

# AUSTRIA

An everyday guide to expatriate life and work.



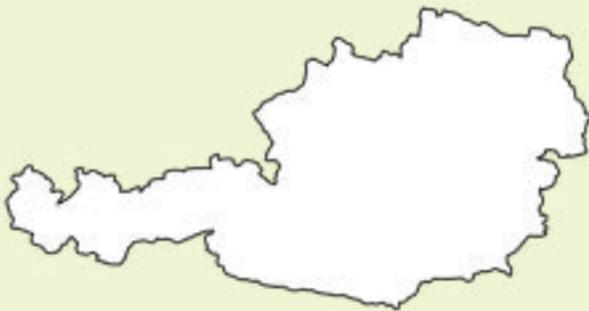
Together, all the way.®



# AUSTRIA COUNTRY GUIDE

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### Quick facts<sup>1</sup>

**Capital:** Vienna

**Population:** 8.5 million

**Major languages:** Austrian German

**Major religions:** Catholicism

**Currency:** Euro

**Time zone:** GMT +1 (GMT+2 from the last week of March to the last week of October)

**Emergency number:** 112

**Electricity:** 230 volts, 50Hz. The two-pin European plug is most common as well as Schuko plugs with side grounding contacts.

**Drive on the:** Right

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.expatarrivals.com/austria/essential-info-for-austria>

## Overview

Situated in the heart of Europe, Austria was the center of the great Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and is well known for its grand architecture, famous composers and scenic ski resorts.



With its historic cities and spectacular scenery, Austria is often cited as one of the best places to live as an expat. Vienna and Salzburg are magnets for culture vultures and the mountains are a haven for outdoor enthusiasts.

Conservative in both social and business environments, Austrian society is fairly insular so expats may find it takes time to integrate with local Austrians, and many choose to spend time with other international expats.

This guide will give some points of reference when it comes to starting life in Austria, including useful information on accommodation, education and healthcare, as well as visas and social and business etiquette.



## Getting started

### Climate and weather



Austria's temperate climate is fairly consistent. However, there are a few notable differences throughout the country, especially across the colder areas around the Alps and the hotter, Mediterranean-style conditions of the southeast.<sup>1</sup>

The west receives more rainfall and less extreme weather, allowing a huge variety of flora and fauna to flourish. Winters are cold, especially at higher altitudes. Alternatively, summers are warm so expats should come prepared for both extremes.<sup>2</sup>

Dominated by mountains, hills and forests, Austria possesses gorgeous landscapes, but it's most famous for its alpine meadows and ski slopes, covered by a thick blanket of snow as one travels further up the rocky summits.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.climatestotravel.com/climate/austria>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.expatarrivals.com/austria/weather-in-austria>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.austria.org/climate/>



## Visas

Individuals from countries on a visa-waiver list, which includes EU states, will not need a visa to enter Austria for stays of up to 90 days. Nationals of countries not on this list and who wish to visit Austria as a tourist require a Schengen travel visa.<sup>1</sup>

For stays longer than three months, expats need residence and work permits. In order to obtain the former, applicants need to show that they have sufficient financial means and proof of employment in Austria. For work permits, employers will need to draft a letter explaining that the individual has skills which can't be fulfilled by an Austrian citizen.

For those unable to obtain these permits, a jobseeker visa will allow highly skilled potential workers to look for work for six months while living in Austria. Once finding employment, expats must still apply for a work permit.

Permanent residence may be granted to those who've stayed in the country for ten consecutive years, with preferential treatment given to those who display significant scientific, economic or cultural contributions to Austria.<sup>2</sup>

## Accommodations

Most accommodation options in the big cities of Austria consist of apartments and studios. They are normally fairly large, with high ceilings and beautiful parquet flooring. Expats moving to the suburbs will find more houses and cottages.<sup>3</sup>

Renting property in Austria is normally done through real estate agents. One can either rent as the primary leaseholder, or enter into a sublet agreement with a primary leaseholder. These agreements can either be limited in time, with a minimum of three years tenancy, or unlimited in time.<sup>4</sup> Three months' rent is usually charged as a deposit, while most apartments come unfurnished.<sup>5</sup>

If moving to one of Austria's major cities or university towns, it's advisable not to begin the property search in September as students flood in from all over Europe, limiting available options in the process.

