



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

▶ EUROPE

## BACKGROUND

**Land and Climate.** A landlocked country in central Europe, Austria covers 32,375 square miles (83,850 square kilometers) and is slightly smaller than Maine. Spectacular mountains, clear lakes, beautiful scenery, and green valleys all comprise Austria's grandeur. The famous Alps cover much of the west and south, while flatlands dominate in the east and northeast. The Danube, the second longest river in Europe, crosses northern Austria. Austria is one of the most forested countries in Europe; around 40 percent of the landscape is wooded.

Austria generally enjoys a mild climate. Spring and summer are temperate. However, winters in some mountain areas can be very cold. In Vienna, the average temperature in winter is 32°F (0°C) and the average temperature in summer is 67°F (20°C).

**History.** Austria has had a significant impact on European history and on world culture. Present-day Austria was once part of both the Roman and Carolingian Empires. Otto I, who later became emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, began his rule in 955. He is often considered the real founder of Austria because of the borders he established. *Austria* is the Latin equivalent of the German word *Österreich* ("Realm of the East").

Two royal families controlled Austria through much of its history. In 1156, with Vienna as its capital, Austria became an autonomous territory under the Babenberg family. Then, in 1273, the Hapsburg Dynasty came to power. For six hundred years, the Hapsburgs gradually spread their empire over central Europe through marriages and other strategies. They helped push the Ottoman Turks out of Europe after the 18th century. Their power peaked in the early 19th century, after they helped defeat the French emperor Napoleon. Wars and nationalist disputes soon led the government to establish a dual

monarchy with Hungary in 1867 through the *Ausgleich* (Compromise).

By 1914, the Austro-Hungarian Empire covered present-day Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and parts of Poland, Italy, and Romania. However, growing nationalism among its various peoples led to the empire's decline. In 1914, when the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Hapsburg throne, was assassinated in Sarajevo, what might have been a local civil conflict quickly mushroomed into World War I, as most European nations became involved in the conflict. The Great War, as it was called, led to the empire's destruction. Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia were created from parts of the old empire; both countries have since divided.

The first Austrian republic (1918–38) struggled to survive and was swallowed up by Hitler's Germany before the start of World War II. After the end of the war in 1945, Austria was divided into four zones, each governed by one of the four Allied powers (Great Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union). With the advantage of its central government in Vienna still in operation, Austria reestablished its territorial sovereignty and proclaimed its permanent neutrality in 1955, only 10 years later. With strong ties to Western Europe, the republic has since been a model of political, economic, and social stability.

Because of Austria's political neutrality, Vienna has become a key UN city where nations meet to discuss problems or negotiate treaties. In 1989, the Hungarian government tore down the barbed-wire fence along the Austrian-Hungarian border. This action is recognized as a significant event that encouraged the 1990 political reforms in Eastern Europe.

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Austria joined the European Union (EU) in January 1995. However, in order to maintain Austria's traditional neutral stance the Austrian government in 1998 rejected membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—a group of nations that sometimes uses military force to enforce mutual security.

### THE PEOPLE

**Population.** Austria's population of more than 8.18 million is growing at 0.2 percent annually. Between 88 and 98 percent of the people are Germanic, while minorities include Croatians, Slovenes, and various other groups. Approximately 200,000 foreign workers—chiefly from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia—live and work in Austria. About 65 percent of the people live in urban areas. Vienna (or Wien), the capital, has a population of around 1.6 million. Graz (238,000), Linz (203,000), and Salzburg (144,000) are the next largest cities. Most people have excellent access to education, economic prosperity, health care, and other resources.

**Language.** The official language is German, but each region has its own dialect. Dialects are more pronounced in rural areas. A minority in southern Austria speaks Slovene. Hungarian and Croatian are also spoken by minorities and taught in some schools. English is a required language in high school and is spoken by many people.

**Religion.** About 78 percent of all Austrians are Roman Catholic, while 5 percent are Protestant. Although a small number of other Christian and non-Christian religions are also present, many people do not belong to any denomination. Younger residents generally are less devout than the older generation; many have withdrawn their membership from the Catholic Church. The Jewish community has fewer than 10,000 members, down from 200,000 before World War II.

Although not as religious as other Europeans, Austrians still believe in traditional ways of living. Catholic traditions, shrines, and churches are highly treasured. Many people use churches for baptisms, weddings, and funerals. In addition to being used for religious services, churches are used for social functions, particularly in rural areas.

**General Attitudes.** Austrians are known for their relaxed and happy approach to life (called *Gemütlichkeit*). A bittersweet attitude toward reality is considered a unique national trait. Although a relaxed people, Austrians are hardworking. They value cleanliness, neatness, and order. Litter is rare. People love to learn and engage in conversation. Austrians have a deep regard for the environment and take pride in their country's beautiful landscape. Austrian society values its professionals, academics, and artists. Cultural arts are important to all segments of society, as Austrians are extremely proud of their culture's contributions to Western civilization.

