

global kitchen.

# euro vision

As famous for its music and architecture as it is for its strudel and schnitzel, modern Vienna reveals an eclectic blend of old and new.

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Majestic touches at Hotel Sacher. Left: a dramatic dessert display at the acclaimed Restaurant Steirereck.

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Once the seat of the Austro-Hungarian empire, Vienna is a city of imposing Baroque stone buildings, where the roofs are lined with imperial eagles and energetic warhorses that look like they're about to leap into the sky. It's this contrast of heavy and light that defines this city: you can hear it in the sparkling music of Mozart with its melancholy undertones; see it in the gold-and-white Pestsäule monument that commemorates victims of the plague; and taste it in a cuisine that's as much about playful pastries as hearty schnitzels.

Vienna's coffee houses and royal courts have attracted some of history's greatest writers, artists, thinkers and, above all, musicians. Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Strauss all lived and worked here, a fact the Viennese are happy to flog as hard as they can to tourists – beware the many touts dressed in 18th-Century costume, whose job is to convince you to buy an overpriced ticket to a second-rate concert. Nonetheless, there's plenty of good music and, of course, good eating to be had in the Austrian capital.

Until WWI, Imperial Vienna played a pivotal role in Europe. Its territories stretched from the Balkans to northern Italy, all of which helped shape its cuisine. Today, there is a new energy flowing into the city, brought by youthful tourists and



Clockwise from above left: Vienna Convention Centre; the view from the balcony at Hotel Sacher; Leopold Hawelka; coffee is always served with a glass of water at his Cafe Hawelka; sweet delights at Demel; Cafe Central.

migrants from its former territories, and by Vienna's own desire to reinvent itself, with such initiatives as bringing in young architects to work on public housing. A similar clash of old and new can be found in Vienna's eateries; in the same districts where family-run businesses proudly serve the food of their forebears, up-and-coming local chefs are rediscovering traditional ingredients and using them in compelling new ways.

### cafe culture

Vienna's cafe scene is said to have started in the 17th century after the Battle of Vienna, when the retreating Ottomans left behind their coffee beans. Coffee houses soon became gathering places for



intellectuals and artists. Today, coffee comes on a tray with a glass of water and once you've placed your order, you're welcome to stay for as long as you like. Most of the original coffee houses vanished after World War II, but one that remains is **Café Hawelka** (Dorotheegasse 6, +43 1 512 8230). It's run by Leopold Hawelka and his son Günter, who prepares the apple strudel using sour apples and fine pastry. The cafe also serves spicy sausages or goulash soup, but refuses, on historical principle, to offer the full meals now served in most cafes.

Vienna's oldest cafe, **Cafe Frauenhuber** (Himmelpfortgasse 6, +43 1 512 5353), embodies the tradition of *gemütlichkeit* (cosiness) thanks to its comfortable private booths. Make sure you try their outstanding strudel made with quark cream cheese. Close by the Hofburg Palace is **Cafe Central** (cnr Herrengasse and Strauchgasse, +43 1 535 3763-61). Its Italianate architecture once attracted Lenin and Trotsky, but these days mainly pulls in bankers. Like most cafes, it has its own speciality coffee, in this case spiked with apricot liqueur.

For the very early riser (or the very late to bed), it's good to know **Cafe Dreschler** (Linke Wienzeile 22 and Girardigasse 1, +43 1 581 2044) serves breakfast from 3am. It's an austere room, where bohemians can be seen correcting their latest play over scrambled eggs with a Hungarian twist of paprika and spring onion. **Café Prückel** (Stubenring 24, +43 1 512 6115) is a much-loved Viennese institution, where tuxedoed waiters serve coffee to card-players, who sit in scruffy contrast to the gilded 1950s décor. Try their delicious *palatschinken* – pancakes filled with apricot jam.

### something sweet

Chocolate arrived in Vienna at around the same time as coffee. Quick to see its potential, the Viennese started serving hot chocolate with sugar and vanilla, topped with a mountain of whipped cream. The city still has more than its fair share of chocolatiers, who are today taking the art into new dimensions. **Altmann & Kühne** (Am Graben 30, +43 1 533 0927) makes its confections in Lilliputian proportions and packs them into decorative boxes.



Also worth a visit is **Schokolade König** (Freisingergasse 1, +43 1 533 3219), a former button shop where they now produce chocolate versions instead.

