



- DIRECT flights to Vienna are available through wizzair.com and austrian.com.
- EXPLORE with the Vienna City Card (viennacitycard.at), Vienna Sightseeing tours

(viennasightseeing.at), Big Bus tours (bigbustours.com/vienna), or DDSG Blue Danube boat tours (ddsg-blue-danube.at).
 ■ SEE Reza's photos on amirinia.com/austria.



RIVER OF DREAMS:
 The stunning cityscape; and (right from top) Danube Tower; window shopping on Kärntner Strasse; Rathausplatz Film Festival; the city's famous ferris wheel

For stunning architecture, lively culture and a true sense of history, the Austrian capital has to be seen to be believed, writes **Reza Amirinia**

VIENNA is one of those must-see places. It may even outshine the likes of Paris and London, as it is more charming and elegant in so many ways.

I arrived in the majestic capital city of Austria — situated on the bank of the Danube river — and I could sense that difference in the first few days of my stay. The longer I strolled through Vienna, which is a lively living museum, the more

glimpses I had of the hidden secrets of this fascinating city, where modernity is blended with baroque and medieval architecture.

Vienna is a rich city with large tree-lined boulevards, splendidly ornamental streets and a collection of royal palaces.

I stayed two nights at the luxury Hotel Grand Ferdinand at Schuberting, which is located on Ringstrasse — a grand boulevard that circles the historic Innere Stadt. This road follows the route of the old

medieval city fortifications. The city walls themselves were demolished in the 19th century to make space for new opulent architectural buildings.

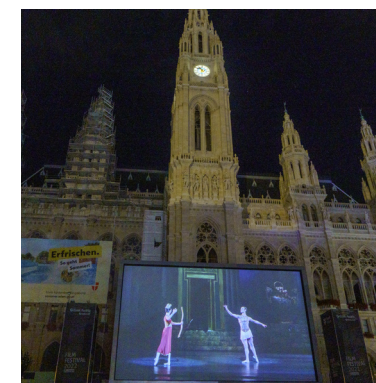
I began my journey along Ringstrasse towards the Wiener Staatsoper at Karlsplatz. The opera house, built in the Neo-Renaissance style, is the home of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and hosts opera and ballet performances. I strolled around the famous pedestrian Kärntner Strasse, Vienna's oldest shopping street that leads me to Stephansplatz.

This square is the heart of the city, where you will find the 12th century St Stephen's Cathedral. This catholic cathedral is one of

the most important buildings in the city and boasts one of the tallest churches in the world with its four towers.

The south tower of the church stands at 137m in height, dominating the city skyline. Visitors can climb the 343 narrow spherical stairs to reach a platform from which you get a panoramic view of Vienna. The interior of the cathedral is also breathtaking, with its collection of art, from beautiful paintings to Gothic sculptures.

Stephansplatz is the busiest point in the city, filled with enthusiastic crowds day and night. The square is the springboard for shopping, sightseeing and travelling in all directions via underground trains. A



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short walk takes me to the Hofburg Quarter and, after a stroll through Kohlmarkt, I arrive at Michaelerplatz.

This is the gateway to the majestic Hofburg, the lavish complex that was formerly the Imperial Palace. The curved façade of St Michael's Wing with its three green domes, and the Gothic architecture is wonderful to see.

It is now the office of the Austrian president as well as museums, galleries, the Austrian National Library and state apartments. It also includes the treasury and the world-famous Spanish Riding School. Walking through the historical compound, arched corridors, ornamental courtyards and beautiful gardens, I was taken back through the history of this city and the events that moulded its story through the centuries.

I managed to visit the Sisi museum, the Imperial Treasury museum and the Albertina museum during my stay but there was so much left to explore. I stayed two more nights at the stylish Ruby Marie Hotel at Mariahilfer Strasse near Westbahnhof, one of the busiest stations and major cross-sections in the city of Vienna.

The 1.8km car-free Mariahilfer is the largest shopping street in Vienna with hundreds of branded stores and boutiques, trendy cafes and relaxing restaurants.

