

# 48 HOURS IN... VIENNA

EMILY O'SULLIVAN KICKS OFF THE WINTER SEASON IN AN IMPERIAL CITY THAT'S MADE FOR COLD WEATHER

**Why go:** Vienna in winter is pure pleasure. The air is rich with the festive scents of *glühwein*, sugary treats, sumptuous cakes and hot chocolate; café windows glisten with vast towers of sugar plums and truffles; opulent decorations give the city a chocolate-box beauty and the frosted city streets glow with the twinkle of lights from the *Christkindlmarkt*. Café culture rules in this imperial city, especially in the colder months. Grandiose coffee houses have played host over the years to penniless artists, revolutionaries and the Viennese literati, and maintain a lasting reverence for their past, with ageing velvet booths, rustling newspapers, cavalier waiters and marble table tops. They are the perfect places to cosy up over a cup of milky *mélange* coffee on an icy winter day, while if you fancy something more modern there are lots of cool new restaurants shaking up the dining scene in glorious surroundings.

**What to see and do:** Vienna's imposing 19th-century and Belle Epoch architecture reflects its historical importance as the epicentre of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But beyond the imperial buildings and wide boulevards is a rich intellectual, artistic and theatrical tradition that roots Vienna at the very heart of modernism, with groundbreaking visionaries such as Schiele, Klimt, Loos, Freud and Otto Wagner. Stroll around the compact centre and you'll discover a wealth of galleries, palaces, churches and museums that seem to reflect all interests and tastes from bombastic structures to Art Nouveau gems. At the core of the city is the Innere Stadt, the first district, with a high density of sightseeing attractions. One of the most impressive sights here is the Hofburg, from where the imperial dynasty of the Hapsburgs dominated central Europe for over 600 years. Contained within this vast imperialist sprawl is the world-famous Spanish Riding School, the Gothic Burgkapelle church and the Vienna State Opera Museum, but the place that fires the imagination and lures the crowds is the Kaiserappartements/Sisi Museum (Innerer Burghof Kaisertorte; €9.90), home to Empress Elisabeth (or Sisi, as she was known) – the 19th century's version of Princess Diana. Resentful of the restrictions court life imposed on her, the troubled empress spent her days in apparent anguish, writing bad poetry, washing her hair (which took an entire day) and doing gym exercises. Unsurprisingly, it's one of Vienna's most important attractions. Walking through Heldenplatz and towards Maria Theresien-Platz, you'll come across Kunsthistorisches Museum (Maria Theresien-Platz; €10). Crowned with a sumptuous octagonal dome (under which you can enjoy a coffee and cake!), this palatial building houses one of the most important collections of fine arts in the world, with works by Bruegel, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Rubens, Jan Van

Eyck and Raphael. Stroll up to the MuseumQuartier for something completely different. This cluster of galleries is Vienna's artistic heartland and is one of the 10 largest cultural complexes in the world. Here there's the Architekturzentrum Wien, designformMQ and MUMOK (Vienna's modern art museum; €9), but easily the most impressive museum on the site is the Leopold (€10), with major pieces by Egon Schiele, Gustav Klimt and Oskar Kokoschka. For more Klimt works (including *The Kiss* and *Judith*), leave some time for the Belvedere (Prinz Eugen-Straße 27), two extravagant palaces constructed in 1721 as the summer residence for Prince Eugene of Savoy. For something completely different, try one of Vienna's lesser-known pleasures, MAK – the Museum of Applied Arts and Design, (Stubenring 5; €7.90). Each room a different era of design from Art Nouveau to Baroque Rococo Classicism, while the building itself is a joy to behold.

**Where to eat:** Vienna's culinary scene has long moved beyond goulash and Wiener Schnitzel, and while traditional food is now fashionable in some of the city's most dynamic restaurants, modern European cooking dominates. Many of the city's most exciting spots are attached to museums, including Café Milo at Architekturzentrum Wien (Museumsplatz; tel: + 43 1 1 714 01 21), with its stunning vaulted ceiling decorated with Turkish mosaics, and the postmodern Café Leopold in the Leopold Museum (Museumsplatz; tel: + 43 1 523 6732). Österreicher im MAK (Stubenring 5; tel: + 43 1 714 0121) at Vienna's Museum of Applied Arts and Design is something of a showstopper with dark parquet flooring, electric green booths bathed in soft lighting and elaborate plasterwork ceilings. The menu comprises both modern and traditional Austrian offering everything from goulash to char fish with pumpkin *tashonya* and vanilla. Hollmann Salon (Grashofgasse 3; tel: + 43 1 96 11 960 40) has a beautiful location in a pretty cobblestoned courtyard, while inside the minimalist white interior is softened by cheeky rustic flourishes. Food-wise, the menu is intriguing, with Austrian tapas and some truly great steaks. The soaring conservatory-style setting of the Palmenhaus (Burggarten 1; tel: + 43 1 533 10 33) may not have the best acoustics around, but the food is fresh and modern, service is relaxed and attentive, and the location is definitely something to savour. Where else can you feast on super-fresh fish while being tickled by large palm fronds? It's worth bearing in mind that Vienna's famous coffee houses offer more than just cake and are good spots for lunchtime meals. Try Café Central (Herrengasse 14) for its lovely vaulted ceiling, warm, softly lit interior and bustling atmosphere. They do a good club sandwich and some well-priced snacks and light meals. ○