Pastry is one of the culinary glories of Vienna, and good bakeries can be found everywhere. One of the city's most famous cakes is the chocolate Sachertorte, made surprisingly light by the addition of apricot jam, and served at the opulent cafe of the **Hotel Sacher** (see Where to Stay). Its great rival is **Demel** (Kohlmarkt 14, +43 1 535 1717-0). Once the imperial confectionery and bakery, it now spans several floors, offering a theatrical display of sandwiches, chocolates and cakes, including the wicked multilayered Dobostorte. One kitchen even has glass walls so you can watch as sweet delights are turned out. Nearby, **Trzesniewski** (Dorotheegasse 1, plus other locations, +43 1 512 3291) serves more than 20 types of open sandwiches, which you can enjoy standing with a glass of *Sekt* (sparkling wine).

### fine dining

**Halle Cafe-Restaurant** (Museumsplatz 1, +43 1 523 7001) sits in the Museumsquartier, a melange of museums, shops and cafes that attracts Vienna's young and arty crowd. Halle's seasonal menu always includes salads and other dishes that showcase clean, modern flavours; even in winter, you can order something as charming and simple as figs with goat's cheese drizzled in warm honey. At the same address is **Glacis Beisl** (+43 1 5265 660). Looking out onto a beautiful garden, it serves more classic dishes, such as the salty, yet satisfying, beef goulash with *spätzle* (small dumpling-like noodles).

To enjoy a truly avant-garde approach, visit **Schon Schön** (Lindengasse 53, +43 6991 537 7701). A designer clothing store, hairdresser, restaurant and cocktail bar in one, the name translates – appropriately – as 'already beautiful'. Located in the fashionable seventh district, it's yet to attract any tourist attention, so the prices are very reasonable – a two-course lunch should cost around \$20. The menu changes regularly, with good choices including pumpkin soup topped with



a scallop, or trout on gnocchi and creamed lentils; both dishes display a flair for working with regional produce and balancing different textures.

One chef who is an internationally acknowledged master of reinterpreting local ingredients is Helmut Österreicher from **Österreicher im Mak** (Stubenring 5, +43 1 714 0121). His food is a homage to artisan farmers and producers, from the perfect sheep's cheese soufflé or saddle of baby venison dressed with red cabbage, ginger and dried forest fruits, to a dessert of glazed butternut pumpkin with vanilla ice cream. There isn't a wrong

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note on the menu. Touches that could be cloying in lesser hands – such as a hint of peanut in the potato mash or the honey in the cabbage – instead add depth.

For sheer inventiveness, nothing beats **Restaurant Steirereck** (Stadtpark, +43 1 713 3168), which is turning out some of the most exciting food in central Europe. In the middle of the city's park, it has a witty interior, with coat racks made of soup ladles and the toilets conceived as throne rooms. Executive chef Heinz Reitbauer's food is equally design-driven, with a beetroot and Jerusalem artichoke

salad tightly rolled in a fine breadbasket resembling a brandy snap, or the medlar fruit and celeriac praline that looks like a petit four. This isn't just empty aesthetics, however. Steirereck entered the S. Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurants list for the first time this year, charting at number 30. Each dish has something to surprise the palate, from the North African spices in the beetroot salad to the crystallised orange peel that comes with the coffee. Downstairs is the **Meierei** (dairy), where you can order a sample plate of European cheeses to enjoy with a glass of wine.



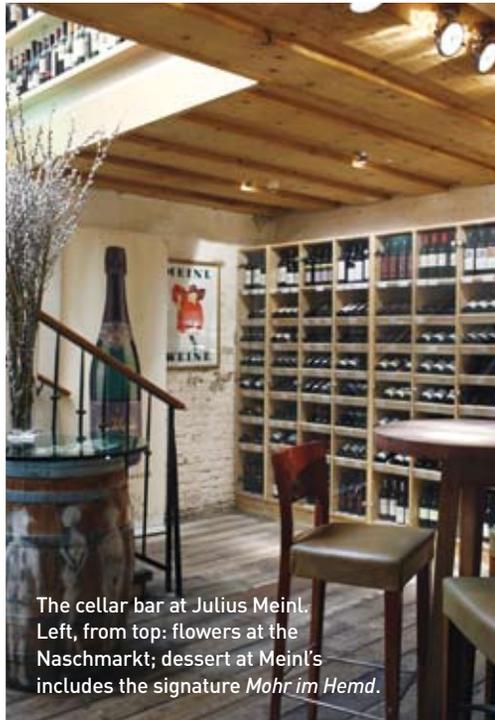
Smart Schon Schön. Clockwise from below left: Restaurant Steirereck's Jerusalem artichoke and beetroot salad; fine diner Österreicher im Mak; The Hotel Sacher's famous Sachertorte; Österreicher im Mak's wine glass chandelier; old-fashioned transport; bream with lentils and curry foam at Schon Schön; Hundertwasser House is a modern architectural landmark.

