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# AUSTRIA “IN YOUR SPORRAN”

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## About this guide

This series of downloadable NATA Mini “In Your Sporrán” Guides has been designed specifically to save the hassle of printing out reams of NATA web pages in order to make sure you don’t miss something whilst wandering the back streets of your chosen destination.

This guide has been compiled almost exclusively by me (Paul Allison), and is based entirely on personal experiences and opinions. Please do not prejudice anything on my say so – not only am I quite warped, but many places were only visited once, and therefore may have been having a particularly good or bad day.

This guide is not intended to replace more traditional sources of information, such as the excellent Lonely Planet guide books or the indispensable “In Your Pocket” guides available local in many Eastern European cities (as well as the downloadable versions from [www.inyourpocket.com](http://www.inyourpocket.com), which have inspired this very guide). Instead, the idea is to supplement these more detailed, better researched and more balanced guides with my own ramblings.

These guides originally came about as people were forever asking for pub tips and the like for places I’ve been to – I soon grew tired of typing out the same emails every few weeks and opted instead to keep the information on the web on the NATA Online site.

All opinions expressed in this guide are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the Netley Abbey Tartan Army.

- For more information about NATA (the Netley Abbey Tartan Army), including photos and diary accounts of many trips abroad with Scotland, as well as much more travel information and guides), please visit [www.netleyabbeytartanarmy.com](http://www.netleyabbeytartanarmy.com)
- For more information on me, please visit [www.paulallison.co.uk](http://www.paulallison.co.uk)



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## Austria Introduction

My first visit to Austria was literally "in passing" - a total of 7 hours spent at Vienna Airport in transit to and from Sarajevo in 1999. My abiding memory is of Austrian Airlines stewardesses in their all-red uniforms (complete with stockings!). Eventually, we decided to take advantage of cheap direct flights from Gatwick to Innsbruck. Why not Vienna first? Well, we thought about it, but it meant nothing to me...

Spring 2005 did bring about a trip to Vienna and Mattersburg (in the rural Burgenland province), and with trips to Graz (August 2005) and Salzburg (October 2005, on the way home from Slovenia) on the cards, expect this guide to grow nicely in time for Euro 2008!

The main thing to remember in this German speaking country is that you are NOT in Germany! (Easier said than done, believe it or not). The Tirol in particular is very similar to Bavaria, in terms of ambience, folk traditions and dialect. The easiest way to remember is that the beer is not quite as good (and is slightly more expensive).



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## Vienna Introduction

I'd never been in any rush to go to the Austrian capital previously, mostly due to my preconceptions about stuffiness and powdered wigs. Nonetheless, when the time came, we were very pleasantly surprised. The café culture, complete with tuxedoed waiters, can be a little starched, but this is completely offset by the lively, cheap heurigen taverns. We spent a pretty active three days there, but could happily go back and still find loads of new things to do.

## Arrival in Vienna (and the wonders of a Vienna Card!)

I wouldn't normally be quite so prescriptive, but... this really is the way to do it if you arrive at Schwechat Airport (VIE)! When you clear passport control, search out the Tourist Office – it faces into the baggage reclaim area, but if you miss it, it has a window onto the Arrivals Hall (come out into the landside area and turn sharp right). Buy a Vienna Card (was just under 17 Euros when we were there) – this is a 72-hour discount and public transport ticket, and is WELL worth the cash. For a start, it gets you a 17% on the first-class CAT (City Airport Train) high-speed link to central Vienna (Wien Mitte station) – either buy your CAT tickets at the same time, or pick them up on the train (each carriage has a conductor checking tickets). If you use the machine you won't get the discount.

Once you arrive at Wien Mitte station, walk along to the main S-Bahn/U-Bahn connections at Landstrasse (all under the same roof), stamp your Vienna Card in the ticket machines by the platform escalators (very important!), and that's you covered for 72 hours public transport.

There are other ways into town (S-Bahn 7, Taxi and bus – the last two offer a 17% discount with the Card as well), but none are the bargain in terms of speed/cost that the CAT is. And if that's not enough convincing, did I mention it was a double-decker train?