Austrians are not Germans and should not be referred to as such; some Austrians may consider it an insult. While the two peoples speak the same basic language (with important differences in dialect), Austrians and Germans have a different historical and political heritage; they also differ in some customs, values, and attitudes.

**Personal Appearance.** Austrians generally wear European fashions. They take pride in dressing well, even if they are only going grocery shopping. While older people might mix traditional Austrian clothing with conservative European fashions, young people prefer modern European attire.

Folk costumes (*Trachten*) are worn often for formal occasions and celebrations. Each area has its own particular cos-

tume. Men's traditional clothing includes *Lederhosen* (leather knee-pants) and *Trachtenjacken* (woolen jackets) or a *Trachtenanzug* (suit). Women may wear a *Dirndl* (dress with an apron) or a *Trachtenkostüm* (suit). Traditional clothing articles often have intricate designs and usually are prized items in a person's wardrobe.

### CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

**Greetings.** In Austria, shaking hands when greeting and parting is an important social courtesy. Even children shake hands with adults when greeting. Common greetings include *Grüß Gott* (May God greet you), *Guten Morgen* (Good morning), *Guten Tag* (Good day), and *Guten Abend* (Good evening). Popular casual greetings include *Servus* (used as "Hi") and *Grüß Dich!* (Greetings to you!). Austrians do not ask "How are you?" (*Wie geht es Ihnen?*) unless they wish to hear a detailed account.

Professional titles are important among the adult population and are used whenever they are known. Otherwise, people combine titles such as *Herr* (Mr.) and *Frau* (Mrs. or Ms.) with family names when addressing acquaintances and strangers. Close friends and the youth use first names.

**Gestures.** Hand gestures are used conservatively in polite company, as verbal communication is preferred. It is impolite for adults to chew gum in public. Motioning with the entire hand is more polite than using the index finger. Twisting the index finger at the side of one's forehead is an insult. People are generally polite and courteous in public. Men often open doors for women and usually help them with their coats.

**Visiting.** Austrians enjoy entertaining in their homes and having guests. Dropping by unannounced is impolite. It is better to make arrangements in advance or telephone ahead of an impromptu visit. Invited guests should arrive on time. Punctuality is important to Austrians. Customarily, guests remove their shoes when entering a home, although this practice is not always followed. Guests remain standing until they are instructed where to sit. Hosts customarily offer the best seats to their guests. If the host must leave the room for a moment, the guest is offered something to read or occupy the time until the host returns. Men stand when a woman enters the room or when talking to a woman who is standing.

While guests usually are offered a drink (tea, coffee, mineral water, juice, or soda), further refreshments depend on the hosts. Invited guests bring flowers, candy, or a small gift (such as a handcrafted item or something appropriate for the occasion). Even married children often bring such a gift when visiting their parents. Gifts are given to the wife, or perhaps the children, but not the husband—even if the gift is for the family. People only give flowers in odd numbers (even numbers are bad luck). Flowers are unwrapped before the hostess appears. Giving purchased flowers is more polite than flowers from one's own garden.

To show courtesy to the hosts, guests do not ask to use the telephone unless the need to call is urgent. In addition, guests do not offer to help make any preparations if they are not well acquainted with the hosts or if the hosts do not seem to have everything under control.

Austrians also enjoy socializing in restaurants and other public places. For example, following Sunday church services, many men, particularly those in small villages, customarily go to a *Gasthaus* (pub) to do business, exchange ideas, and drink. Such socializing is less about drinking and much more about networking with friends.

**Eating.** Although the tradition of having the main meal at midday is still strong, eating habits are changing. Working people and students now eat the main meal in the evening. Other traditions remain, such as keeping hands above the table during the meal, not gesturing with utensils, and not placing elbows on the table while eating. It is impolite to begin eating until all persons at the table are served. Austrians eat in the continental style, with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. When guests are present, the hostess will nearly always offer second helpings but will gracefully accept a polite *Danke, nein* (Thank you, no).

Restaurants serve mineral water rather than tap water. (People generally drink tap water only in the home.) The bill, which usually includes a service charge, is paid at the table to the server.

## LIFESTYLE

**Family.** Austrian families are usually small, generally consisting of parents and one or two children. However, rural families are often a bit larger. Most Austrians expect to marry and have a family. Both parents generally work outside the home. Women comprise nearly 40 percent of the labor force. Duties related to the household and children are not necessarily shared, except among younger couples. Some homes, especially in rural areas, maintain a strict patriarchal family structure. The government has many programs to support families: monetary allowances for each child, maternity leave (eight weeks before and after childbirth), and nursing allowances for care of the elderly. Children who are not in school and whose parents both work are cared for privately or in day-care centers. Most urban Austrians live in apartments; sometimes extended families will share one large house that contains several apartments. About one-fifth of all housing is publicly owned. Rural families generally live in single-family homes.

