



36 HOURS

Vienna

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Vienna, the Austrian capital, clings to tradition: Just smell the timeless fragrances of roasting chestnuts and spiced wine at the Christmas markets that spring up all around the city every December. For many visitors, the city is often a brief stop on a whirlwind tour of Central Europe, leaving little time to explore much beyond the historic center, called the First District. Still, there is plenty to see and do in its other districts, including some newly added cultural institutions. The Wien Museum, the premier place to learn about the city's history, reopened this month after a three-year renovation, while the House of Strauss, a museum and concert hall honoring the Strauss family of musicians, arrived in October.

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Recommendations

Key stops -

- **Wien Museum**, expanded after a three-year-renovation, traces 2,000 years of the Austrian capital's history through objects, including relics of working-class Viennese life and fine art.
- **Palais Freiluft**, in a Baroque palace and its garden, is the Christmas market of choice for those who want a little luxury.
- **Kikko Ba** is an izakaya that playfully combines Japanese influences with Austrian ingredients.
- **Badeschiff Wien**, a boat floating on the canal that cuts through Vienna's center, has several curling rinks on its decks, and a menu of hot winter cocktails.

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Itinerary

Friday

4 p.m. **Explore two millenniums of local history**

The Wien Museum, focused on the city's history, reopened on Dec. 6 on Karlsplatz, a sweeping plaza with a Baroque church, with several new wings and a large terrace, nearly doubling its former size. The museum's straight lines and white concrete set it apart from the opulent marvels erected by the Hapsburgs, the dynasty that ruled Austria for more than 600 years, like the Belvedere and Kunsthistorisches Museum. The new permanent exhibition (free admission) traces Vienna's history through objects, including the exterior wall of a store that a Jewish businessman was forced to liquidate before he fled Austria, after the country was annexed by Nazi Germany. Regular Viennese people are as much of a focus here as the elites — a Gustav Klimt painting, for example, hangs near an early-1900s folding bed used by servants, a slice of working-class Viennese life.



Wien Museum

6:30 p.m. Dine on Japanese street food with Austrian touches

Sure, schnitzel is good. But Vienna's culinary scene has far more to offer than breaded veal. Take, for example, Kikko Ba, an izakaya where the menu features Japanese snacks made with Austrian ingredients. Beef tartare (16.90 euros, or about \$18) comes with dabs of artichoke cream and pieces of crisp kombu (dried kelp); a bath of sturm, a fermented grape juice, with citrus juices, transforms raw sea bass into a bright ceviche (€16.90); and a creamy udon carbonara (€15.90) is topped with chives (ubiquitous in Austrian cuisine), bonito flakes and dried seaweed. Natural wines and cocktails like a yuzu spritz and a basil-and-melon margarita complement the food's sophisticated playfulness.

8:30 p.m. Sip mulled wine and hot cocktails in a palace garden

All of Vienna's 17 or so Christmas markets are one-stop shops for holiday gifts, comfort food and hot drinks, but each has its own personality. In the high-ceilinged rooms and the garden of a centuries-old Baroque palace, the Palais Freiluft market screams luxury. Inside, vendors sell paintings, hand-poured candles and Austrian honey. Outside, heat lamps offer shelter while you sip a hot cocktail, like a Moscow Mule (€7.80), and nosh on a

käsekrainer, a sausage stuffed with cheese (€13.90), or on buckwheat galettes (€13.50), folded crepes stuffed with fillings like mozzarella and bacon. A curling sheet allows up to 10 players (€5 per person for 30 minutes). Most booths take cards, except the chestnut seller.



Palais Freiluft

11 p.m. **Crawl the Gürtel**

Along one long section of the Gürtel, the ring road that separates Vienna's inner and outer districts, the U-bahn runs on top of a viaduct, and below, among the arches, grungy clubs and bars have made their home. On weekends, live music spills onto the street, along with partygoers clutching hand-rolled cigarettes. Rhiz, a cozy bar with arched brick walls and cheap drinks (€3.70 for a small draft beer) draws a laid-back crowd, indie bands and D.J.s that lean into the experimental side of electronic music (concert tickets, about €10 to €15). A 15-minute walk north is Venster 99, a compact bar with graffitied walls that often features punk or

alternative performances (entry is pay as you wish). Between the two are plenty more places to drink, dance or chill; let your ears guide you.



Vienna comes alive with Christmas markets in December, when the aromas of roasting chestnuts and spiced wine fill the air.

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Saturday

9 a.m. **Make Viennese bread the star of your meal**

Austrians take pride in their bread — and rightly so. A loaf of dense, seeded brown bread is to Vienna what a baguette is to Paris. Some bakeries in the city, including chains like Öfferl, Joseph Brot and Felzl,

offer full breakfast menus. One of Öfferl's bakery-bistros, in the Third District, which has a minimalist design palette of concrete and neutral colors, offers breakfast until 6:30 p.m. Here, the *bäckerfrühstück*, or baker's breakfast (€17.50), includes rolls, sour-cream butter, marmalade, cheese from the Alps and ham. The vegetarian version (€15.50) swaps out the ham for goat-cheese balls. For the curious, the menu notes the Austrian producer of every piece of cheese, slice of ham and egg.



Öfferl

10:30 a.m. **Treat yourself to a knife made from old car parts**

Located in the stylish Seventh District, where trench coats are plentiful and sweaters are chunky, the Spittelberg Christmas Market, which runs along a charming cobblestone side street, has a new focus on handcrafted, recycled and upcycled goods in 2023. You'll find a yurt selling Mongolian wool products and a booth hawking knives made from automobile parts. Bring cash because some booths don't take cards. If you're still in a shopping mood, there are many antique shops and boutiques nearby,

including Volta Vienna, a home-goods store selling monochromatic sculptural vases, mugs, candelabra and more; Graf&Gräfin, with soft leather bags, delicate gold jewelry and eccentric goodies like candles in the shape of women's bodies; and Luv the Shop, which sells brightly colored clothing, including knit sweaters and party dresses, from Scandinavia.