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1 <http://www.austria.org/visa-application/>

2 <http://www.migration.gv.at/en/types-of-immigration/permanent-immigration-red-white-red-card.html>

3 <http://www.migration.gv.at/en/living-and-working-in-austria/housing/housing/>

4 [http://www.tenlaw.uni-bremen.de/Brochures/AustriaBrochure\\_09052014.pdf](http://www.tenlaw.uni-bremen.de/Brochures/AustriaBrochure_09052014.pdf)

5 <https://www.thelocal.at/20140511/top-6-things-to-know-about-renting-in-austria>

## Schools

The Austrian education system has a good reputation and is accessible to foreign children. Nine years of education is compulsory in Austria, with all students enjoying access to free public schooling. Most of these state schools use German as the language of instruction so the language barrier may be a major deterrent for expat parents when it comes to public schools.<sup>6</sup> There is a smattering of bilingual institutions, teaching both in German and English. Their curricula cater towards students with a knowledge of both languages.<sup>7</sup>

After the first four years of primary school, children will then move on to either a general or academic middle school. Non-mandatory secondary education follows, preparing them for university, while vocational schools offer more practical programs to prepare students for chosen professions.<sup>8</sup>

Expats tend to send their children to international schools, which are mostly based in Vienna. Kids enroll from all over the world to follow the school systems of their home countries, such as the British, American, French, Spanish, German or Japanese curricula. Other schools offer the International Baccalaureate qualification. However, these international schools can be incredibly expensive.

## Language

Austrian German is the dominant and official language in Austria, spoken by 98% of the population. It's used by the media and for official government announcements, as well as in schools and universities.<sup>9</sup>

Alemannic and Austro-Bavarian are considered the major unofficial languages, with both used in more informal settings. The former is found mainly in the westernmost state of Vorarlberg, while Austro-Bavarian can be found throughout the country. It's worth noting that many Austrians do speak English.<sup>10</sup>

## Social etiquette & Cultural faux pas

Getting used to a different country's social norms and dynamics can be tough. Here are a few pointers to help

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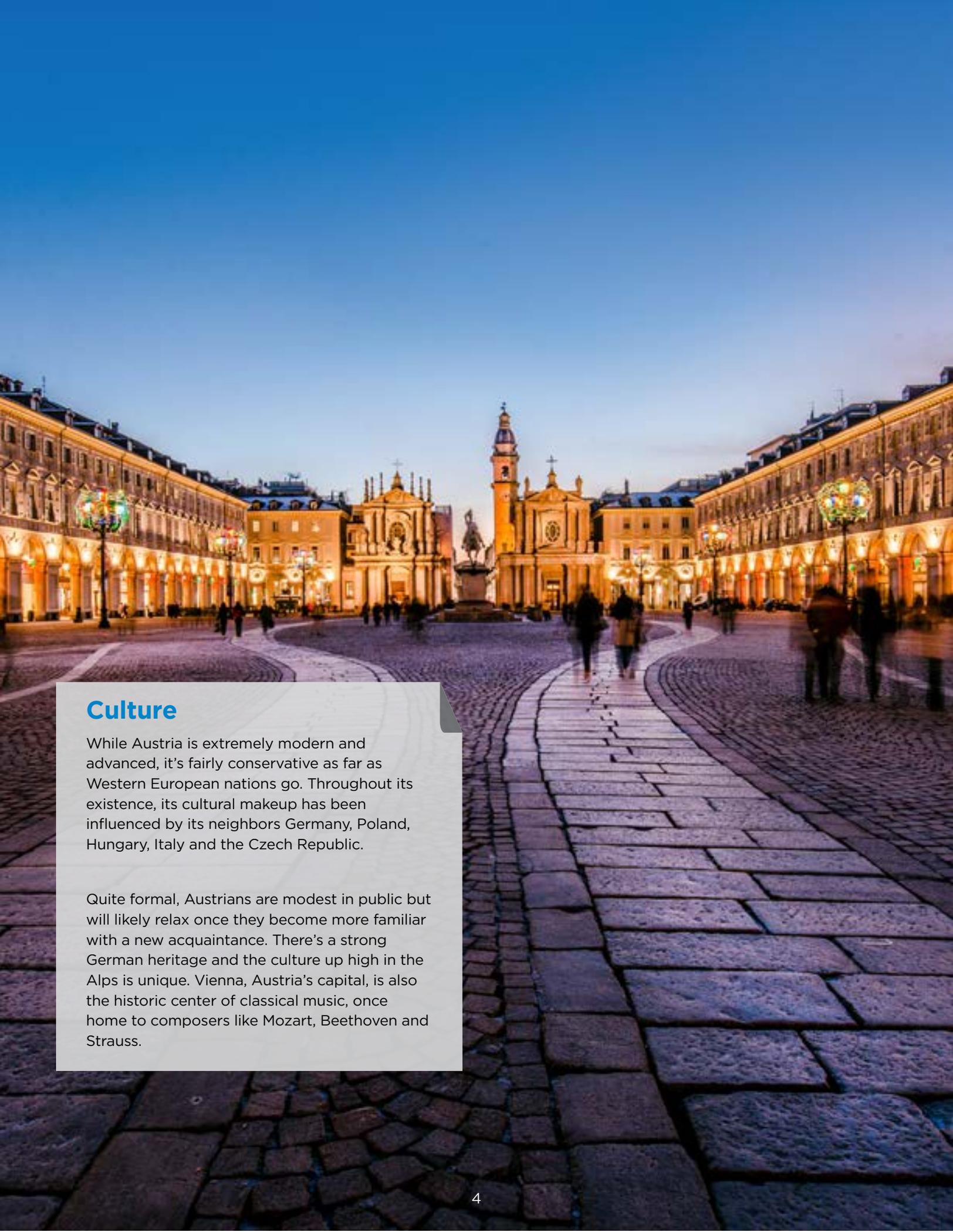
6 <http://www.expatarrivals.com/austria/education-and-schools-in-austria>