**Dating and Marriage.** Austrian youth begin associating in groups, but when they start getting together as couples, they usually date only one person at a time and the relationship generally is considered serious. Actual dates are rather casual affairs, as people often just agree to meet somewhere. Males and females each pay their own expenses; one or the other offers to pay for both only on special occasions. Eating out, going to movies, and dancing are favorite activities.

Couples often decide to live together before or instead of marrying. The typical age for marriage is between 25 and 28 years old. A civil ceremony must be performed for the marriage to be legal; church weddings are optional.

**Diet.** Austrians love good food and have a rich and varied cuisine. Specialties drawn from cultures of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire include such favorites as *Wiener Schnitzel* (breaded veal cutlets) from Italy, *Kolatsche* (a pastry made out of yeast dough) from Bohemia, and goulash from Hungary. Traditional Austrian meals begin with a beef-broth soup. Popular soups include *Griessnockerlsuppe* (using small flour dumplings), *Frittatensuppe* (using shredded crêpes), and *Leberknödelsuppe* (using liver dumplings). Goulash is served at most restaurants. *Backhendl* (fried, breaded chicken) and *Knödel* (moist dumplings) are also common. Vienna is famous for its cakes and pastries, including apple strudel, *Sachertorte* (a rich chocolate cake with apricot jam and chocolate icing), and *Krapfen* (a kind of doughnut). Coffee is also a favored tradition; Austrians love to go to coffeehouses and drink coffee.

A typical day begins early with a light breakfast of hot chocolate or coffee, rolls, bread, and jam or marmalade. Later in

the morning, some eat a second, heartier breakfast, including goulash or hot sausages. The main meal may include soup, meat (often beef or pork) with potatoes or pasta, vegetables, a salad, and often dessert (such as a homemade pastry). *Jause* (afternoon coffee) may include sandwiches, pastries, and coffee. If the main meal is eaten at midday, families have *Abendessen* (evening meal) in the evening. *Abendessen* generally includes cold cuts, eggs, cheese, rye and other breads, and a salad. After a visit to the theater or other evening activity, a light meal might end the day.

**Recreation.** Austrians love the outdoors. Taking walks (*Spaziergang*) is a national pastime. Hiking, mountain climbing, skiing, cycling, tennis, boating, and swimming are all popular activities. Soccer is a favorite sport, but Austrians are better known for their excellence in winter sports. They are consistent medalists in Winter Olympic events. Gardening is popular, even when space is limited. Many Austrians cultivate window boxes full of flowers.

While most Austrians spend their five-week paid vacations within the country, other favorite destinations include Italy, Greece, Croatia, Spain, and Turkey. People like to spend much of their vacations relaxing at the beach.

**The Arts.** Cultural arts play a key role in Austrian society. Both modern and traditional forms of art and music are popular. Even large numbers of the youth attend opera performances and orchestral concerts. The names Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Strauss, Beethoven, and Brahms (who all composed in Vienna), as well as Wolf, Mahler, and others, attest to Austria's musical heritage. The Vienna State Opera, the Vienna Philharmonic, the Vienna Boys Choir, and the Salzburg Festival are four of many music institutions that enjoy worldwide fame. Austria is also noted for its writers (Franz Kafka, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Karl Kraus). Painters and architects have flourished in the 20th century, especially since World War II. Most Austrians approve of the government's strong role in the development and performance of cultural arts.

Folk music is also important in Austria. Common folk instruments include the *hackbrett* (an instrument played by tapping its strings with small hammers) and zither (a stringed instrument). Guitars and harps are also prevalent in folk music. In addition, nearly every village has a band (usually brass), and larger towns have professional orchestras. There are many local theaters.

**Holidays.** Austrians celebrate New Year's Day, *Heilige Drei Könige* ("Three Kings," 6 January), Easter (Saturday–Monday), Labor Day (1 May), National Holiday (26 Oct.), All Saints' Day (1 Nov.), St. Nikolaus Day (5 Dec.), and Christmas (25–26 Dec.), as well as various religious holidays throughout the year. Numerous balls, including the famous Opera Ball in Vienna, are held on the last Thursday of *Fasching* (Carnival), which occurs in January and February. On All Saints' Day, Austrians remember their dead by visiting graves and sometimes attending public services for victims of the two world wars. Christmas Eve (*Heiliger Abend*, or "Holy Evening") is the most important part of Christmas. Families gather to share a meal and sing Christmas carols. Children receive their presents, which customarily are believed to be put under the tree by the Christ child when they are out of the room. Christmas Day is reserved for visiting family.