You can find everything in this street and enjoy relaxed window shopping. Mariahilfer runs from the Westbahnhof to the Museum Quarter at the edge of the inner city. Mariahilfer also has a historic discovery — an eleven metre piece of a Roman Road.

I booked to stay one more night at the boutique hotel of Das Tyrol not knowing it is located at the other end of Mariahilfer near the Museum Quarter, which opened up yet another perspective of the city.

Vienna is filled with prominent museums and lively galleries. In the old town, you will find yourself in a never-ending cultural world of art, design and creativity. Besides the museums in the inner city including the Natural History and Art Museum, the Museum Quarter is another world

LATE DEALS

CRUISE CONTROL

NCL Prima is a new cruise ship, which launched a few weeks ago, and can be booked through **Sunway**.

The ship is a totally new concept in cruise ships with exceptional design and facilities on board.

The Bermuda and Atlantic Coast trip includes direct flights (with a 23kg bag) to New York City where you will spend one night in The Big Apple before boarding the impressive multi-storey vessel.

You will then spend five nights experiencing the amazing facilities while travelling to Bermuda.

Leaving on October 9, it costs €1,536pps for an interior cabin with entertainment and meals included. You can upgrade to include all your drinks for €99pp.

Visit sunway.ie for more info or call 01 2311868 to book.



SCARE CITY BREAK

Why not give the family something to look forward to on the October weekend with a spooktacular midterm break at **The Grafton Hotel** in the heart of Dublin 2?

Their amazing 'OMG Bunk Rooms' can accommodate up to 6 people sharing, and its central location makes it the perfect base to explore the city's exciting Halloween festivals.

The Halloween midterm package is available from October 21 to November 3, and includes one night with breakfast for two adults and up to four children, Halloween treats and a welcome 'spooky' cocktail, priced from €450.



BAROQUE ON:
Upper Belvedere
ceremonial palace

← within the artistic sphere of the city. This attractive district combines baroque architecture and modern buildings, on the site of the former imperial court stables.

I spent two more nights at boutique hotel, The Harmonie Vienna, located in a quiet and pleasant residential area at Harmoniegasse near the Serviten Quarter (Servitenviertel). The tram D stop is only a three minute walk from the hotel. Taking the tram, you could be on Ringstrasse in minutes to explore some other historical places — from the 19th century neo-Gothic Votive Church (Votivkirche) opposite Sigmund-Freud Park, to Imperial Court Theatre (Burgtheater or Castle Theatre) and Vienna City Hall (Rathaus).

The 14th century baroque building of the University of Vienna is on the right of Rathauspark, while the Austrian Parliament is located on the left of the park.

The magnificent 19th century neo-Gothic style Rathaus hosts the Rathausplatz

Film Festival every summer. This open-air cultural and culinary festival offers the presentation of the best pre-recorded concerts and operas in Austria on a super large screen. Visitors can also enjoy gastronomic delights and beverages.

One of the most interesting attractions I visited during my stay was Belvedere Museum, comprised of two baroque palaces (Upper and Lower) as well as the Orangery and the Palace Stables. The palaces are located in a landscape of green parks, fountains, cascades and decorative sculptures.

I often find the best way to get your bearings in a city like Vienna is to take an audio-guided tour, like the red Big Bus, yellow Vienna Sightseeing bus, or a boat tour on the Danube around the modern parts of the city. If you wish to go higher up, try visiting the Danube Tower. It is the tallest building in Austria standing at 252m tall, with a 360° panoramic view of the city complete with Austrian cuisine in the rotating Turm Restaurant.

For a change from the buzz and fuss of the city, why not explore the wine-growing areas of Vienna's suburbs? I stayed four nights at the luxury Hotel Landhaus Moserhof in the town of Gumpoldskirchen, 20km from the centre of Vienna.

This historic town is surrounded by enormous vineyards at the foot of Anneninger, in the Vienna Woods. The region is a charming location for relaxation and hiking the hillside vineyards. Of course, wine-tasting may well be an added attraction for tourists.



The two baroque palaces of Belvedere are in a landscape of green parks, fountains, cascades and sculptures