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### Things to do & see in Vienna

For a place with such a stuffy reputation, Vienna is really packed with sights. It really would take a full week or more to really see and do everything, so pick and choose your favourites carefully. This was our pick of the attractions (many of which were discounted through the Vienna Card):

- **The Big Wheel** – the “Risenrad” is the iconic symbol of the city, and sits on the north-western edge of the Prater park. A sort of London Eye prototype in wood and iron, the wheel was immortalised in the film *The Third Man*. Sometimes you get to go around twice when it’s really quiet!
- **UNO City** – a strange choice of attraction, but one I really enjoyed. As one of four UN headquarters, the UNO City is a patch of “international” land on Austrian soil, on an island in the Danube. Unless you’re a UN delegate, you can only get in on a guided tour (run twice a day, in English or German) – don’t forget your passport! As a politics graduate, I loved it.
- **Prater** – the northern edge contains a permanent amusement park (free to enter, pay per ride), which is pretty much like any other amusement park/fairground. The middle bit lies alongside the Messe, and the southern part contains sports grounds, including... The Ernst Happel Stadion – Vienna’s massive national stadium (holds 50,000, but seems much larger), on the southern edge of Prater, was being partially renovated ahead of Euro 2008 when we were there. Apparently contains a museum, but we didn’t see it.
- **St Stephens Dom** – Large, attractive cathedral right in the middle of Vienna’s Innere Stadt. Faces Haas Haus, a mega-modern glass and chrome building, a juxtaposition that sums up Vienna pretty well.
- **Hofburg** – Once the largest private residence in Europe, this central palace is larger than some other city centres on it’s own. Difficult to comprehend it’s considered a single building (albeit of many different sections).
- **Danube Tower** – the TV tower is slightly north of the UNO City, and is very skinny for its size. As a result, the restaurant revolves quicker than some others of that ilk – we did two and half turns whilst eating an ice-cream sundae!



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- **Heuriger** – Vienna has the most vineyards of any city in Europe, and the local wine is traditionally sampled in Heuriger taverns. Most often these are clustered in the vineyard areas (such as Grinzing and Stammersdorf), but there are a couple of central ones (the Esterhazykeller is a good one). The sell “young” wine (mostly white) in half-pint beakers at exceptionally cheap prices. Be warned – the locals mix it with soda for a good reason: all that young wine can make you very ill the next day!
- **Eulennest Vinotheque** – another wine experience, straddling the “To Do” and the “Places to Drink” sections. Inspired by the Vienna Card leaflet, we went along for a discounted “tour of Austrian wines”, a snip at 7 Euros for 5 wines (not full measures mind!), brought to your table and given an expert introduction. You can choose between white, red or mixed, and best of all, if there’s two of you, you probably won’t both get the same wines. There’s a deli counter selling posh cheeses and parma ham (known as “speck”), so you can purchase a plate or two to nibble on, and there’s nothing to stop you buying a few more full-sized glasses (or bottles, to take away as well as drink in) of the wines you like. Be warned – it soon all adds up! Well worth it, and a very civilised way to spend a few hours of an evening.

### Places to drink in Vienna

#### Heuriger

I would really, really recommend taking a step into the unknown and visiting one of the heuriger areas on the outskirts. We opted for Stammersdorf, an easy half-hour tram ride (number 31) from Schottenring right to the terminus (one street south of where the action is). It really is wall-to-wall wine taverns on Stammersdorfer Strasse, ranging from the small, family-run affairs through to larger places with seating and tables in large courtyard gardens. The unifying feature of these taverns is the school canteen style catering – grab a tray, join the queue and ask for (or point at) what you want. The wine, on the other hand, is almost always ordered and served by a waitress. The Stammersdorf heuriger we visited (three different ones) did not have live music or gimmicks, but by all accounts those in the more-touristed Grinzing suburb are (although these are frowned on by many of the locals due to the number of tour buses passing through).