### classic vienna

There's no getting around it, Austria's traditional fare is mostly solid comfort food – think roast pork, liver-dumpling soup (with terrifyingly large dumplings) and different cuts of boiled beef including the Viennese speciality *tafelspitz*. This dish reaches its finest expression at **Plachutta** (Wollzeile 38, +43 1 512 1577), where it's served at the table straight from a copper pan. First you're given the beef broth with root vegetables, followed by the carved meat. It's served with roast potatoes, chive sauce and apple with horseradish, alongside hot marrow for spreading on the house-baked bread. If you're



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The cellar bar at Julius Meinhart. Left, from top: flowers at the Naschmarkt; dessert at Meinhart's includes the signature *Mohr im Hemd*.



interested, the waiters are happy to give you a copy of the recipe from local celebrity chef Ewald Plachutta.

If you're feeling up for the ultimate eating challenge, then visit **Figlmüller** (Bäckerstrasse 6, +43 1 512 1760), a tavern where businessmen come to enjoy the beer, and tourists come for the schnitzel – an enormous, crisp pork loin that covers the entire plate.

Locals, on the other hand, tend to head for **GmoaKeller** (Am Heumarkt 25, +43 1 712 5310), an old Viennese inn set within a cellar, which is the place to experience traditional food at its very best. The linen and glassware are perfect, and the food is delicious. Their satisfying *frittatensuppe* is a beef broth filled with strips of thinly sliced pancake, or alternatively, go for the house speciality: deep-fried calf's liver served with mayonnaise.

To experience Vienna's Hungarian side, try **König von Ungarn** (Schulerstrasse 10, +43 1 515 8415), part of the 260-year-old grand imperial-era hotel of the same name. The dining area – which sits under the flat where Mozart composed the opera *The Marriage of Figaro* – is formal, but the food is surprisingly well-priced and the staff are friendly. It's best to stick with the Hungarian-influenced menu items, such as the sausage with goulash sauce.

The cafe/brasserie/bar **Palmenhaus** (Burggarten 1, +43 533 1033) is located in the Habsburg Orangery, which is considered one of the finest examples of greenhouse architecture in Austria. The food is seasonal: in winter you can order something like a mixed seafood grill, with small portions of perfectly cooked salmon, red snapper, smoked trout, calamari and swordfish; while summer dining may include a wild garlic

risotto or corn-fed chicken with spring vegetables. For dessert, go for the *topfenpalatschinken* (pancakes filled with curds and raisins).

## hot heurigen

Originally, the *heuriger* was a winery that was allowed to sell food, but these days *heuriger*-style restaurants can be found throughout the city. Typically, they have a buffet of food that includes pork knuckles, smoked hams, sausages and roasted vegetables. **Zwölf Apostelkeller** ("Twelve Apostles' Cellar", Sonnenfelsgasse 3, +43 1 512 6777) is a shamelessly touristy example, but its stone walls also show evidence of more than six centuries of architecture.

More traditional *heurigen* are found on the city's outskirts near the Vienna Woods, such as **Mayer on Pfarrplatz** (Pfarrplatz 2, +43 1 370 3361), a romantic, sprawling house that hasn't changed since composer Beethoven lived there. Another option is **Buschenschank Wolff** (Rathstrasse 44-46, +43 1 440 2335). This massive farmhouse attracts a mix of locals and tourists, and serves its own wines, plus a hearty buffet: the smoked pork with sauerkraut and bread dumplings is excellent.

