

COVER STORY

Taste of Vienna



KRUSTE & KRUME

In the Austrian city's culinary scene, there's a reverence for tradition alongside modern twists

SYDNEY LONEY
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

When you visit Vienna, you will have strudel. It's inevitable. You will likely also sip coffee at a pace foreign to many Canadians: slowly, while seated, for an extended period. (To-go cups are a rare sight in the city.) And, unless you're vegetarian, you will, or at least should, bite into an artfully spiced sausage after lining up at one of the city's roughly 120 iconic streetside Würstelstands.

Dining, sipping, savouring — none of these things are taken lightly in Vienna. Much of the city's cultural identity has formed around its enduring reverence for food. Strudel and, yes, Wiener schnitzel are national dishes, while the city's coffee house culture, Heuriger wine taverns and, most recently, its sausage stands have all been recognized for their intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO.

Vienna's food traditions were shaped by the former Habsburg monarchy, with influences from Hungary, Bohemia, Italy and Croatia, says Martha Tretter, founder of Artemezzo Boutique Tours and an expert in the city's culinary evolution. "That mix makes the cuisine rich and layered," she says.

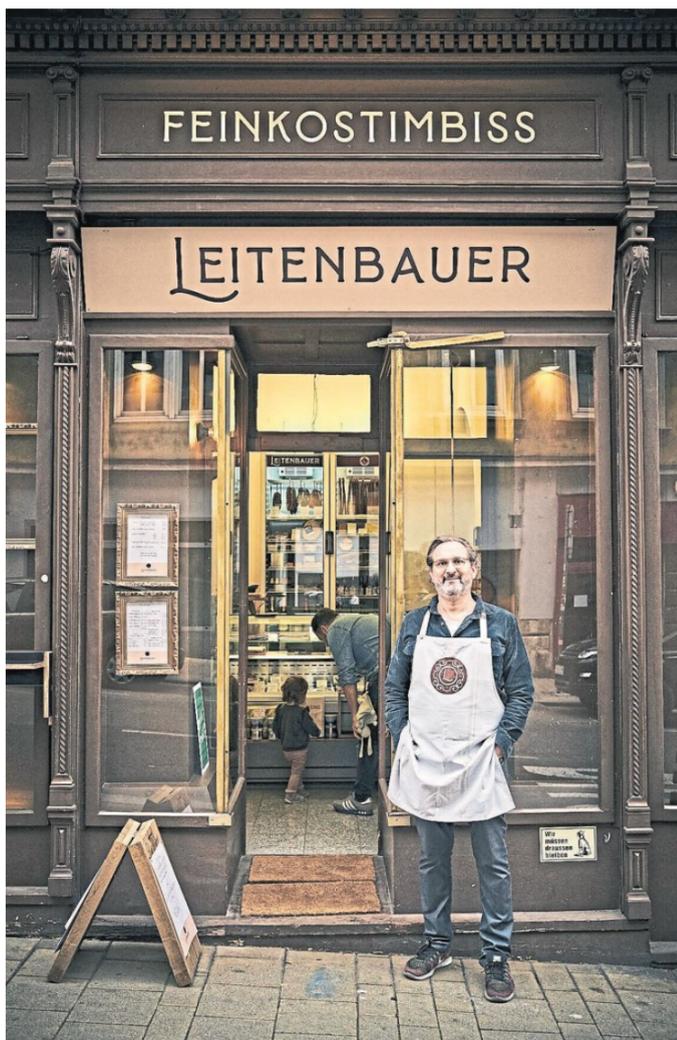
It also requires time to fully appreciate. There is etiquette involved: Waiters won't clear tables until everyone has finished eating, whether you're seated in a formal restaurant or a cosy coffee house like Café Schwarzenberg, the oldest still-operating café in Ringstrasse, the circular grand boulevard in the historic centre.

There is a prevailing sense that you will not need to leave soon. "Dining in Vienna is never rushed," Tretter says. "It's a culture that values time, rhythm and presence."