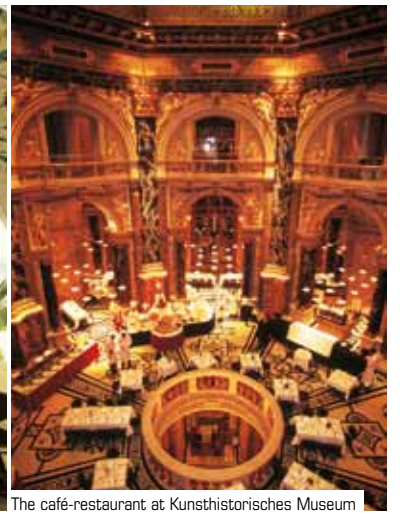
Aer Lingus flies to Vienna  
daily from Dublin



The Leopold Museum



Café Milo



The café-restaurant at Kunsthistorisches Museum



Desserts at Hollmann Salon



The Plague Monument, Graben



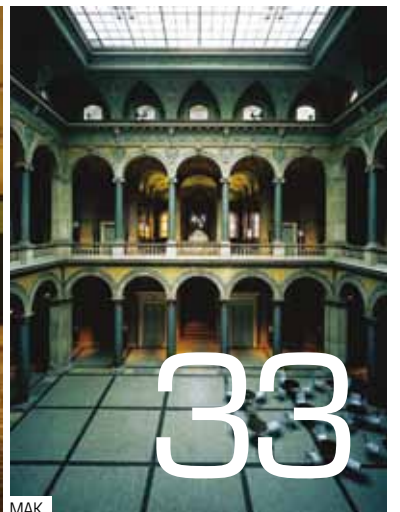
Café Demel



Cosy simplicity at Hollmann Salon



Hollmann Salon



MAK



Osterreicher im MAK

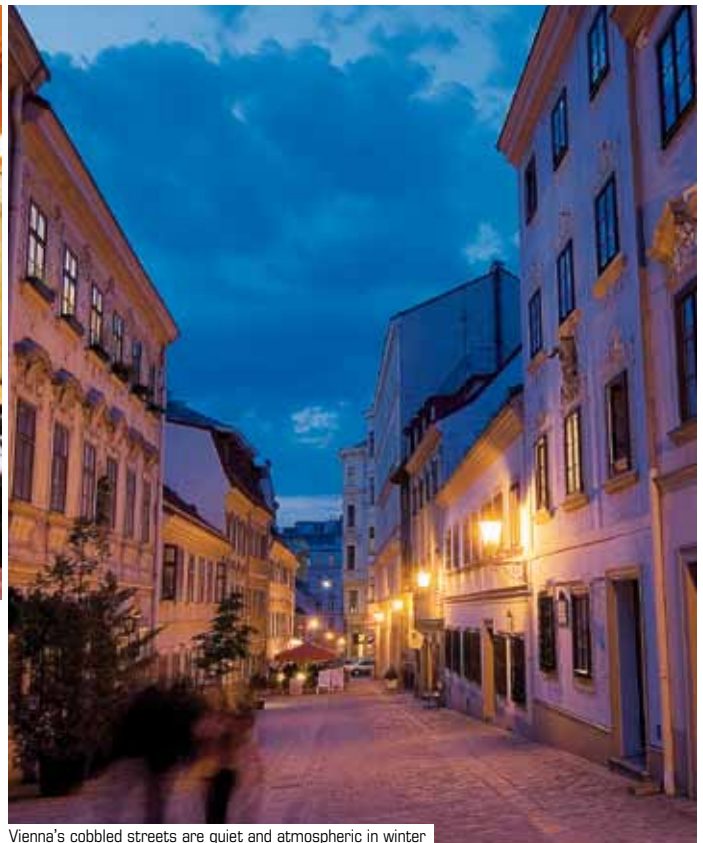


Café Central

Demel (Kohlmarkt 14) dates back to 1786 and is famous for its exquisite cakes and hot chocolate. The splendid interior alone makes it worth a visit – just be prepared to queue at busy times. For a more low-key literary feel, head to Café Braunerhof (Stallburgasse 2) with its rickety dark wooden tables and great strudels or feast on an open sandwich in the small but beautiful main bar of Zum Schwarzen Kameel (Bognergasse 5), which opened as a grocer's back in 1618 and boasts illustrious patrons such as Beethoven.

