

FACTSHEET: Living in Vienna

Geography & history

Vienna is a typical central European capital with approx. 1,7 Million inhabitants living on approx. 400 km² of space, which expands over from its Northern to its Southern limits over a distance of approx. 22km and from East to West over approx. 30 km. Vienna is a very hilly town, which is proven by the difference in height between the lowest point of the city at the banks of the river Danube near the cities eastern limits with 151 meters above Adriatic sea level and the highest point within the town, the peak of the “Hermannskogel” - mountain with 542 meters.

Due to the circle of woodland enclosing Vienna nearly completely, and the huge green parks, which can be found even near the inner city, one might get the impression that the town isn't populated very tightly.

Looking at its average population density of „only“ approx. 4.000.- inhabitants by km² (compared to e.g. Paris with nearly 25.000 people / km²) this might sound right, but if you look at the figures of certain districts, the impression will change significantly. In Vienna's currently very trendy eighth district (Josefstadt) for example, 22.000 inhabitants / square meter already live together quite closely.

Today's splitting of the city into 23 municipal districts mainly results of its development throughout the centuries. The first human remains having been found in the city date back to the Paleolithic age, but one can only safely speak of the foundation of a real “city” from roman times onwards, precisely from the foundation of the roman army-camp “Vindobona” and its connected civilian town in the first century after Christ.

Since medieval times, the town has continuously grown to a classic, fortified city (which was built basically on the grounds today's 1st district is built) with a strong city wall, which extended along today's “Ringstraße”-road.

The suburbs beyond the city-walls (today's districts 2 – 9) were again encircled by a second, slightly smaller wall, the so-called „Linienwall“, which was approx. at the location of today's “Gürtel”-ring road. All areas beyond this last fortification and on the northern side of the Danube (today's districts 10 – 22) were independent villages until the 19th century, and many of them, like the wine-village of Grinzing in the 19th district even managed to at least partly preserve their rural charm until today. The last district to join Vienna was the 23rd district, “Liesing” in the very south of Vienna, which was only integrated into the city in 1938.

Vienna's districts – Where to live?

Your decision on one of the 23 districts of Vienna may depend upon a number of factors, therefore it is important to take enough time for this to stroll through Vienna's different neighborhoods and find the corner of the city you like the most.

Following below, we have tried to describe the features of the different areas to live in which you find in Vienna, to give you a little help for choosing the right place:

The 1st district – The inner city:

Vienna's historical center, with sights and famous buildings to be found on every corner and a hot-spot for visitors from all over the world. If you like the very lively atmosphere of the center of town, it is still possible to find absolutely unique buildings to live in, as well as all forms of representative living. But there is of course a different side to each medal: Disadvantages like high rents, hardly any free parking-space and a sometimes poor infrastructure regarding e.g. shops for daily grocery needs have led to most Viennese considering the district the perfect place to have their office at, but not for living...

The 2nd district – „Leopoldstadt“:

Vienna's former Jewish quarter, only separated from the inner city by the Danube-canal, is seen as the ideal place of residence for sports enthusiast today, mainly due to its vast green areas such as the Prater, the green banks of the Danube-canal and the nearby Danube Island. If you want to live only a stone-throw away from the urban business-centers as well as be able to start your daily 10k-run right in front of your house, this is the place to move to. This district also still has wide area of services for the Jewish community, which is fortunately growing again in our town, like Jewish schools and kosher shops, and with the „Karmeliterviertel“ (named after the „Karmelitermarkt“, a local food-market which can be found there) it also has one of Vienna's currently most trendy areas to move to !

The 3rd district - Landstraße:

Even with interesting tourist attractions like the „Belvedere“-palace , the „Hunderwasserhaus“-Museum and Vienna's Central bus-terminal, this district always meant more a working- than a living area for Vienna's expats. Around the central “Reisnerstrasse”-street, the majority of embassies and other international organizations has established its offices. Other points of possible interest for the international community might be the Russian-orthodox and the Polish catholic churches and the small but important group of specialized shops and service-offers for the expat-groups, which has established itself in the churches surroundings.