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- **Esterhazykeller** – one of Burgenland's premier vineyards has its own outlet in these atmospheric city centre cellars. Whilst the prices are higher than the outlying heuriger, they're not prohibitive, and the food system works on the same lines (just get a table first – it's a popular place!).

### Pubs

- **Bar Italia**, Mariahilfer Strasse – trendy street café by day, achingly trendy subterranean cocktail bar to be seen in by night. Only went in as I was drunk. Left even more drunk after two cocktails powerful enough to subdue a bull elephant.
- **Siebensternbrau**, Siebensterngasse – A great brew-pub with no less than seven of its own beers, including hemp and chilli beer. The food's good too, especially the huge schnitzels and the apple strudel.
- **Bierkutsch'n**, Landstrasse - rare wee beer and food place right on Landstrasse. Handy for Wien Mitte/Landstrasse station and that wait for the airport train.
- **Gasthaus Mehler**, Prater – across the tramlines on Engerthstrasse, at the back of the Ernst Happel, and quite possibly the closest bar to the ground, is this yellow-coloured two story gasthaus, complete with beer garden courtyard. We were in on a weekday early evening and it was popular with the locals for food and beer, yet also very friendly. One to remember if there's a game on.
- **Schweizerhaus**, Prater – a famous old pub in amongst the rides and stalls of the Prater Amusement Park, complete with Budvar on tap. Full of drunken locals and tourists at any time of day, and a handy pit stop between the Wien Nord U-Bahn and the Ernst Happel.
- **Gasthaus zum Kärntnerwirt**, Favorittenstrasse – A decent enough local out near Austria Wien's stadium. Not worth a special trip. Halper, right over the road, is supposed to be a little more olde worlde but was shut on the Sunday we were there.



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- **Loos Bar**, Kärntner Strasse – we got as far as the front door, but the place was rammed and there was no chance of us getting served. The 20 or so people in there were having a great time! The place is absolutely tiny, but clever use of mirrors and ornate coloured décor make the bar seem much bigger. Famous for its cocktails – worth a visit but get there REALLY early! Only a few minutes southwest of Stephansplatz in the centre.
- Bar opposite Nordbahnhof, Praterstrasse – if you're looking for a beer near Prater without having to brave the garishness of the amusements to get there, this could be your saviour. Right on the corner, with a food area and a stand-up drinking area.

There's also a good spread of pubs in the streets due north of Neubaugasse U-Bahn (right up to Siebensternbrau and beyond), but we didn't go in any as we had focussed on heuriger more than originally planned! Although I do wish I'd known about this really handy web site before we went.

### Innsbruck Introduction

Innsbruck has a stunning setting in a valley between two mountain ranges, and is a main junction between Bavaria and Northern Italy, sitting as it does on the Brenner Pass. It's quite a large town in population size, but is very walkable. Even the airport is in the city limits and only a few miles from the old town.

We were there in Summer, when it seems to be very popular with Italian tourists, including hen parties - I'm sure it takes on more of a ski resort ambience in winter, but as that's not really our bag, it would be unfair to comment.



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### Things to Do & See in Innsbruck

There is more than enough to fill a weekend, but we can really recommend getting hold of an Innsbruck Card (the Tourist Board site for details) - at €21 for 24 hours, we still saved loads. Almost everything is free with it, and you don't need to worry about transport fares either.

- **The Golden Roof** - we couldn't work out what the fuss was about, but do try to look up so you can catch sight of the golden roof.
- **Panoramic painting** - although it's not the town's main attraction, it is vastly under-rated. Housed in a circular building next to the valley station for the Hungerburgbahn funicular railway, this unbelievably lifelike huge painting puts you directly in the middle of a 19th century battle in the hills above Innsbruck. Well worth a visit.
- **Hungerburg/Hafelkar cable car** - the most accessible of the mountains surrounding the city, you can catch the funicular up a very steep pull to the Hungerburg plateau (or get off at the middle stop for the Alpen zoo), then take the Nordkette cable car up to Seegrubbe (home to a restaurant and hotel), or carry on up to 7,000 feet with the Hafelkar cable car. On a clear day, you can see for miles (it was cloudy when we there).
- **Bus trip** - there are two sightseeing bus routes served by mini-buses with audio guides. Very cheap, and a good way of seeing the city (and free with the Innsbruck card)
- **Bergisel ski jump** - Innsbruck has hosted the Winter Olympics twice, although this is a new ski-jump designed by an award winning architect. The easiest way to get to it is on the sightseeing bus - jump off at the hunting museum and walk a short way up the walkway to the entrance. Once you've paid your money (or shown your Innsbruck Card), you can catch a mono-rail style lift that takes you to the foot of the tower, where a conventional elevator whips you up to the restaurant and viewing gallery at the top.