**Where to drink:** Vienna's upscale, professional types slink into the bar at Do&Co (Stephensplatz 12) for slushy ice-cold mojitos. With its incredible elevated location facing Stephansdom Cathedral, it's easily the best "bar with a view" in town. Hot on its heels is Sky Bar (Kartnerstrasse 19), edged with the feeling of a gentleman's club thanks to its brown leather seats, paneled walls and sweeping panoramas. Viennese locals keep it real at the tightly packed Kleines Café (Franziskanerplatz 3). It's small and no-nonsense, but is effortlessly charming with a picturesque position on a neat little square. Café Alt Wien (Backerstrasse 9) brims with atmosphere; inside it's all peeling poster-covered walls and well-worn wooden tables. The air is thick with nicotine, the mood is bohemian and the beers are cheap. Possibly Vienna's smallest bar, the Loos (Kartner Straße 10) is not only a great place to grab a pre-dinner cocktail but it's an architectural masterpiece to boot. Constructed in 1908 by modernist pioneer Adolf Loos, its miniature scale belies its rich detailing with dark marble, leather seats, mirrors and black onyx. A little off the main tourist drag, Café Dreschler (Linke Wienzeile 22), in the sixth district, has recently been given a revamp by Sir Terence Conran – expect a pale stylish and elegant interior and a hip crowd.

**Where to shop:** Viennese shopping ranges from the high-end elegance of Kohlmarkt, with its glitzy designer shops, to the flea-market bric-a-brac of Naschmarkt. Wander off the main shopping streets of the Innere Stadt where Zara stores jostle for attention with H&Ms and you'll find pretty little boutiques with a quirkier edge. A little below-the-radar is the boho district of Freihausviertel, where an eclectic mix of stores is injecting new energy into the area. Try Pregenzer (Schleifmühlgasse 4) for whimsical designer clothes from Austrian designer Jutta Pregenzer, and Elfenkleid (Margaretenstr 39) for simple designs with a high-standard finish. Vintage fans should drop into Nostalgische Mode (Schleifmühlgasse 15a), or if you're after some off-beat souvenirs, take a short walk up to Kettenbrückengasse where you'll find the WieWien concept store stocking cool T-shirts, calendars, snow globes and arty books.



Vienna's cobblestone streets are quiet and atmospheric in winter

**Where to sleep:** Defiantly modern in the face of Vienna's Baroque opulence, the Do&Co (Stephensplatz 12; tel: + 43 1 24 188; doco.com; doubles from €265) is easily the city's hottest hotel. Perfectly placed right in the centre of the city opposite the Stephansdom Cathedral, it's a stone's throw from all the major sites and the big stores. Reception is up on the sixth floor and the small area can get packed at busy times of the day, but the rooms are comfortable, modern and elegant with glass-panelled bathrooms, plasma televisions and delightfully comfortable beds.

**Top Tips:** Get a horse and carriage around the city. Prices are roughly €40 for 20 minutes, but the well-worn cobblestones and elegant boulevards make it worth the fee. If you're traveling at the weekend, book ahead in restaurants for lunches and dinners. The best places get quickly packed out. The Citybike Vienna is a public bicycle rental system with 54 rental locations through the city. The first hour of rental is free, after that it's €1 for two hours and €3 for three hours. Log onto [citybikewien.at](http://citybikewien.at) for more information. O

#### ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

##### From the airport:

A taxi from the airport to the city centre costs roughly €25. The high-speed CAT (€9) train will get you there in about 15 minutes.

##### Getting around:

Vienna is very easy to navigate on foot, while the underground system is easy to use, is clean, safe and efficient. Tickets cost €1.70 per journey.

##### Essential websites:

Try [wien.info](http://wien.info) – the Vienna Tourist Board's website for good listings and info.

##### Costs:

Vienna has a reputation as a costly city to visit, but this isn't borne out by reality. Prices in good restaurants cost about €15-20 for a main course, while pints of beer can cost as little as €3 in places.

##### Did you know:

Vienna's cemetery, the Zentralfriedhof, is the second largest in Europe. Beethoven and Schubert are buried here.

**Further Reading:** The *Time Out Vienna* guide is spot on.