



02 VIENNA

2014 ranking: 06 | 2015 ranking: 05

Vienna has come a long way from the backward-looking metropolis languishing in its own Baroque beauty and imperial past. For several decades after the Second World War the Austrian capital, formerly a cultural and intellectual hub, sat at a dead end in western Europe, gradually shrinking in population until 1987. Back then a walk through the city's streets revealed a dark patina on its buildings and social issues that 1980s Austropop star Falco alluded to in songs such as "Vienna Calling" ("Ganz Wien"): listen closely and he declares Vienna is "in distress" and "*so herrlich hin hin hin* [so wonderfully wrecked]".

But over the past decade Vienna has blossomed like Edelweiss, or "risen like a phoenix" to evoke another glorious Austropop star: the bearded, ball-gowned 2014 Eurovision Song Contest winner Conchita Wurst. Once with a reputation for being dull or downright geriatric, Vienna has been moving into the future on multiple fronts – culture, infrastructure, urbanism, business, the list goes on – while valuing the past. And all of this is held together with a sense of civic responsibility that is one of Europe's best-kept secrets.

Beyond Vienna's obvious assets – Habsburg palaces, classical music and theatre, an intellectual legacy, Veltliner, *Wienerschnitzel* and *Apfelstrudel* – some hard facts point to sustainable good living. Two thirds of the city's apartments are rent-regulated, which assures the strong middle class that it can stay that way. An annual subway pass costs a euro per day thanks to an initiative by the city's green-red government in 2011 to urge Viennese to use public transport. Shopping streets such as Mariahilferstrasse are also turning into pedestrian zones; residents were sceptical but the project has been a success. The city is the fastest-growing metropolis



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in the EU, surpassing 1.8 million in 2014 to become the German-speaking world's second-largest city after Berlin. And Vienna's municipal cultural budget is higher than that of some large countries.

These figures add up to something so vibrant that expatriated Austrians find themselves coming home and surprised at what they see. Ana Berlin, whose communications agency ABC represents Vienna Design Week and other cultural events as well as architectural firms, returned home in 2009 after six years in Paris. "When we came back we met a lovely crowd of international families beyond our old Viennese friends. It's as if Vienna had become an international hub in the years we weren't here." She also didn't mind living in 100 sq m, with a private garden, for the same price as a 35 sq m Paris apartment.



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Newcomers arrive to study in one of the city's many excellent universities, work in fields such as biotechnology and government or join the lively art and design scenes. To keep pace with the influx, infrastructural improvement is extensive: subway lines have been extended in the past decade and major rail hubs either completely rejuvenated, as in the case of Wien-Mitte and Westbahnhof, or built from scratch, such as the airy and efficient Hauptbahnhof that opened in October. The last is part of a civic-expansion project and will ultimately become an entire neighborhood with housing for 13,000 people, an estimated 15,000 office workers, a park and schools. There's more: skyscrapers are rising in Donau City, a new suburb called Seestadt Aspern is emerging between Vienna and the airport and

PHOTOGRAPHER: ANDREAS JAKWERTH



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Previous spread

- 01 Supersense, a café and concept shop
- 02 MuseumsQuartier courtyard
- 03 Drinks at the Volksgarten Pavillon
- 04 The 1950s pavilion has retained many original features
- 05 Mixed crowd at Volksgarten Pavillon

This spread

- 01 Graben, a pedestrianised street in the centre of Vienna
- 02 Café Prückel, a traditional coffee house
- 03 Fashionable hats in the Mühlbauer shop
- 04 Volksgarten Pavillon is also open during the evenings
- 05 Head to The Golden Quarter for a luxury shopping experience
- 06 Glass roof in The Golden Quarter
- 07 Café in the Supersense shop
- 08 A hat in the new branch of Mühlbauer
- 09 Ludwig Reiter shoe shop
- 10 Ludwig Reiter's bespoke footwear
- 11 DC Tower 1, designed by Dominique Perrault



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INT'L
ROUTES
160



GOOD
LUNCH
€15



PUBLIC
LIBRARIES
39



MONTHLY
TRAVEL
€48

in 2014 the inner city acquired a row of blue-chip shops called the Golden Quarter alongside a small explosion in hotel openings – a Park Hyatt, Ritz-Carlton and Jean Nouvel's Sofitel among them.

A city's appeal, though, isn't just about development: it also lies in its spirit and surroundings. In Vienna, lunches and dinners are long and local wine, grown and processed within city limits, is often served. Coffeehouse waiters wear bow ties. The Viennese have a salty sense of humour to go with their lilting German.

And then there's the great outdoors: 51 per cent of Vienna is green space. "We always score highly on quality-of-life lists and part of it is down to things like this," says psychologist Joachim-Arno Habart as he sunbathes on a meadow by a pier jutting into the Alte Donau. The body of water resembles a lake but is in fact the old Danube riverbed, now with 8km of pebble beaches, marinas and waterfront property. The result of the anti-flood "Danube regulation" that began in the 1870s, the area is a place to swim, boat, windsurf or row, just seven subway stops from the centre.

Small idylls pop up where you least expect them. Not far from the Hofburg Palace is the Volksgarten Pavilion, an urban oasis with a mid-century look and a contemporary feel. Designed in 1951 by Oswald Haerdtl, the architect behind the Café Prückel coffehouse, the glass-box café with a pinkish-slab roof is run by siblings Andreas, Michael and Barbara Böhm, who took over from their father Peter in 1993.

At the time the primary clientele was older ladies. "Back then, we thought: 'We'll take them, everyone is welcome,'" says Andreas Böhm. "But we also wanted to bring in a new audience in the evenings." The Tuesday-night Technoclub is one of Vienna's longest-standing evening events; the pavilion is nearly always packed.

"By now we're an institution; a mix of tradition and modern," says Böhm. It's a key combination that works. Maybe being stuck near the folds of the Iron Curtain in the late 20th century wasn't so bad after all: the isolation allowed Vienna to retain what makes it special, before again becoming a contemporary and increasingly cosmopolitan European crossroads. — (M)

Population: 1.8 million in the city, 3.7 million in the metropolitan area.
Unemployment rate: 10.2 per cent (total).
Average monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment: €1,150.
Average price of a three-bedroom house: €523,280.
Daily newspapers: 9.
Culture: more than 100 museums, 144 cinema screens, 161 art galleries.
Independent bookshops: 234.
Bars close on a Saturday night at: depends on the owners but on average, 04.00.
How close to the sea, mountains or lake? It's 69km to the Rax mountain range.
Price of a cup of coffee: a Wiener melange is €3.70 at Café Prückel.
Price of a glass of wine: €3 to €5.
Can you bring your towel to work (for a cheeky outdoor lunchtime swim)? Yes: take a dip at the Alte Donau.
Rubbish recycled: 40 per cent.
Three things to improve the city: Create more pedestrian zones and bike paths. Also, longer opening hours for shops: 19.00 is too early during the week; being closed on Sunday is a disaster.