



From Vienna to Salzburg

By Mary Welch

Experience the best Europe has to offer



Vienna

There are many activities for kids. Among them are:

Schönbrunn Palace: Built about 300 years ago as the summer residence for the imperial family, there are a lot of fun activities that allow children to see how the emperor's children lived. Among the highlights are learning about the hygiene and healing practices of long ago on an artificial body. Kids learn how leeches were used, or can dress up mannequins in Baroque clothes. And by playing with reconstructed period toys, children gain an insight into the customs of the aristocratic families of the past.

Schönbrunn Maze & Labyrinth: Once, only the imperial family was permitted to walk here. Now the Schönbrunn Maze is fun for everyone. Once you have made it through the maze, you can climb a platform and watch others get lost. Directly adjacent to the Maze, the Labyrinth is great for adventures: climbing poles with sounds, a jumping station and puzzles.

Schönbrunn Zoo: One of the world's oldest zoos (250 years), this zoo offers a variety of experiences, including touching elephants. And, in the authentic Tyrolean farm, you can learn many interesting things about day-to-day farm life as well as how to keep pets.

Prater: A great amusement park, the Prater features more than 250 different stands and attractions – from a traditional merry-go-round to the ghost train to ultra-modern highlights such as the "Ejection Seat," with which you can reach heights of more than 90 meters.

The Giant Ferris Wheel (Riesenrad): Take a turn on the Giant Ferris Wheel (Riesenrad), which is more than 100 years old, at the Prater amusement park.

Salzburg

Hohensalzburg Fortress: Built in 1077 by Archbishop Gebhard and considerably enlarged by Archbishop Leonhard von Keutschach (1495-1519), this is the largest, fully preserved fortress in central Europe. Kids will love the torture chamber. Since 1892, the fortress can easily be reached by funicular railway departing from the Festungsgasse.

Salt Mine Hallein – Dürrnberg (outside of Salzburg): The journey into the depths of the salt world begins with the handing out of the traditional mining suit. Completely dressed in white, visitors roll into the salt mine on a little train, then you go on smoothly polished chutes to get from one floor to the next right into the heart of the mountain. Then you glide on a raft over a salt lake. How fun is that?

It is only 187 miles between Vienna and Salzburg. But in that relatively short distance, one gets to experience all Austria and, indeed, Europe has to offer. Vienna is one of the grand, proud aristocratic cities of Europe with a history of centuries of Habsburg palaces and Bohemian cafés by the Danube. While the buildings in Vienna date back centuries, one still gets the feeling of being in a vibrant, energetic cosmopolitan city.

Salzburg lures you back to the days of windy, narrow, cobblestone passageways with small trade shops dating back to when Mozart was a pup, and still being run by the original families. Salzburg gives you great beer, the strikingly beautiful Alps and, dare you forget, the von Trapp family and the "Sound of Music."

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There are slight differences for Americans doing business in Austria

- Austrians usually use courtesy titles (Herr Schmidt) or job titles (Dr. Schmidt) when addressing business partners/strangers. Only use first names when on a familiar basis.
- Most people in Austria speak some English, and English is widely spoken in the major cities.
- Business meetings are conducted in hotels as well as the company's offices. Private clubs are not used.
- Toasts are often given. Whether it is a group toast among several people or a toast between two individuals, it is important to look each person in the eye and hold up your glass as a salute.

flights to Vienna, it is possible to fall asleep in Atlanta and wake up in the beautiful land of Mozart. Unlike Paris and Rome, which have their unique charms and – let's face it – idiosyncrasies, Vienna is the perfect place to experience Europe that blends the best of traditional Europe with the energy of the emerging Europe. Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, for instance, is less than two hours away. Another interesting fact is that while Austria is overwhelmingly Catholic, there are almost three times as many Muslims as there are Lutherans. What that means is that Vienna is a charming mixture of cultures, yet steeped in tradition.

Our center for our visit was the luxury Hotel Sacher, which was founded in 1876 by Eduard Sacher, the son of the maker of the Original Sacher-Torte. The Original Sacher-Torte is a unique chocolate cake that is a source of city pride and even provoked a 25-year legal battle with another patisserie Demel over the exclusive right to the name "Original Sachertorte."