7 <http://www.austria.org/education/>

8 <https://www.classbase.com/Countries/Austria/Education-System>

9 <http://www.commisceo-global.com/country-guides/austria-guide>

10 <http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-language-is-spoken-in-austria.html>



## Culture

While Austria is extremely modern and advanced, it's fairly conservative as far as Western European nations go. Throughout its existence, its cultural makeup has been influenced by its neighbors Germany, Poland, Hungary, Italy and the Czech Republic.

Quite formal, Austrians are modest in public but will likely relax once they become more familiar with a new acquaintance. There's a strong German heritage and the culture up high in the Alps is unique. Vienna, Austria's capital, is also the historic center of classical music, once home to composers like Mozart, Beethoven and Strauss.

ease into life as an expat in Austria:<sup>11</sup>

- Keeping eye contact is very important to Austrians. Not doing so is considered impolite. Putting hands in pockets when speaking to somebody is also considered to be rude.
- Expats should always bring a gift for the host if invited for a social occasion. One should avoid giving things that could be misconstrued as romantic, such as red roses or perfume, nor should they offer red carnations, as this is seen as a political symbol.
- Social occasions aren't usually spontaneous. People normally arrange things beforehand. Be careful not to arrive late as, while a delay of around 15 minutes is understandable, being punctual is important.<sup>12</sup>
- When greeting a group, shake hands with everyone, including children. Make sure to shake the hands of the women first.
- Dressing appropriately is valued by Austrian society. Even informal appearances are conservative and elegant, always steering away from the flamboyant.

## Eating

Austrians love their food, with cuisine that generally consists of rich, warm and hearty flavors. There are a few regional variations and specialties. A myriad of dishes dot their way across the country, from the strong cheeses and bacon of Tyrol to the seafood and dumplings of Salzburg, from well-known Viennese pastries to the many sausages and meats from all over Austria.<sup>13</sup>

The concept of *gemütlichkeit* is a big part of Austrian culture. It essentially means a friendly feeling of warmth, a sense of belonging and good spirit. This cozy state of mind normally accompanies the comfort of dessert and post-dinner coffees. When entering a restaurant, particularly those outside the cities, it isn't uncommon to greet and be greeted by other patrons with a friendly "Mahlzeit".<sup>14</sup>

Austria's most recognizable dishes include Wiener Schnitzel (a breaded veal cutlet), a Viennese Sachertorte (a local chocolate cake), Apfelstrudel (a

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.ediplomat.com/np/cultural\\_etiquette/ce\\_at.htm](http://www.ediplomat.com/np/cultural_etiquette/ce_at.htm)

<sup>12</sup> [http://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=11&CID=14](http://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=11&CID=14)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.tasteofaustria.org/food-regions/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://wikitravel.org/en/Austria#Eat>

popular pastry) and Tafelspitz (boiled beef).

