



Vienna at Christmas

Art and architecture in the Habsburg capital

20–27 December 2025 (ML 865)

8 days • £5,220

Lecturer: Tom Abbott

One of the world's most beautiful cities – grand boulevards and picturesque alleys, great architecture and outstanding art.

The Kunsthistorisches Museum, one of Europe's greatest art galleries, is among the many outstanding museum collections.

Perfectly located heritage hotel.

Includes tickets to two performances, including one at the Staatsoper.

Vienna was once the seat of the Habsburgs, the centre of the Holy Roman Empire and capital of a multinational agglomeration of territories which encompassed much of Central and Eastern Europe. Today it is an imperial city without an empire. It is a relic, but a glorious relic, and one of the world's foremost centres of art, architecture and music.

The Kunsthistorisches Museum ranks with the best of Europe's art collections, and the Court Treasury is without peer for its historic regalia and *objets d'art*. The great Gothic cathedral bears witness to the city's status in the Middle Ages as the most important city in Danubian Europe; the Church of St Charles and numerous Baroque palaces demonstrate that by the beginning of the 18th century Austria had become one of the great powers.

During the 19th century, when the empire reached a peak of prosperity and prestige, a splendid range of historicist buildings was added, notably on the Ringstrasse, the grand boulevard which encircles the medieval core. Around the turn of the century there was an explosion of artistic and intellectual activity which placed Vienna at the forefront of Art Nouveau – here known as Secessionism – and the development of modernism.

Not all is on a grand scale. Tucked behind the imposing palaces and public buildings are narrow passages and ancient courtyards which survive from the medieval and Renaissance city. In Vienna the magnificent mixes with the unpretentiously charming, imperial display with the *Gemütlichkeit* of the coffee houses.

As with the planning of all our Christmas tours, careful research into seasonal closures and several special arrangements enable us to provide a full programme of visits.



Vienna, Karlskirche, early-20th-century etching.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 1.00pm from London Heathrow to Vienna (British Airways). Settle in to the hotel before an apéritif and dinner in the hotel's own excellent restaurant.

Day 2. Walk through the Roman and medieval core of the city passing the 14th-century Church of the Teutonic Order with its richly decorated Flemish altarpiece. Visit the Stephansdom, the magnificent Gothic cathedral providing a dramatic backdrop to the seasonal Christmas market. The walk continues in the afternoon through parts of the picturesque old centre and around the Hofburg, the Habsburg winter palace, a vast agglomeration from six centuries of building activity. Within lies the unparalleled collection of precious regalia in the Treasury. Adjacent is the court church of St Augustine.

Day 3. Drive to the outskirts to see villas by Jugendstil architect Otto Wagner and the intricately decorated apartment blocks in the Linke Wienzeile. Visit Klimt Villa, a neo-baroque residence where the artist worked

on some of his most important works. The Liechtenstein collection in the princely family's great Baroque palace (*Gartenpalais*) is perhaps the finest in private hands in Europe.

Day 4. Located beyond the Ringstrasse in the 18th-century suburbs, the votive Church of St Charles (Karlskirche) is the Baroque masterpiece of Fischer von Erlach. The palace of Schloss Belvedere, built for Prince Eugene of Savoy on sloping ground overlooking Vienna, constitutes one of the finest residential complexes of the 18th century. It now houses the Museum of Austrian Art with art of all eras, including paintings by Klimt and Schiele.

Day 5. Christmas Eve. The Academy of Fine Arts houses an outstanding collection of works spanning medieval times to the 21st century. Continue to the Secession building, built in 1898 as an exhibition hall for avant-garde artists and containing Klimt's *Beethoven Frieze*. Pass the Hofpavilion, designed by Otto Wagner as the emperor's personal railway station. At the resplendent imperial palace of Schönbrunn, the main summer residence of the Habsburg rulers, the lavish interiors include the private

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continued

apartments of Franz Josef and Elisabeth. Some free time before Christmas dinner. There are several musically embellished midnight masses.

Day 6. Christmas Day. The morning is free, though Mass at St Augustine's is recommended and some museums are open. Start the afternoon in the Great Hall of the National Library, the last great work of architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, begun in 1723 and completed by his son Joseph Emanuel in 1735. Evening visit to the Kunsthistorisches Museum. It is particularly rich in Italian, Flemish and Dutch pictures, but its holdings extend to superb decorative arts and ancient sculpture. Dinner in the museum's Cupola Hall.

Day 7. Private visit to the magnificent Liechtenstein Palace (*Stadtpalais*), built c. 1700 by the richest family in the Habsburg Empire. The princely art collection housed here is one of the world's greatest still in private hands. Afternoon visit to the Leopold Museum, home to a collection of turn-of-the-century art and artefacts including the world's largest assembly of works by Egon Schiele. *We hope to offer a musical performance this evening. Programmes are confirmed in the summer.*

Day 8. The Jesuit church was spectacularly refurbished c. 1700 by the master of illusionist painting, Andrea Pozzo. Pass the Austrian Postal Savings Bank designed by Otto Wagner and step inside the The Museum of Applied Arts to view its excellent international and Viennese collections. Time for a light lunch before driving to the airport for the flight to Heathrow, arriving c. 6.40pm.

Lecturer

Tom Abbott. Specialist in architectural history from the Baroque to the 20th century with a wide knowledge of the performing arts. He graduated in Psychology and Art History from Carleton College, Minnesota and studied at the Louvre School of Art History in Paris. Since 1987 he has lived in Berlin and has organised and led many academic tours in Germany. Tom has a particular interest in the German and American architectural and artistic modern including the Bauhaus and Expressionism.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £5,220 or £4,880 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £6,180 or £5,840 without flights.

Included: air travel (economy class) on scheduled British Airways flights (Airbus A320); travel by private coach; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 2 lunches and 5 dinners with wine; all admission charges; all tips for waiters, drivers; all taxes; services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Music: tickets for 2 performances are included in the price of the tour. *Programmes are confirmed in the summer.*

Accommodation. Grand Hotel Wien (grandhotelwien.com): Luxury hotel in a superb location on the Ringstrasse just a few steps to the opera house, traditionally furnished and decorated. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? There is quite a lot of walking and standing around in museums and churches.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.