But where there is tradition, there are also, quite often, modern twists. My culinary journey through the city's streets reveals why Vienna's historic fare and refined dining cul-

"Sausage is deeply rooted in the Austrian soul," says Georg Leitenbauer of Leitenbauer Delikatessen.

HANS SCHUBERT/
LEITENBAUER
DELIKATESSEN



ture endure, as well as the trendy embellishments that keep them fresh for visitors and locals alike.

A good place to experience Vienna's lively juxtaposition of past-meets-present is in the 7th district, home to the Museum Quarter. Vienna has 23 districts in total, and the 7th, or Neubau district, is where you can wander through a labyrinth of covered alleyways and cobblestoned side streets and happen upon a quiet courtyard garden, vintage boutique, modern café or avant-garde art gallery.

Although Neubau means "new construction," the area dates back to medieval times.

"Neubau is special because it mixes that classic Viennese feeling with a young, creative energy," says Sebastian Knöbl, who co-founded Rebel Tours with his sister, Gabriela.

On a bakery/delikatessen/wine tavern tour, Knöbl shares snippets

from Neubau's past, from its 18th-century red-light district hijinks to the newer Baroque-style buildings masquerading as old (if the windows are recessed, they're not truly historic).

The nice thing about Neubau is that you can still order a serving of Schinkenfleckerl — a rich, velvety and deeply satisfying dish made with pasta, ham, eggs and cheese — in a traditional beisl.

These relaxed restaurants are renowned for their simple furnishings and homestyle fare, typically served in (very) large portions. But, just a few doors down, you might also encounter a hip vegan lunch spot or natural wine bar.

"You feel the city's classic roots everywhere, but the execution has become lighter, more seasonal and is often influenced by international flavours," Knöbl says. Modern Heuriger wine taverns, like Tian Bistro and Bruder, serve organic wines and creative small plates alongside the usual Brettljause (Viennese charcuterie), while many restaurants reinterpret dishes like Tafelspitz and goulash with new techniques and cleaner flavours, he says. "Thanks to the city's growing diversity, you see a beautiful mix of cultures in bakeries, street food and fusion kitchens that still feel very local."

Sampling in local food shops is one of the best ways to experience the many diverse flavours. You'll find what are arguably the best sweet and savoury croissants in Vienna at Ährnst, while even vegetarians have been known to "cheat" at Leitenbauer Delikatessen, according to owner Georg Leitenbauer. "Sausage is deeply rooted in the Austrian soul," Leitenbauer says. "Over the years, I've discovered that many people have a story or childhood memory connected to sausages."

Leitenbauer's is a casually elegant snack bar and shop, where you can pick up cheeses from Norway, organic Viennese honey, mustards, pickles, oils and Spanish olives. An ornate button on one bottle-filled cabinet reads "Press for Champagne."

Shopping done, reward yourself with a generous splash of Wiener Gemischter Satz, a complex Viennese field-blend, in which several white grape varieties have been grown and vinified together. You can also order a famous Viennese/Frankfurt sausage, made according to a recipe dating back to 1806 and served with mustard and freshly grated horseradish, reportedly a favourite breakfast of Emperor Franz Joseph I.

So revered is the city's sausage culture that its Würstelstands earned a heritage designation in 2024. The first stands were actually mobile push carts, designed to give injured soldiers a way to make a living after the First World War.

Today, stands like Bitzinger, one of the city's most famous, maintain their traditional combination of simple food, quick service and, as Knöbl puts it, "friendly chaos."

"Würstelstands are a place where everyone meets — students, workers, musicians after a concert, taxi drivers, night owls," he says. "They're like the city's informal living room."

Everyone you speak to in Vienna has a favourite sausage stand (Knöbl's is Wiener Würstelstand). Locals are also very particular about where to find the best slice of Apfelstrudel.

Knöbl's recommendation can be found at Café Hawelka: "It's old and looks a little rundown but has a special Viennese coffee house energy."