Districts 4 - 9 – Vienna's maybe most typical side:

This is the place where working and living mix most, and studying and going out melt into each other, here you will find Vienna most densely packed quarters as well as some of its still most trendy zones to live in such as the “Spittelberg” in the 7th and the “Freihausviertel” in the 4th district. Most buildings were erected during the time of the turn of the last century and the public traffic connections as well as the infrastructure for daily life can be considered very good. In the evening, and endless row of bars, restaurants and clubs are waiting to be discovered!

But it should not be forgotten that the price level for both renting or buying apartments in this area is still at an “acceptable” level, but keeps rising constantly, that the parking-situation even in mild words has to be described as chaotic and that this area, compared to other ones in this town, suffers from a significant lack of public green areas like e.g. parks, which might be the reason for it never having become a center of family life, but has more attracted young urban professionals or Vienna's “Bobo” scene, for more information on this please see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bobos_in_Paradise

Districts 10 – 17 and 20 – Colorful living beyond the Gürtel and the Danube-canal

Despite Vienna's „new“ parts north of the Danube these are the oldest and biggest residential areas of Vienna and as colorful as diverse in regards to their inhabitants, the building structure as well as the overall feeling living there may give to you ! There is space for the “bourgeoisie” districts like Hietzing, where elderly upper-class ladies drink their afternoon coffee in the elegant Café Domayer near the Palace of Schönbrunn whilst enjoying a round of bridge as well as for areas like the quarters around the shopping streets of Thaliastrasse and Ottakringerstrasse, which are today dominated by immigrants from Southeastern-Europe and their colorful shopping- and going out scene, where every success of e.g. the Croatian or Turkish national football team is still celebrated with spontaneous street-parties.

The costs for rent and general living are still relatively low compared to the rest of Vienna, the infrastructure, traffic- and parking situation is acceptable and the short distances to the Vienna woods around the city cover for a certain lack of green areas in the districts themselves. The more expensive areas such as the 13th and 14th district are often chosen by expats as their second place of residence in Vienna, when they have already lived here for some time, while the 15th, 16th and 20th district are ideal for all those searching an economic solution for their housing-needs while enjoying the lively, multicultural atmosphere of these areas!

Districts 18 – 19: Vienna's upper class suburbs:

As a Viennese, if you can afford it you live in the “Cottage” (pronounced „Koteesch“ in the local dialect) - and if you cannot, you may still dream about it ...

Vienna's former wine-producing suburbs like Neustift, Grinzing, Döbling or Nussdorf have, since the turn of the last century, slowly turned into the towns most elegant (and unfortunately also most expensive) residential districts. Here one can still see paid gardeners trimming the English lawn, or embassy chauffeurs waiting in front of the numerous big embassy-guesthouses and -villas to pick up their Excellencies and drive them to their offices in the 3rd or 22nd district.

Even with the numerous upscale building projects in this area filling more and more empty spaces from year to year, the building structure is still relatively open. Many houses have their own garden, most apartments at least a balcony or terrace, and the next park or the Vienna Wood is never far away. The infrastructure is acceptable (or even good, if you have your own car) and there is always enough parking-space, which has made this area one of the top-areas, also for expats to live in, maybe also due to the „American International School“, which is located in the 19th district, the second largest international school after the “Vienna International School” in the 22nd district.

The negative side to all these wonderful aspects of living are high rents and property prices, a partly “very quiet” atmosphere of living, an evening entertainment scene which mainly consists of small wine-taverns and the fact that to get to work in some other part of the city or to get to a cultural event somewhere in the city center, you sometimes have to calculate travelling for an hour or more on public transport one-way...