## where to drink

To people-watch among Vienna's wealthy and beautiful, head to **Onyx Bar** (Stephansplatz 12, +43 1 241 88) on the sixth floor of the Do & Co Hotel. Even more exotic is the wood-paneled, Persian-carpeted **Planter's** (Zelinkagasse 4, +43 1 533 339315), where colonial Ceylon meets explorer's Africa. Just a tip: never sink into what looks like an empty lounge chair in a Viennese bar until you're sure it hasn't been reserved.

Another highlight is the tiny **Loos American Bar** (Kärntnerdurchgang 10, +43 1 512 3283), with a stunning interior made up of a mosaic of semi-precious stones. It's a surprisingly friendly place, though they don't appreciate sightseers. A visit to the luxury hotel **Palais Coburg** (Coburgbastei 4, +43 1 518 18-0) is a must for wine lovers, as you can tour the 60,000-bottle cellar, then head to the bar and sample many of their wines by the glass.

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Clockwise from right: the newest branch of cookbook store Babette's; modern touches meet Old World elegance at Hotel Altstadt; Vienna City Hall by night.



## where to shop

Situated on the Graben, one of the city's most expensive streets, is the **Julius Meinl** emporium (Graben 19, +43 1 532 3334). The cellar-level bar offers wine and grappa by the glass, plus antipasti and cheese plates. Try grüner veltliner – a charming, flavourful wine that's Austria's finest white, or one of the increasingly popular reds, such as blaufränkisch or zweigelt. Upstairs in the food hall, find caviar, foie gras and pâté; an entire department dedicated to dressings and sauces; and marzipan fruits heaped under glass, which are almost indistinguishable from the equally lavish displays of real fruits. There's even a whole

wall of pumpkin-seed oils, which the Viennese pour over everything from eggs to ice cream. Befitting of Meinl's coffee merchant origins, the cafe offers 35 different ways to drink your brew, while the upstairs restaurant is regarded as one of Austria's top 10 eateries. The regularly changing menu may feature Joachim Gradwohl's multi-textured pike-perch with artichokes, mushrooms and a light ricotta ravioli. The signature dessert is *Mohr im Hemd* (Moor in a shirt), a dense choc hazelnut pudding.

In the narrow **Naschmarkt** (Linke Wienzeile), you'll find all of Austria's food influences in one place: Italian pastas, olives and cheeses jostling with big black wheels of local bread, next to stalls selling Turkish doner kebabs. Austria is a leader in 'bio' (organic) food and wine, and there are many stalls devoted solely to bio-produce. While you're at the market, try a plate of mixed Baltic seafood at **Umarfisch** (stand 76-79, +43 1 587 0456). On Saturdays, there's an adjacent flea market, where you can bargain for the remnants of empire, from Art Nouveau light fittings to war medals.

Nearby is **Babette's** (Schleifmühlgasse 17, +43 1 585 5165), a cult cookbook and spice shop that also has a lunch counter, which may serve anything from Japanese noodles to tandoori chicken. Another branch (Am Hof 13, +43 1 533 6685) opened last year in an old shop with a vaulted ceiling; offering more than 70 base spices that can be mixed to any recipe, it has the feel of an old apothecary.



## where to stay

An affordable hotel within 10 minutes of the city centre is **Papageno** (Wiedner Hauptstrasse 23-25, +43 1 504 6744, from \$165 per double including breakfast). The rooms are modern, but the fittings have a hint of grandeur about them. Further along the same street is the sharply styled **Das Triest** (Wiedner Hauptstrasse 12, +43 1 589 18-0, from \$520 per double including breakfast). The staff are experts in fulfilling guest requests and the elegant, understated decor marks renowned English designer Sir Terence Conran's first hotel project.

Another highly regarded hotel is the **Hotel Altstadt** (Kirchengasse 41, +43 1 522 6666, from \$260 per double including breakfast). Each room is individually designed to showcase an old and new facet of Vienna, so yours may have a desk inlaid with a street map, propped against a wall covered in sumptuous wallpaper.

For pure extravagance, nothing beats **Hotel Sacher** (Philharmonikerstrasse 4, +43 1 514 56-0, from \$545 per double), where every room is furnished with antiques and original artworks. You can even choose the colour of your room! **d.** Thanks to the Austrian National Tourist Office and Das Triest for assistance. For more on Vienna, visit: [austria.info](http://austria.info).