The hotel, which features beautifully appointed rooms and a luxury spa (word of warning: the sauna and steam room are co-ed, clothing optional), is very much a part of the city's fiber. Anna, Eduard's wife, turned the hotel into a headquarters for the intellectual and political crowd. She also had them autograph a tablecloth, a tradition that continued well after her death. Still on display is the tablecloth with the signatures of the rich and famous, everyone from Emperor Franz Josef to Hillary Clinton.

From the Hotel Sacher, one is within close

walking distance to the Opera House (which has performances throughout the year) to Kärtnerstraße, an open shopping plaza that has everything from souvenir shops to high-end luxury shops. In the middle of the plaza is always some sort of local entertainment to add to the festive mood.

Vienna is famous for its coffee culture. The "kaffeehaus" is still the place to drink coffee, read the newspaper and talk. There are dozens of newspapers from around the world, and no one is hassled about leaving. In fact, the kaffeehaus is so traditional that few offer to-go cups. For coffee on the run, go to Starbucks.

The city has a very convenient layout. The "old town," or city center, is the first district. It is circled by the Ring road, which is also the location of many famous old buildings. Districts 2-9 are gathered within the Gürtel (belt) Road; there, you can find the Prater (amusement) park, the hip quarters of the second district (close to Schwedenplatz), the shopping streets of Mariahilferstraße, Hundertwasser House, the Hundertwasser Kunsthaus.

It is very easy and safe to walk, compared to many European capitals. Another way to get around is the subway, which is convenient and free for children. A nice side trip is to take the subway to the Naschmarkt, the city's biggest outdoor food and flea market. Spices, cheese, sausages and coffee beans vie for attention with the fresh fruits, and it's refreshing to know that flea market "junk" in Austria doesn't look much different than it does here.

As Atlantans get frustrated at tourists who want to experience the "Gone with the Wind"

South, Viennese want tourists to know that Vienna has gone beyond the wiener schnitzel and apple strudel. It is, in fact, a leading center for modern European cuisine and design. An example of that is a tiny restaurant, Ein Wiener Salon, that only serves one menu each week. However, the cook, who is a fashion designer, and his architect partner, take pains to merge the freshest ingredients with a creative flair. If you go, make sure you are willing to be adventurous. If you don't like the menu, there are no other options.

But if you really want to experience Vienna like a local, go just outside the city to its wine region and spend time in a heurigen, which is similar to a beer garden. (Who knew?) There one can find small vineyards and restaurants to drink the local wine and enjoy classic Austrian cooking. We'd suggest going to Hengl-Haselbrunner and sitting in the open-air courtyard, drink a Riesling and enjoy the music and conversation. In fact, some of the wine from this winery is on the menu at Two Urban Licks.

It's a short drive from Vienna to Salzburg via the Wachau Valley and Lake District on the autobahn, and short stops at a couple small towns such as Bad Ischl, Fuschl, Mondsee are recommended.

Salzburg is nestled with the Alps in the background and the famed Hohensalzburg Fortress looking down over the city. Salzburg is divided by the Salzach River with several bridges connecting the two sides. Nestled between the castle and the river is the Old Town (Alstadt), which

roughly forms a semicircle where you'll find several squares (all of which have a beautiful church on one end) as well as narrow streets, alleys and great shops and restaurants. Salzburg Cathedral is the center point of the Old Town.

Across the river are more windy streets, and you'll recognize some scenes from "The Sound of Music," including the Mirabell Palace and Gardens (think "Do-Re-Mi") and St. Peter's Cemetery where the family hides behind the tombstones.

We stayed at the Hotel Sacher Salzburg, a luxury hotel that dates back to 1866. Located near the Salzach River, the hotel boasts 116 rooms and suites and can host social events for up to 300 people.

Salzburg is also the birthplace of Mozart, and one shouldn't miss the Mozart Dinner Concert at Baroque Hall in St. Peter's Restaurant. The restaurant itself dates back to 803 A.D., and the courtyard and baroque dining hall are simply breathtaking. There is a set three-course menu in the style of the Mozart era and a recital of his most popular music between each course, including excerpts from "Don Giovanni" and "The Magic Flute."

Another excellent restaurant, Stieglkeller, is perched high atop the roofs of Salzburg. This focal point of Salzburg's hospitality and beer garden tradition, situated above the Old Town and protected by the mighty fortress, offers a magnificent view, excellent Austrian dishes, home-brewed Stiegl beer, and friendly service. ♀