Districts 21 to 23 – International flair and space to grow to the North and South

Some conservative Viennese may question, if these districts are really part of the “real” Vienna. But hard facts show that they are home to nearly a quarter of the Viennese population, who live here on nearly half of the city's area. And most of them love living here and wouldn't want to live anywhere else. Even if the city has erected some of its biggest public housing estates here, and the actually city center might be quite far off, many of the former rural villages such as Kaisermühlen, Essling, Süßenbrunn or Hirschsstetten managed to preserve its local charm. Rents and property prices are still affordable, the city is constantly working to improve the public transport connections by lengthening the underground routes to these suburbs, parking is normally no problem at all and shopping maniacs

can find a number of big supermarkets, shopping centers and big furniture houses on every corner. Enjoying outdoor sports? The Danube Island with its 22 km of beaches, running tracks and bike-paths are ideal for all sports enthusiasts!

Where do the local expats meet? In the waiting line in front of the security check at the United Nations Center, at one of the many organized activities of the “Vienna International School”, which is located just next to the UN-Center in the 2nd district, or every Saturday morning on the parking-lot of a very popular Swedish furniture shop or during summer-weekends in the public barbecue areas along the Danube island!

How to live?

Rental:

The majority of the Viennese have rented their flat or even house from somebody, flat- or house-ownership does by far not play such a big role than e.g. in the Anglo-American world. The obvious advantages of renting are the limited necessary resources in the beginning (often just 3 months rent deposit) and most importantly the flexibility it offers, in case of a change of your housing needs, is normally enough to give your landlord 3 months notice and you are out again and maybe off to your next destination.

Adverts for available flats and property can be found in daily newspapers, in special real-estate gazettes (e.g. each Friday in the „Immo-Bazar“) as well as on a number of special websites, e.g. <http://derstandard.at/Immobilien> (German only)

An overview of the average rents for each district can be found in the annex.

If you have found an object you like, please also be aware of the below aspects:

- Adding to the regular rent of your flat, you are also obliged to pay a part of the buildings „Betriebskosten“ (house operational costs) for e.g. waste disposal, water, heating, electricity and cleaning of the general areas of the building such as hallways, elevators, staircases. Your share of these costs depends on the size of your flat; always ask for the current amount before renting a place.
- And there are of course the individual operational costs of your flat, such as domestic gas and electricity. For a one-person apartment you can calculate approx. 1 € / m²/month + another 50 cents /m²/month for every other person which lives there. Costs for TV / Radio / telephone and Internet access must also be considered, complete packages for these 4 services will cost you around € 100 / month.
- Before getting the keys to your new home, you are normally required to deposit the equal amount to 3 months rent with your landlord, it will be paid back to you if you move out again and leave the apartment behind in good condition.
- If the property was rented using the services of a real-estate agent, they normally may also charge a provision equal to max. 2 months rent for a timely unrestricted rental contract or equal to max. 1 months rent if the contract is limited to a certain time.
- If your apartment is already fitted with equipment or furniture from somebody living there before you, and these items are younger than 5 years and still useable, your landlord may charge you an extra amount for these, the so-called „Ablöse“, the exact amount can be freely agreed upon between landlord and tenant.
- Already clarify with your landlord when moving into a new place, how it later has to be left behind again when you are moving out again, if e.g. all walls have to be painted in the same color again freshly or things like that.

- Please don't forget that 99% of all Viennese flats are rented out with no or with very limited furniture in them. In most cases you will only find a minimum of bathroom appliances and a very simple kitchen. Ask your landlord if there is e.g. a laundry room for everybody in the house to use.

The laws regarding rental and general property issues in Austria are currently undergoing major changes, for the biggest part for the better of the tenants. If you have any further questions regarding this topic, or if you are unsure e.g. about a part of your rental contract, the following institutions can provide help and consulting, please always contact them BEFORE signing any contracts (Links in German only):

Arbeiterkammer Wien / „Vienna Chamber of Labour“:

<https://wien.arbeiterkammer.at/beratung/Wohnen/index.html>

Verein für Konsumenteninformation / “Consumer protection board”:

<https://www.konsument.at/konsument-home>

Mieterschutzbund / „Tenants association“:

<http://www.mieterschutzwien.at/>

.. Or simply ask the team of the expat-center for first advice.

