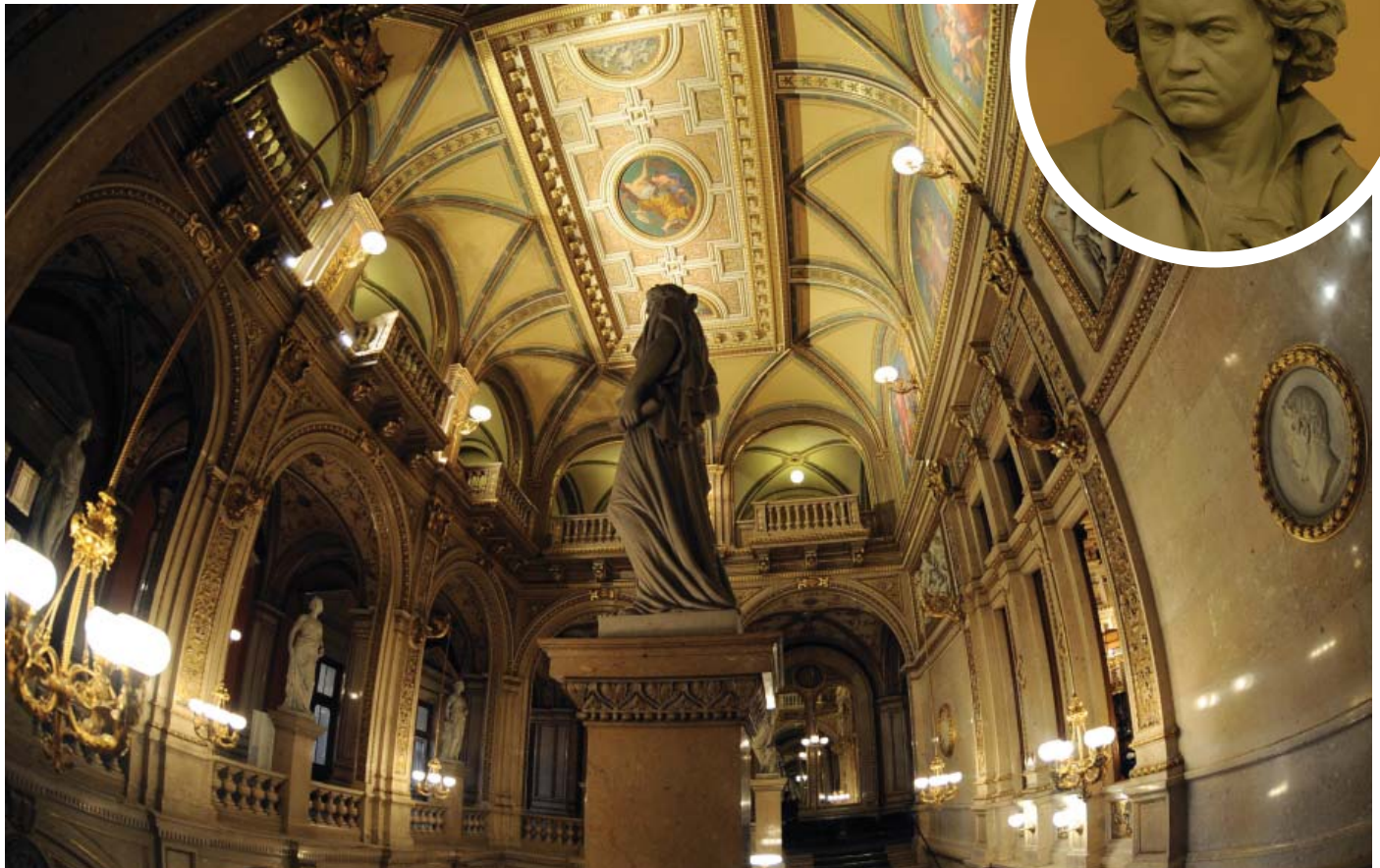


## Travel

# Viennese whirl

Kate McAuley dives head first into the Austrian capital's cultural riches – and discovers a new appreciation for the 'wiener'



The foyer of the Vienna State Opera. Inset: Ludwig van Beethoven

There's a joke Europeans like to tell visitors from the Antipodes. To a girl from Sydney, it goes something like: What's the difference between Australia and yoghurt? Yoghurt has a culture. This refers to my homeland's relatively recent link to the Continent, and consequent lack of a similar history in music, art and other endeavours that, for the more highfaluting among us, constitute 'high culture'. It's a funny little jibe that hardly ruffles my feathers as we have other worthy offerings. Instead, when I have the opportunity to travel to these pinnacles of classical erudition, such as Vienna, I immerse myself fully into all that which I can't get back home.

The obvious entry point here is music. A clutch of the classical world's greatest

## The Sachertorte dessert was so celebrated that a hotel was built in its honour

composers were either born or lived in Vienna at some point during their lifetimes. Over a period of many centuries, Ludwig van Beethoven gave his first concert, Johann Strauss penned the 'Blue Danube' waltz, the German, Johannes Brahms, directed the world-famous Viennese Philharmonic

Orchestra for three seasons and Gustav Mahler found the time to write 10 symphonies and propel the **Stattsoper** (state opera) into the realms of international repute. Its most famous former resident, however, was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The prodigious composer is a poster child for the city. While resident in Vienna he wrote symphonies, religious masses and operas such as the *Marriage Of Figaro*.