SEE NEXT PAGE



KRUSTE & KRUME

At Kruste & Krume, aspiring strudel-makers can learn how to hand-stretch dough for Apfelstrudel, pictured at top.

Everyone in city has a fave sausage stand

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For something fruity, Tretter favours Gerstner's apricot strudel but also loves Demel's milk cream strudel for its soft, custardy texture. Of course, when in doubt, you can always try making your own pastry at Kruste & Krume, a grocery store and baking school.

Julia Pimingstorfer, a former chef and baker turned strudel instructor, grew up preparing strudel in her grandmother's kitchen in rural Upper Austria. She makes it look effortless (it isn't), but there is a meditative quality to kneading and hand-stretching the dough to get it paper thin (without inadvertently jabbing a hole in it).

Strudel is important in Vienna as a signature dessert of the Habsburg Empire and a hallmark of traditional Viennese cuisine, Pimingstorfer says.

"It's central to our coffee house culture, where Apfelstrudel is a

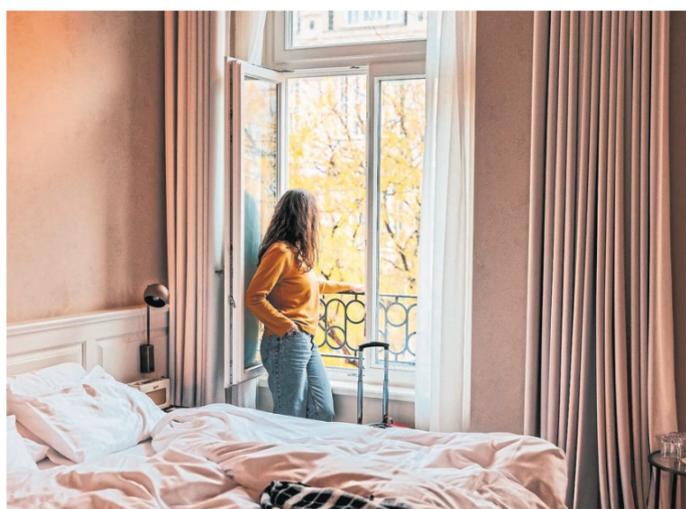
IF YOU GO

How to get there Air Canada and other airlines fly from Toronto to Vienna (just over eight hours non-stop)

Where to stay Hotel Motto is a charming boutique hotel that playfully showcases Viennese art, cuisine and culture. The rooftop terrace offers a scenic overview of city life.

Where to dine Head to Gastwirtschaft Steman for the traditional dishes and outstanding service, or to the newly Michelin-starred Z'SOM for local ingredients presented with Latin American flair in a casual fine-dining atmosphere.

What else to do Browse the intricately hand-forged silverware at Jarosinski & Vaugoin while hearing about the royal and celebrity clientele, past and present, from the charismatic sixth-generation owner Jean-Paul Vaugoin.



PAUL BAUER/WIENTOURISMUS

For past-meets-present accommodations, Hotel Motto has turned a centuries-old building into a design hotel with contemporary art.

classic accompaniment to coffee, and the hand-stretched dough represents pastry craftsmanship."

Her tips for perfecting the art? Good-quality apples from old-growth Austrian orchards. "Also, use more butter than you think is necessary."

It's immensely gratifying to pierce the gently flaking pastry of a fresh-from-the-oven Apfelstrudel, releasing the warm, spicy scent of apple, cinnamon and a hint of rum, knowing that people have experi-

Café Schwarzenberg is the oldest still-operating café in Ringstrasse.

JULIUS HIRTZBERGER/WIENTOURISMUS

enced that same moment in Viennese kitchens and coffee houses for centuries.

Such is the nature of this remarkable city that you don't need to visit one of its many museums or monuments to experience its history. Just order a sausage at a Würstelstand or a slice of Apfelstrudel to get a taste of its past, as well as its future. SYDNEY LONEY TRAVELLED AS A GUEST OF THE VIENNA TOURIST BOARD, WHICH DID NOT REVIEW OR APPROVE THIS ARTICLE.

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