Self-owned flats and houses

There are more and more people in Vienna which see no sense in paying rent for living in a place month after month, sometimes for many decades, and in the end that place they love is still not theirs, when they could just as well buy the place, pay the same monthly amounts for a loan every month for e.g. twenty years but then owe this place and have a safe investment. If you are thinking like this as well, and are considering buying a flat or house or even building something on a bought piece of land, please also consider the following aspects:

- Non-Austrian citizens need a public permission to buy land, a house or a flat, EU- and EEC citizens need at least a public confirmation confirming that they do NOT need this permission.
- Please do not forget that there are a number of additional charges being added to the buying price of your property. The most important ones are (always in % of the buying price): 3,5 % property acquisition tax, 3 % provision if you have used a real estate agent's help, 1% fee for entering your ownership into the property register as well as the public notary or lawyer's fees for creating the sales contract.
- Even with these additional costs for professional legal support, we would seriously recommend you to seek help from a lawyer or public notary office before signing such a huge and long-binding contract, this should protect you from making serious and expensive mistakes.
- Please bear in mind that the buying price and the financing costs are not the only financial aspects, there are of course also house-operational costs and individual operational costs to be.
- More and more people buy flats, land or property mainly for investment reasons, pls. mind that any income which is generated from selling a property you have bought less than a certain time ago, and for which you cannot prove to have lived there yourself during the time you owned it, will be subject to a speculation tax. This time-span is currently 10 years for empty land or houses or flats which you are not living in yourself, and 2 years for every form of property you do use for personal living.

Our advice in this matter is the same as with renting a place: Gather as much information as possible! You might want to speak about this with one of the abovementioned institutions, the specially trained consultants of the bank of your trust or a public notary or lawyer!

Serviced apartments

Many expats are in the situation of not being in Vienna for a very long period of time. Founding a regular household would cost them too much time. If you don't want to have to deal with topics like electricity and gas-bills, installation of cable-tv or internet access, a „serviced apartment“ might be just the right choice for you. These are small 1 – 2 room apartments, normally located in areas with a good public transport connection, which are fully furnished and equipped and can be rented for short – medium time periods.

Besides simply providing space to live, most apartment-organizations offer additional services such as cleaning-, washing- and ironing-service, breakfast delivery etc. ... The price for such an apartment is of course significantly higher than for a “normal” unfurnished apartment on the free market, and will depend on its size and location as well as on the booked additional services. You have to roughly calculate approx. € 1.200 - € 1.800. - / month for a one-room apartment with weekly cleaning, depending on its location. The team of our expat-center will be happy to help you find a suitable partner for your needs in this matter.

Living and Furnishing

As mentioned before, unimportant if you rent or buy your new place of residence, it will most commonly be nearly empty when you want to move in, and unimportant if furnishing and decorating is your most-loved ambition or if you just hate it, you will not be able to avoid having to buy at least a few pieces.

Unimportant of your taste and budget, Vienna has always been and still is a center of producers and shops for furniture and home decorations. While in the city center there are mainly smaller, more exclusive shops and traditional craftsmanship dominate the business, you will in the suburbs also find more budget-oriented furniture houses, both run by Austrian companies as well as international chains. A concentration of such stores can be found south of Vienna at the “SCS”-shopping center or in the north of Vienna, in the 22nd district around Wagramerstrasse and the neighboring business areas such as „Gewerbegebiet Kagran“.

Some furniture-warehouse chains also operate branches in the city-center, Mariahilferstrasse is a good place to go to for this.

You don't insist on brand-new furniture or have to leave Vienna again and cannot take everything with you on the move? Many expats advertise their used furniture-items in popular expat-web forums like www.virtualvienna.net or www.vienna-expats.net.

If you have neither time to nor fun in organizing your furniture and decorations yourself, we have a solution to your problem as well: Vienna is known for its good taste – as well as for the quality of its interior architects, designers and decorators. We can of course also assist you in finding the right partners from these businesses for your needs e.g.: www.viennahomefurnishing.at or www.raum-ideen.at.