

Travel



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Life in Vienna: wine gardens, parks, violins

Second in a two-part series.

Vienna, Austria: I looked down on the Ringstrasse from my window, savoring all the sensory impressions of Vienna. The music had not yet started in the Stadtpark to my left, where a statue of Johann Strauss plays a bronze violin, but the rest of the city was in action.

The red streetcars clanged up and down the Ringstrasse, which literally rings the Inner Stadt, or inner city, from the Donau canal back to the Donau canal. You may think the Danube runs through Vienna, but in Austria the river is called the Donau and the city is called Wien.

The stylishly dressed men and women sat in the sidewalk cafes below, moving back and forth from the offices and shops set among the carved fronts of historic buildings. The Flakiers, a term that describes both the horse and carriage and the bowler-hatted driver, clopped past, their red wheels spinning.

A HORSE AND carriage is a perfect way to see the city for the first time, the pair of horses pulling ahead and the outline of the driver, with his homberg and his whip, seated on the seat above you.

You may not be able to hear what he says from your open back seat, but you won't care. As we circled the Ringstrasse, faces turned up to the sun, we passed the opera house, the



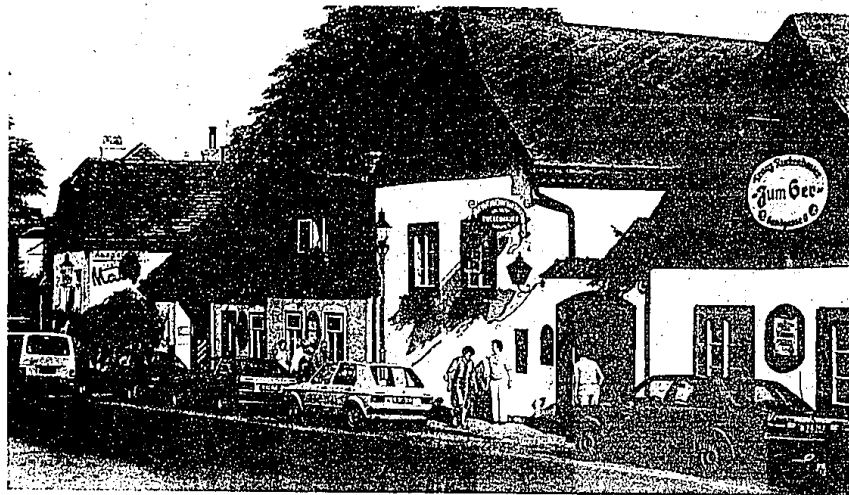
1-of-a-kind
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Iris Jones
contributing
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parliament buildings, the university, the great museums, all the impossible neo-classical buildings left behind by an emperor.

The pigeons flew over us as we trotted under an ancient gate into the Hofburg, home of Austrian rulers since the 13th century and now the center of government. The Austrian president has his offices here. Swarms of people gather around the carriage stands or wander in and out of the buildings.

There are dozens of magnificent, historic things to see in the city: The baroque church pews of the Karlskirche, the great museums of both classical and modern art. Some say modern art was born here when the young Viennese artists rebelled against the carved and cluttered buildings of the empire at the turn of the century.

THE LAST thing that the fun-loving Viennese would want you to do, however, is bury yourself day and night in their historic buildings. Stop



Grinzing, one of the wine villages in the Wienerwald — better known as the Vienna Woods — is dotted with wine gardens, such as these along the Heurigen.

for coffee and some famous Viennese pastries at one of the city's well-known coffee houses, especially the Demel.

Sit in a sidewalk cafe under an orange umbrella while you contemplate the beautiful shops, the street theater and the next historic building you may visit. Wander into the Cafe Central, once a famous coffee shop where Trotsky and Eisenberg and other famous men met downstairs from the stock exchange.

In late afternoon, when you have had enough of the Inner Stadt, take a No. 38 street car to Grinzing, one of the wine villages in the Wienerwald, better known as the Vienna Woods. You will get a quick tour through the suburbs and join the throngs swarming into the many wine gardens up and down the Grinzing village streets.

The vineyards are on the slopes of the Wienerwald behind and above the village. This year's fresh white wine, called Heurigen, is sold by the jug in the wine gardens, or Heurigen, where people eat and drink and sing.

DON'T MISS the opera, whatever else you miss in Vienna. This is the city of music, home of Mozart and Haydn and Strauss, a city where gossip and headlines are about new conductors, not new baseball players. The real music-social season is in the winter, but the opera is there for you in summer too.

Buy your tickets by mail ahead or face the fact that you may not get in, or that you must buy your ticket on the black market. The Viennese love the opera, and even they can't get in sometimes.

If you don't reserve ahead, ask your hotel concierge to get you tickets for the Spanish Riding School, with its famous Lipizzaner horses; the Vienna Boys Choir; and the opera. Check the box office for last

minute cancellations, or the ticket shops on the street. Be prepared to pay up to \$100 for top opera seats sold at the last minute.

EVERY SEAT in the beautiful Staatsopera, or state opera house, was full, on the main floor and on the five balcony tiers above us, when we sat down to watch "Carmen." I've never seen anything like it and probably never will again, not just because it was a stunning performance, but also because of all those beautifully dressed, knowledgeable and enthusiastic opera lovers.

I had been told that the Viennese are very critical, that they almost never give the standing ovation that is so common in our theaters. Imagine this moment:

The last curtain closed. There was a second of stillness, and then the theater erupted around us like a riot. They ran down the aisles to the stage, cheered from the balconies, threw flowers from the gold and white balconies onto the stage.

The Emperor Franz Josef hasn't been in his box for half a century, but he would probably be on his feet too, clapping and cheering for the cast. It's not always like this, but the performance was new and spectacular.

The woman sitting beside me was an opera lover from San Antonio.

"Did you say you have never seen Carmen before?" she said. I hadn't. "Never see it again," she said. "You will never see another performance like this one."

We had to leave, because we had reservations for a late supper across the street at the Bristol Hotel. By that time, 20 minutes or so after the performance ended, the cheering had stopped and the hand-clapping had begun, a rhythmic clapping that said "Come back, come back."

We could hear them as we crossed the street, pushing our way through the happy nighttime crowds, hear them above the clang-clang of the streetcar and the hoot of car horns. I can hear them in my mind now, and they will always be part of my memory of a day in the life of Vienna.

For more information contact your travel agent or the Austrian National Tourist Office, 560 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110, or telephone toll-free 1-800-223-0284.



The Mozart statue and musical garden in Vienna.

Photos by
Micky Jones

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