

Vienna Tops the List of Best Cities To Live In

By Maria Lisella

Vienna recently surpassed Zurich as the most livable city in the world, according to Mercer's Quality of Living Survey. The study, used by governments and major corporations when placing employees on overseas assignments, ranks 215 world cities based on 39 factors, grouped into 10 categories, which include: health, recreation, availability of consumer goods, education, public services and transportation, natural environment, political stability, economics and socio-cultural factors.

Much like the intended audience for this survey, your clients are likely savvy travelers who have been to Europe many times before and are on the prowl for that something "extra." They want to feel welcomed and surrounded by impressive sights and authentic people. They work hard and have earned the pleasure to travel, yet they yearn for a connection to the places they visit. This is where Austria, a country that is well aware of its own value and the need to preserve it, is sure to impress. During the past few years, Austria has moved to the cultural center in the heart of Europe, in part due to the influx



Museum Quarter in Vienna

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of new immigrants from nearby former Eastern European countries, and it has attracted a host of dazzling international architects who have jumped with two feet into the swirling artistic scene in Vienna.

World-famous architects are creating the new campus for the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration in the 2nd district next to the Messe Wien. Zaha Hadid will provide the inspiration for the Library & Learning Center. Work on Vienna's new central station has started this year at the site of what is now Südbahnhof. Parts of the station will become operational in 2012, ahead of completion in 2015. This project has attracted big-name architect Renzo Piano who will be designing an office building at the site.

A new cultural scene seems to be erupting from theater to dance, opera to the symphony on every corner of Vienna. Its musical heritage ranges from opulent theaters such as the **Vienna Opera House** to the sounds of the 500 year old Vienna Boys' Choir and top music festivals that immerse travelers in nothing less than a magical atmosphere.

Imperial Attractions

Part of Vienna's great charm can be found in its ravishingly beautiful Imperial Palaces, many of which house the city's greatest and most frequently visited museums. Vienna developed from early Celtic and Roman settlements into a medieval and then baroque city, and became the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Since the 16th century, Vienna has been universally acknowledged to be the musical capital of Europe.

Famous for its imperial attractions, performing arts events, cultural calendar, coffee houses and cozy wine taverns, Vienna's behemoth Baroque palaces are an unparalleled orientation to this jewel box of a city. Travel Vienna's famous Ringstrasse Boulevard that circles the city's most dramatic sights like the **Vienna State Opera**, the **Museum of Fine Arts**, the **Museum of Natural History**, **Parliament**, **City Hall** and city mansions in a variety of architectural styles.

Austrians are acutely aware of their heritage, and incorporate it into everyday life through traditions and stories passed from one generation to another and that is still evident in Vi-

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enna whose residents seem to have a passion for the city.

Take Elisabeth Guertler for instance, who has been intertwined with three of Vienna's most venerable and visible institutions: she is owner of the ultra-luxe **Hotel Sacher**, the first female managing director of the Spanish Riding School and is the former chair of the Vienna Opera Ball. The more than 1,000 19th century paintings scattered throughout the Sacher Hotel tell the historical traditions of Vienna. To ensure the traditions are refreshed and preserved, Guertler's daughter, Alexandra Winkler, is one of the current owners of the Sacher.

A visit to the Imperial Palace is a must and no aspect is more intimate or moving than the **Sisi Museum**, devoted to the famous empress' tragic life. For all of the city's monuments to the Hapsburgs, this one reveals the very human nature of the monarchy.

Rising behind the façade of the former Royal Stables in the midst of Imperial Vienna is **The MuseumsQuartier Wien**, a complex of some 60 museums that has blossomed into one of the 10 largest cultural complexes in the world. Its terrace cafes, bars and shops have made it a spectacular recreation zone. For a touch of whimsy, notice that the courtyard furniture in the MuseumsQuartier, such as the MQ sofas are painted a different color every year. Stop in for lunch at the MuseumsQuartier's award-winning restaurant Café-Restaurant "milo" designed by Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal, for a light three-course Austrian-style lunch. Visit www.mqw.at Or, check out Hollein's Haas Haus, which reflects St. Stephen's Cathedral in its glass façade.

The Giant Ferris Wheel immortalized in *The Third Man*, the Orson Wells-produced film based on Graham Green's novel, continues to have a cult-like attraction. Hop into one of the cabins for a fantastic pre-dinner panorama from the comfort of one of the cabins Orson Wells made so famous, followed

New Sleeps in Vienna

Vienna's Tourist Office reported an astounding leap in visitor arrivals during the first quarter of this year – 14.6 percent overnights – compared to last year's increase from the U.S. of a healthy 10.5%. Vienna's hotel inventory hovers around 52,000 beds in 400 accommodations but is about to get a boost later this year. In fall 2010 the **Accor** group will open the **Sofitel Praterstrasse** hotel in a new building in Vienna's second district. This elegant glass and steel construction on the Danube Canal boasts the acclaimed French architect Jean Nouvel at the helm. Besides the 360-bed five-star hotel, the 19-story building will house stores and offices. Visit www.sofitel.com

In early 2010 the brand new **Fleming's Deluxe Hotel Wien-City** opened in a former office building used by the state gas company in Vienna's 8th district. The 400-bed, four-star hotel features a gym with sauna, two restaurants, a bar and six conference rooms. Visit www.flemings-hotels.com

The **Wombat's Group** will be opening a 440-bed hostel on Naschmarkt this summer, their fifth location in the city. Visit www.wombats-hostels.com

by dinner below in the restaurant now known as Waggon 31. Visit www.riesenradplatz.at

Vienna is filled with museums and a new permanent exhibition called "Red Vienna in the Laundry Room" offers a zany variation on the museum experience as it occupies space that formerly housed showers and water tanks within the Karl-Marx-Hof, part of a public housing project that was created during the era of the one-party rule by the Social Democrats from 1919-1934 (the Social Democrats have held the position of mayor and a majority on the city council without interruption since 1945). One of Red Vienna's most enduring achievements was the introduction of the social housing construction program, the *Gemeindebauten* that has provided affordable living quarters since the First World War. Visit www.das-rotewien.at/waschsalon

Getting There

Austrian Airlines, which recently celebrated its 50th birthday, operates flights daily from New York's JFK International and Washington, D.C. Dulles Airport. The company also packages accommodations with flights and tour components through its **Austrian Airlines Vacation Center**. Call 800-790-4682; E-mail info@austrianair-vacations.com; or, visit www.austrianair.com or www.austrianair-vacations.com

For further information, contact the **Austrian Tourist Office** in New York, 212-944-6880; E-mail: travel@austria.info; www.austria-tourism.biz

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