Tradition and ceremony ooze from the city at every turn. At the famous **Spanish Riding School** the masterly riders control their handsome steeds as they dance, rear and move in a slow motion gallop. Although the school has been practising this kind of classical equitation for more than 430 years, convention does not always escape evolution and the school



has recently accepted its first female riders – much to the chagrin of the more conservative populace.

To state the obvious, history has been integral to Vienna's cultural development. The rise and fall of the Austrian empire, the intrigues and interests of the powerful Habsburgs, and Napoleon's temporary occupation of the country is felt nowhere else as keenly as when visiting the stunning **Schloss Schönbrunn** – the former summer residence of the once ruling family. The great halls still echo with the sounds of chamber music and the pitter-patter of Empress Maria Theresa's 11 children, one of whom was the infamous Marie-Antoinette. The walls and ceilings are decorated with exquisite works of art. The most memorable of these are the portraits and intricate murals by painter Martin van Meytens II (1695-1770) that depict aristocrats and royalty of the time and important crowd scenes.

All things artistic remain essential to the Viennese landscape. At the **Albertina** – a gallery – I'm introduced to the bleak grey landscapes, morbid slashes of blood red and messy streaks of colour that are unique to the work of German artist Gerhard Richter. At **The Leopold Museum** works by Egon Schiele resonate with the artist's tortured



Centre and top: the Leopold Museum



existence and obvious mummy issues. Thankfully, I find Gustav Klimt's offerings nearby a tad more upbeat.

Austria's culinary arts come to the fore while I'm seated for dinner at **Vestibuel**. I plump for my first Wiener Schnitzel (breaded veal) accompanied by buttery new potatoes

made tangy with herbs. It's simple, yet divine. Dessert was a no-brainer – a slice of the infamous Sachertorte at the **Hotel Sacher's Café**. The exact recipe is a secret, but the rich chocolate cake, slathered with apricot jam all encased in a thin shell of chocolate gives me goose bumps. First invented in 1832 by Franz Sacher, it was so celebrated that the hotel was built in its honour. Enough said.

## The wieners

While in the English vernacular the word 'wiener' causes those of a cheeky disposition to erupt in a fit of giggles, in Vienna it's simply how the locals say **Viennese** (the city itself is known as **Wien**) – and, boy, do they know how to market it. I don't think there's a city anywhere else in the world that has donated its name to so many treats and art forms. New York has the steak, Singapore has the Sling, but the Austrian capital is in a class all of its own.

**Cafés** the world over serve their approximation of a Viennese coffee. **British retailer Marks & Spencer** sells the addictive tea-dunking chocolate **Viennese sandwiches** and you'll be hard pressed to find someone who would pass on an offer of a **Mr Kipling's Viennese Whirl**. Even **French bakery chain Paul**

serves a selection of pastries known as 'Viennoiserie', which is surprising, given its Gallic provenance. And then there is the glitzy yet graceful Viennese waltz – a competitive ballroom dancer's delight. There are countless others, but I'm sure you get the picture.

To shed some light on just how the city has managed this global domination, I ask a couple of Wieners for their thoughts. I get an answer from a patron at one of the restaurants in **Naschmarkt** (see **Where to shop, overleaf**): 'Ah yes,' says the burly man propping up the bar. 'This is the cultural capital of the world, but we like to share.' I'm not sure how true this is, but one thing's certain: while it's possible to visit your local mall to imbibe in some of these exports, there's no comparison to indulging in situ. Promise.



Naschmarkt; Albertina gallery, inset



## Need to know



**Emirates holidays** offers a three-night deal, including flights and accommodation. Prices start at Dhs4,752 per person.



### WHERE TO STAY

**Hotel Sacher**, Philharmonikerstraße 4. Visit [www.sacher.com](http://www.sacher.com), +43 (0)1 51 456 0

**Do & Co Hotel**, Stephansplatz 12. Visit [www.doco.com](http://www.doco.com), +43 720 072 522



### ACTIVITIES

#### Staatsoper (state opera house).

Take a tour for €5 (Dhs26) or watch a performance – prices start at €2 (Dhs11) for standing tickets, which can be bought 80 minutes before the curtain is raised. Seated tickets (from €8, or Dhs41) go on sale a month before the performance and almost always sell out. Visit [www.staatsoper.at](http://www.staatsoper.at)

**Schloss Schönbrunn (Schönbrunn Summer Palace)** Tours start from €9.50 (Dhs49). Visit [www.schoenbrunn.at](http://www.schoenbrunn.at)

**Spanish Riding School** Standing tickets start at €20 (Dhs103). Visit [www.srs.at](http://www.srs.at)

**Weiner Riesenrad (Ferris Wheel)** Tickets start at €8.50 (Dhs44). Visit [www.wienerriesenrad.com](http://www.wienerriesenrad.com)



### WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

**Vestibuel** Burgtheater. Dr Karl Lueger-Ring 2, +43 1532 49 99. Visit [www.vestibuel.at](http://www.vestibuel.at)

**American Bar by Adolf Loos** Kärntner Durchgang 10. +43 1512 3283. Visit [www.loosbar.at](http://www.loosbar.at)

**Do&Co** Albertina, Albertinaplatz 1, +43 532 9669. Visit [www.doco.com](http://www.doco.com)

**Artner am Franziskanerplatz**, Franziskanerplatz 5, +43 1503 5034. Visit [www.artner.co.at](http://www.artner.co.at)

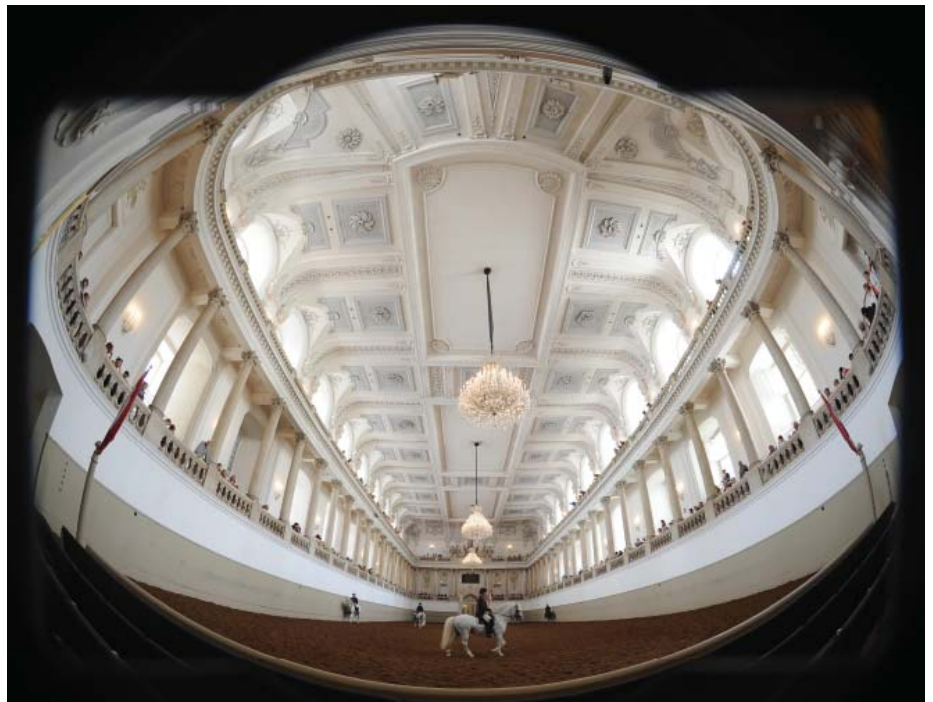


### WHERE TO SHOP

**Naschmarkt** Fresh produce stalls open daily with a flea market on Saturdays. Between Karlsplatz and Kettenbrückengasse.

**Innere Stadt** The pedestrianised city centre streets, such as Kärntner Strasse, Graben and Naglergasse, boast a huge selection of high street as well as luxury designer brands. There are also many music and book shops.

**Lobmeyr** Exquisite glassware artisans since 1823. Kärntner Strasse 26, 512 0



*The Spanish Riding School*

On the advice of the locals, I eschew my normal Starbucks latte for a Kleiner Swarzer at **Café Central**. The Viennese take their coffee very seriously, and, after knocking back this murky liquid, I begin to understand why. Apparently it's something to do with the spring water that gushes straight from the mountains, through the city's plumbing system and out of its taps. I've never tasted anything like it. Not bitter, not sweet – simply perfect.

To step away from all things haute and get a feel for the street life I make my way to **Naschmarkt**. At one end the daily produce market is alive with colour. Purveyors sell all manner of things – bushels of bulbous artichokes, sleek asparagus sprigs, blood-red tomatoes and aromatic horseradish roots. Cafés and taverns are interspersed throughout. On the weekends the area expands to include a flea market that sells all sorts of goods, including antiques, homewares and imported ethnic jewellery.

Heading out at night is also a must. At **Volksgarten** – an impressive high-ceilinged, wooden floor-boarded space – I try vainly to fit in with Vienna's ultra cool set. It thumps with a funk, soul and dance melange by DJ First Lady Of Bad Taste – a Dutch lass who's music forces me out of my seat and onto the tiny dance floor. Moving on, I end up at **Porgy & Bess**. Although normally a jazz club, tonight Richard Dorfmeister (of the Kruder & Dorfmeister DJ duo) and his decks take centre stage. As expected, the next day calls for some lighter relief, so I head to the Prater amusement park and channel my inner-child



on the Riesenrad (a giant Ferris wheel offering excellent views).

In Vienna, culture abounds. You can't help but hear it, see it, be inspired by it – even trip over it when you're not paying attention. And that goes for everyone – not just those of us from the flipside.



*Porgy & Bess, above and inset*