1 p.m. **Skate into the holiday spirit**

Glide along the narrow, winding ice-skating paths that unfurl amid the trees of one of the most prominent Christmas markets in Vienna, the Christmas market in front of City Hall. Twinkle lights hanging in the trees and vendors selling mulled wine, gingerbread, and sweet rolls with jam and vanilla sauce ("buchteln") set a holiday mood. After the Christmas market closes on Dec. 26, several additional rinks will open on Jan. 19 under the name Wiener Eistraum, or Viennese Ice Dream, nearly tripling the total amount of area available for ice skating and taking over the entire plaza in front of City Hall until March 3. (If booked in advance online, entry for adults is €9, and entry for children is €6.30. Ice skate rentals start at €4.90.)



The Christmas market in front of City Hall

3:30 p.m. **Meet Europe's first pop stars**

Classical music might seem old-fashioned, but 200 years ago, it was anything but. There were few things the 19th-century Viennese loved to do more in their leisure time than hit the dance floor for a romantic waltz or an energetic galop. The House of Strauss, a museum and music hall in a beautifully restored 19th-century building, deftly uses technology, historical images and audio to share the story of an iconic Viennese family. Johann Strauss and his son, Johann Strauss II, the composer of the “Blue Danube” waltz, are considered by some historians as the world’s first pop stars: They printed portraits of themselves on sheet music, displayed at the museum, and toured the world for concerts and festivals (€23 for adults).



House of Strauss

6:30 p.m. Sip an Italian aperitivo, then dig into a schnitzel

Italian influences run strong in Austria; after all, the two countries share a border. Stop by Monte Ofelio, a bar and cafe in the Second District, for a perfectly executed Negroni Sbagliato, a cocktail made with vermouth, prosecco and Campari, or for a glass of wine, and a grazing platter of Italian cheeses and sliced meats. Continue with the Italian theme at Skopik & Lohn, an example of one of Vienna's new-style "beisln," Viennese slang for traditional restaurants. Italian dishes beloved by Austrians are given extra flourish, like gnocchi, served here with shaved truffle and parmesan foam (€22), and are enjoyed alongside classics like veal schnitzel (€26) and beef tartare (€15).

9 p.m. Take in the view aboard a boat

Badeschiff Wien, a boat with a bar and restaurant, is moored in the long canal that runs through the center of Vienna. From the deck, you can see the historic center's stately buildings against the graffitied walls of the canal, embodying Vienna's opulent-yet-slightly-disheveled feel. Believe it or not, you can swim in the unheated pool on the deck year-round, but if dipping into very cold water isn't your thing, fret not: From November until March, the Badeschiff opens several curling sheets (€30 to €45 to rent a sheet for 30 minutes.) While you play, stay warm with winter cocktails like mulled wine with spiced rum or apple punch with whiskey (€7.50 each).

11:30 p.m. **Party until the break of dawn**

Vienna is no Berlin when it comes to club culture, but there are a few places where it comes close. If you're looking for a dance-until-dawn, hard-techno experience, Das Werk, on the banks of the Danube Canal, is the place to go (though unlike some exclusive clubs in Berlin, Das Werk's bouncers do not care how you dress). Here, the party doesn't start before 11 p.m., when the crowd becomes hypnotized by the D.J. — or by the light show on the walls around her. If you take a break outside, check out the outdoor art gallery: Several years ago, street artists from around the world were invited to decorate the walls of the buildings around Das Werk with large-scale murals. Entry costs €10 to €15.



Das Werk



The glamorous Café Central is popular with tourists, but the Viennese tend to prefer coffee shops that are cheaper and even slightly frayed, like Café Rüdigerhof, which has simple breakfasts and coffee drinks piled high with foam or whipped cream.

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Sunday

9 a.m. **Time-travel at an old-school Viennese coffeehouse**

Vienna's coffeehouse culture dates back to the 17th century; in 2011, it received a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage designation. Guidebooks send tourists to Café Central, where Sigmund Freud was a customer, and Café Landtmann, a meeting point for politicians. But the Viennese tend to prefer coffee shops that are cheaper, dustier and slightly frayed, with servers who appear as if they would rather be doing anything else. Take, for example, Café Rüdigerhof, established in 1902, where newspapers rest on old-school wooden holders (to prevent creasing), and breakfast is a simple affair. A melange (coffee with steamed milk and foam), with an egg and two rolls with butter and marmalade or honey, will set you back €7.10. Don't miss a Viennese classic: two peeled, soft-boiled eggs served in a wide-rimmed glass with a spoon. The cafe is cash-only.



Café Rüdigerhof

10:30 a.m. Strip down to warm up in the sauna

When the weather is cold and frightful, nothing beats a sauna session and a hot soak. Therme Wien, is just the place for a morning of self-care. This isn't five-star luxury, but it's clean and spacious, with a bistro and a restaurant, views onto a park outside, and peaceful areas with miniature waterfalls. The complex offers pools, slides, saunas and hot whirlpools. The sauna section is nude (minimum age is 14), with women's, men's and mixed-gender areas. Entering the nude section in clothing is a major faux pas. The spa offers scrubs and massages, but be sure to book treatments well in advance. (Entry for up to three hours is €28, and saunas cost an extra €12. A towel rental is €6.)