**Commerce.** Large stores are open from 8 a.m. until 7 p.m. on weekdays and from 7:30 a.m. until 5 p.m. on Saturdays. Large chain stores remain open on Saturday until evening. Small open-air markets often open at 6 a.m. Some small private

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shops still close for the traditional *Mittagspause* (midday break), which was once universal as the two- or three-hour break for the main meal. Only restaurants, gas stations, and tourist shops remain open on Sunday. Most families vacation in August. Small family-owned shops might be closed the entire month while the family is away.

## SOCIETY

**Government.** Austria's executive branch consists of a federal president (currently Thomas Klestil), a federal chancellor, and the chancellor's cabinet. The president appoints the chancellor, approves all members of government, and represents Austria internationally. The chancellor (currently Wolfgang Schüssel) conducts all other executive business. The *Bundesversammlung* (Parliament) has a 64-member upper house, called the Federal Council (*Bundesrat*), and a 183-seat lower house, called the National Council (*Nationalrat*). The *Nationalrat* is where most legislative work takes place. Austria's various political parties have a tradition of cooperation, which has promoted political stability. The Republic of Austria has nine provinces, each with its own government. The voting age is 18. Three types of high courts have jurisdiction over either justice, administration, or the constitution.

**Economy.** Austria is an industrialized nation with a mixed free-market/social-welfare economy. Social-welfare programs are fairly extensive and provide support for the unemployed. Around 68 percent of Austrians are employed in service industries. Agriculture plays only a minor role in the economy, although the country is mostly self-sufficient in food. Important resources include iron ore, timber, tungsten, coal, and other minerals. Austria exports machinery, lumber, textiles, iron, steel, chemicals, and paper products. Its major trading partners include other EU countries, central and eastern Europe, Japan, and the United States. Tourism is also an important industry.

The economy is generally stable and growing, a result of a unique system of social partnerships in which unions and owners or employers cooperate to exercise restraint on prices and wages. The groups also try to reach a consensus on managing the national economy. Unemployment is relatively low, and the inflation rate is one of Europe's lowest. Key economic goals include reducing government spending and encouraging privatization. Until January 2002 when Austria adopted the euro (EUR), the national currency was the *schilling*.

**Transportation and Communications.** Most families own at least one car; private cars are important for daily transportation. The public system of trains, buses, streetcars, and subways is also used heavily, especially in large urban areas. Buses reach even the most remote areas, and a good system of trains crisscrosses the country. On the expressway, there is a speed limit of 130 km/h (81 mph); seat-belt laws are strictly enforced. Children younger than 12 must ride in the backseat. The Danube River is an important transportation route for goods and passengers. Austria's communications system is efficient and extensive. Most homes have televisions and phones. Many Austrians have cell phones. Daily newspapers are available throughout the country.

**Education.** Each state is responsible for public schooling,

## DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	16 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women	14 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$26,730
Adult literacy rate	99 percent (male); 99 (female)
Infant mortality rate	4 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	75 (male); 81 (female)

which is free and compulsory for children ages six to fifteen. Most Austrians complete this amount of schooling and also gain other training or higher education. Compared with students in the United States, young Austrians spend much more time on their schoolwork, social activities and sports are considered less important. Education traditionally has been important in Austria, which is home to many Nobel Prize winners and noted scholars. Austrian universities offer a high-quality education, and they attract many students from abroad.

**Health.** Health care is provided for everyone. Health insurance is required by law and provided by employers for even part-time workers. Private insurance may be used as a supplement or alternative. Austrians enjoy good health and have access to adequate care.

## AT A GLANCE

### Events and Trends.

- Government plans to reform the state pension prompted in May 2003 the first nationwide strike in decades. Workers from the air transport, postal services, banking, and hotel industries were expected to stop work in protest of plans to save Austria 2.2 billion euros over four years by raising the retirement age and reducing benefits.
- In September 2002 Austria's government coalition between the ruling conservative People's Party (ÖVP) and the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) collapsed following a power struggle by the (FPÖ). Although the coalition was re-formed in February 2003, support for the (FPÖ) fell during elections in September 2003.
- In late 2002, a new law made German language classes compulsory for all post-1998 immigrants. The government hopes the classes will increase immigrants' integration into Austrian society. Many claim the law is unfair for those who are struggling just to overcome poverty and illiteracy.
- The FPÖ sponsored a petition in 2002, which was signed by 900,000 Austrians (15 percent of voters), demanding that Austria veto Czech accession to the EU unless the Czech Republic would shut down a nuclear power plant close to the border between the countries. However, the Czech Republic continued to use the plant and joined the EU anyway.

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