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### Places to Drink in Innsbruck

Happily, there is no shortage of quality places to kick back and have a beer in Innsbruck, ranging from the down and dirty to the posh and swanky. The Altstadt has several options, but it's definitely worth exploring the bars in the railway arches north of the main station. Here are some we can personally recommend:

- **Elferhaus** - superb pub, right opposite the Goldener Adler hotel, that has a whole host of Austrian beers on tap, and more exotic bottled beers. Well worth a decent visit.
- **Tribeca** - trendy style bar with window seats offering a good view over the top of Maria Theresen Strasse. Stands for "Triangle Below Canal" in New York, in case you were wondering. Had a happy hour late on Saturday afternoon when were there.
- **Cappucino** - a strange choice for inclusion, but a great wee bar. Primarily a narrow coffee/wine bar in the old town (there is beer on tap), this great wee bar is populated by the local characters, and is great entertainment!
- **Seegrube & Hafelkar** - Both cable car stations offer restaurants that serve beer. And remember, you get drunk quicker at altitude!
- **Stiftskeller** - a handy beer garden/cellar right on the edge of the old town near the Hofburg. Don't sit on the stammstisch table!
- **Bar d'Abbei** - in one of the quieter back-streets of the old town, and one of the cheapest. Frequented by genuine old-school mad jakies.
- **Viaduktstube** - The first bar on the road leading up from the station, and the most down to earth. Complete with juke box full of euro-pop and German-style rock music.
- **Little Rock** - A rock bar popular with grungy and gothy kids, and table service.
- **Cafe Dom** - outdoor seats facing the imposing cathedral
- **Baren Bar** - strange and very popular local bar with pictures of cuddly bears everywhere



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## Mattersburg

Mattersburg is home to Burgenland's top football team, SVM, and the stadium is capable of holding the town's entire 6,000 population with room for a couple of thousand of their pals to boot! The town's main tourist attraction is its lovely railway viaduct (I kid you not), and handily for any hybrid train/stadium spotters, it is slap band next to said football stadium. The main station, with one of the skinniest platforms in Europe (one abreast) has a handy pub, and is around 10 minutes uphill from the town centre. The primary hotel, the Florianihof, is very comfortable and has a restaurant and bar (the bar also serves as the reception). A handful of bars compete for your attention, including a sports pub on the way to the ground, and unbelievably, and Irish pub called The Peacock, staffed by nubile Hungarian beauties. The football club bar is apparently a focal point of weekend nightlife, which isn't too surprising when it knocks out top-notch local wine at 1 Euro a glass! A nice wee place, but somewhere you're unlikely to find yourself in without a reason. You might see it out the train window if you ever make the trip from Vienna to the Hungarian shopping town of Sopron.

## Bregenz

I'd never heard of Bregenz until April 2005, when I saw their football team play in Vienna against FK Austria. Three months later I found myself changing trains there. It's on the very western edge of Austria, sitting on the shores of Lake Constance (or the Bodensee), squeezing up to the water between Switzerland to the south and Germany to the north. We only had time to wander from the station to the lakeside and sample an ice cream and a beer at the Wirsthaus am See. The Bregenz festival is a big cultural in central Europe each July/August, and an open-air stage is set up on the lake. The town stretches inland and uphill, and seemed worthy of a further visit – you can reach it by boat from Friedrichshafen (served by Ryanair), should you be tempted.

Was this guide useful? Please let me know:  
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