 43 1 211 14; www.wien.info; open 9am-7pm daily).

CHECK IN
Hollmann Beletage (3), near the canal at Kollnerhofgasse 6 (00 43 1 961 19 60; www.hollmann-beletage.at), is central and stylish. This boutique B&B has a handful of rooms featuring clean lines, natural wood floors, simple, classic furniture, and designer touches. The reception doubles as a guest lounge, with an open fireplace, sofas, library, and CD collection. Rooms start at €140 (£100), including

breakfast. Cheaper, but equally central, is **Pension am Operneck** (4) at Kärntner Strasse 47 (00 43 1 512 93 10). Its location is almost unbeatable: opposite the legendary Sacher Hotel and State Opera on Kärntner Strasse, Vienna's most celebrated street. Rooms are, like the owner, fading after years of service, but both still provide comfort and warmth to guests. Pre-book one of those six doubles for €125 (£89), with breakfast an additional €10 (£7) per person. If you don't mind being slightly away from the centre, the 10-year-old **Golden Tulip Art Hotel** (5) at Brandmayergasse 7-9 (00 43 1 544 5108; www.goldentulip.com) offers four-star comfort at a very low price: as little as €66 (£47) for a double room, without breakfast.

TAKE A HIKE
Stroll around the medieval quarter of the 1st district. Begin at **Stephansdom** (6), open 6am-10pm (Sundays from 7am), admission free. At Domgasse 5 you find the renovated **Mozarthaus Vienna** (7); open 10am-8pm daily, €9 (£6.50). Head north on Essiggasse to narrow, winding Schönlaterngasse and its tall baroque façades. Turn left onto Fleischmarkt, the city's former meat market, and, after passing the sublime Greek **Orthodox Church** (8) at number 13 (open daily except Saturday, free admission), cross Rotenturmstrasse into

one of Vienna's several Jewish quarters. Its cobbled streets contain many delights, including the city's oldest church, **St Rupert's** (9), reputedly built in 740.

LUNCH ON THE RUN
Nip into **Trzesniewski Café** (10) at Dorotheergasse 1 for a quick – and we mean quick – lunch. This divine sandwich shop serves two bite-size breads (€3/£2.20) with a choice of 21 spreads. Or wander along to **Hoher Markt** (11) and

order a käsekrainer (a hearty sausage infused with cheese) and beer at the Würstelstand am Hoher Markt. For a full meal, head to **Hotel Riviera** (12) at Schönlaterngasse 13 (00 43 1 907 61 49). Its midday menu, featuring creative Italian and Austrian cuisine, is a bargain.

TAKE A RIDE
Trams 1 and 2 circle the 1st district in opposite directions along the Ringstrasse. This is a wide boulevard lined with exceptional examples of neo-classical architecture. It replaced the medieval city walls in the mid-1800s to make way for Emperor Franz

Joseph's showmanship of Imperial power.

WINDOW SHOPPING
Mariahilfer Strasse is Vienna's Oxford Street – good for high street brands but often an exhausting shopping experience. Instead, wander through the **Naschmarkt** (13), the city's most colourful market. It mostly touts fruit and vegetables, but on Saturdays it expands westward to include a motley – and fascinating – flea market.

AN APERITIF
Do as the Viennese do and stop off at a coffee house. **Café Bräunerhof** (14), at Stallburggasse 2, is among the most authentic. It has changed little since Thomas Bernhard frequented the place, and the waiters are charmingly grumpy.

DINING WITH THE LOCALS
Gasthaus Wild (15) at Radezkyplatz 1 (00 43 1 920 94 77) is a beautifully revamped *neo-beisl* (new pub) featuring a dark-wood interior and classic and modern Viennese cuisine. Mains, such as schnitzel mit erdaüpfelsalat (schnitzel

with potato salad), range from €7 (£5) to €19 (£13) and the Austrian wine list is well above average.

SUNDAY MORNING: GO TO CHURCH
The obvious choices are gothic Stephansdom (4), which has mass at 9am and 10.15am, and the **Burgkappelle** (16), at Schweizerhof, where you can hear the illustrious Vienna Boys' Choir sing their young hearts out at 9.15am.

A WALK IN THE PARK
On a cold winter's day, take a brisk stroll in the gardens of **Schloss Schönbrunn** (17), open 6.30am-dusk. Laid out in French style between 1750 and 1755 for the pleasure of Maria Theresa, the gardens were first opened to the public in 1779. Wander immaculately groomed

tree-lined paths, stumble across a classical statue here or fake Roman ruins there. When it gets too cold, **Café Gloriette**, the garden's neo-classical coffee house, can provide warming drinks and vistas of the palace and gardens.

OUT TO BRUNCH
Europa (18), a short way west along Mariahilfer Strasse at Zollergasse 8, is hard to pigeonhole – a café, a bar, a restaurant, a club? The fact that it's a bit of everything takes nothing away from its legendary breakfasts, served till 3pm on weekends. **Café Sperl** (19) at Gumpendorfer Strasse 11 is the darling of Jugendstil aficionados for its original fittings. It opens its doors at 11am, just in time for brunchers.

CULTURAL AFTERNOON
Spend an afternoon, or the entire weekend, at the **Museumsquartier** (20). The former Habsburg stables on the edge of the 1st district houses a

cultural bonanza, including the Leopold Museum (00 43 1 525 700; www.leopoldmuseum.org) and Mumok (00 43 1 525 00-0; www.mumok.at). The former holds the largest collection of paintings by Austrian expressionists, with memorable works by Egon Schiele, Gustav Klimt, Oskar Kokoschka, while the latter the city's premiere collection of 20th-century art, including controversial pieces by Vienna's Actionists. Leopold opens 10am-6pm daily (except Tuesdays until 1 April); Mumok 10am-6pm daily except Monday, both extend until 9pm on Thursdays; admission €9 (£6.50) to each.

WRITE A POSTCARD
Head for the **Palmenhaus** (21) in Burggarten, a bar-restaurant occupying the Habsburg's former Victorian palm house. Once cocooned in the building's whitewashed steel pillars and glass panels, it should be easy to wax lyrical about the Habsburgs and the architectural legacy they left the city.

ICING ON THE CAKE
From late January to early March the **Rathausplatz** (22) is transformed into the Wiener Eisstrau, a large ice rink with a connecting ice path that winds its way through an adjacent park. Hire some skates (€6/£4.40), grab a ticket (€5/£3.30), and make an evening of it; open till 11pm.



Having a ball: dancing at the city's State Opera AP

Graphics: John Bradley



Waltz over to Vienna

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