

AUSTRIA

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Austria lies in the heart of the Alps. To the North is Germany, to the west is Switzerland and Lichtenstein, and to the south is Italy. About half of the country lies with in the Alps. The eastern part of the country can be described as lowlands, with its neighbors to the east being Czeck Republic, Slovak Republic, Hungary and Slovenia. This area including Vienna is the perfect place for agriculture, as well as huge cattle operations, like those in Styria. The climate in the mountains is vastly different than that of the lowlands. In the mountains it is more temperate, with 4 seasons, and a lot of snow in the winter, and cool summers. In the eastern part of the country it is rainier with warmer winters and hotter summers.

PEOPLE AND CULTURE:

The people of Austria are very Austrian as a rule. They have not been Americanized as much as other Western European countries have, as they are not one of the front runners in the global economy. That being said, they stick to the values and traditions that they have grown up with. Entire families will take a Sunday and go hiking as a family in the mountains, after going to the neighborhood church in the morning. People in the bigger cities, especially Vienna will sit at a café for hours on end and just enjoy the sun and the company. There is a definite slower pace to the Austrian way of life. They take time to enjoy, and are not as hung up on working and the bottom line as their American counterparts are. That being said there is a certain way to do everything, and a strict interpretation of the rules is a way of life in Austria.

A student from Tyrol once said “I am Tyrolean before I am Austrian.” This is the sentiment most often felt with the Austrian people with regional cultures sometimes more defined than those at a national level, even coming down to dialects. Sometimes a person can not be understood fifty miles away from their hometown as the languages are so different. That being said, the Austrian students do not go too far away from home. Often they go to university in the same state they have lived their entire lives, and will still go home close to every weekend.

GETTING AROUND:

The easiest way to get around Europe is my train. People who live in Austria also qualify for a resident card for the trains which offers discounts on all train travel that originates or concludes within the Austrian border. Like many cities in Europe, the larger cities in Austria have a very reliable and practical bus system that sometimes reaches 20 kilometers outside of the city center. At peak times buses can run as often as every three minutes. The best way to see the landscape is by foot or bike or ski, as it is a priority in the country to be conscience of the harm that transportation can have on the environment. It is not hard to find a footpath to get to a place that may otherwise be inaccessible. If one does decide to rent a car, the landscape and the absence of traffic will make your quest of the beaten path an enjoyable one.

LANGUAGE:

German is the official language of Germany, and nearly everyone speaks it. There is a minority of Turkish people who may not be as proficient as others, but they know the general common phrases. In the last 15 years or so there has been a push for Austrians to become more multilingual, so nearly all younger Austrians will be able to speak English to a degree. The older generations will still not know much English, and often it is the older people who have the thickest dialects, however, a mastering of common German phrases will put you in the correct direction and show them that you are interested in making an effort to learn their languages and customs.

SALZBURG:

Your adventure begins in Salzburg, literally translated, “salt mountain.” It was here that Maria was a postulant at Nonnberg Abbey before becoming governess for the Trapp family, and thus starting the American association of Austria with singing on the mountaintops. This is a decently sized city where they know that 1492 was the year that the Stegal brewery was started. Red Bull was also invented here, and its headquarters are still in the state. The Salzach River divides the town in two. On one side is Nonnberg Abbey, the fortress, and the Augustinian brewery, and on the other side is the Mirabel castle and the Gaistberg, the mountain where the Hefterhoff Hotel is located where Notre Dame holds its classes for four weeks in September.

INNSBRUCK:

The capital of Tyrol is where the CES Program students will spend a majority of their time living in Austria. It is also one of the main university cities in the country, with several different schools including medicine, sports, business, philosophy, and political science. Innsbruck is also a cultural center, housing the Landestheatre, and attracting home of the most famous artists both in Austria and the world. Its location in the heart of the Alps provides an ideal place for winter sports. There are a number of ski resorts within minutes of the city center, which have had the privilege of hosting the Olympics twice, in 1964 and 1976. The ice rink used in the Olympics is still used by the public as a skate rink, as well as the ice hockey rink. Among other events, the city celebrates Chriskindlemarkt, Sankt Nicolas (Dec. 6,) Bergsylvester (Dec 31,) and a variety of things in the summer months as well.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austria>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyrol>

http://www.tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g190442-Tirol_Austrian_Alps-Vacations.html

http://www.alltravelaustria.com/Austria/Destination_Guides/Regions/Tirol.htm

<http://www.tyrol.com/>

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