## Drinking

Austrians adore both beer and wine. Expats will often find the latter served, along with tasty snacks, at rustic establishments called *Buschenschank*.<sup>15</sup> When toasting, Austrians maintain eye contact, clink their glasses and exclaim, "Prost!"<sup>16</sup> Expats should make sure they do this to each person in the group. Schnapps is often served after a meal. A strong digestive that must be downed in one go.<sup>17</sup>

Austria is famous for its coffee houses, especially in Vienna. Many have outdoor terraces which are ideal for summer gatherings. Brews and pastries are often enjoyed together during *Jause*, an Austrian daily ritual occurring mid-morning or mid-afternoon.

## Holidays

Austria's public holidays consist mostly of Christian observances. There are a few localized holidays, as Austrians prefer to identify with their region first and country second. This is mostly due to their staunch avoidance of anything resembling nationalism. Provinces also celebrate holidays for their patron saints.<sup>18</sup>

New Year's Day - 1 January

Epiphany - 6 January

Easter Monday - March/April

Labor Day - 1 May

Ascension Day - May

Whit Monday - May or June

Corpus Christi - May or June

Assumption of Mary - 15 August

National Holiday - 26 October

All Saints' Day - 1 November

Day of Immaculate Conception - 8 December

Christmas Day - 25 December

St Stephen's Day - 26 December

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.tasteofaustria.org/the-heurigen-tradition/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.austria.info/uk/service-facts/customs-and-expressions/prost-drinking-with-austrians>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.frommers.com/destinations/austria/in-depth/food--drink>

<sup>18</sup> <https://publicholidays.at/>

## Getting in touch

The telecommunications infrastructure in Austria is of the highest standard. Keeping in touch is easy, with internet and telephone services both reliable and efficient.

### Telephone

Telekom Austria is the main player when it comes to installing landlines. While it is the dominant company on the market, competition is currently growing with cheaper alternatives such as Priority, Inode, Tele2 and UTA. Expats should have an idea of how they want to use the connection before choosing a provider as packages can vary greatly.<sup>1</sup>

Mobile phones, called Handys in Austria, receive good signal across the country, even on the underground metros. Expats should consider a contract, as pre-paid rates are generally more expensive. Providers include Orange, Tele-ring, T-Mobile, 3, Yesss and A1.

### Internet

WiFi is available all over Austria, especially in the busier city centers. Internet cafes are ubiquitous while most restaurants provide a connection free of charge. It's not difficult to acquire high-speed internet as the whole country is fast integrating fiber optic cable. Some internet service providers include Telekom Austria, A1, UPC and Priority.<sup>2</sup>

### Postal services

Austrian Post functions as the country's official postal service. Importantly, it offers an express service for items whose accurate timelines are a priority.<sup>3</sup> Post boxes and offices are easy to recognize, thanks to their bold yellow coloring.<sup>4</sup>

1 <https://www.justlanded.com/english/Austria/Austria-Guide/Telephone-Internet/Getting-a-phone-line>

2 <https://www.justlanded.com/english/Austria/Austria-Guide/Telephone-Internet/Mobile-Phones>

3 [https://www.post.at/en/footer\\_about\\_us\\_corporate\\_information\\_company\\_overview.php](https://www.post.at/en/footer_about_us_corporate_information_company_overview.php)

4 <http://www.visitingvienna.com/shopping/stampspostoffices/>

## Transport

Public transport in Austria is fast and advanced, with a reliable railway network running throughout the country and a metro system in Vienna.<sup>1</sup> Buses and trams provide useful and cheaper ways to get around, often with schedules running from 5am until 11pm. There are

1 <https://www.aboutaustria.org/living/gettingaround.htm>

also night-bus lines, perfect for getting home after a late night out.<sup>2</sup>

Driving in Austria is fairly simple thanks to an excellent road network. But there are a few things to get used to. For starters, all vehicles need winter tires to combat the snow, slush, ice and frost during the cold months.<sup>3</sup>

To drive in Austria, expats must have an international driving license. Toll stickers, sometimes called vignettes, must be placed on the windshield. Drivers can be fined if their vehicle doesn't have these toll stickers, which can be bought at gas stations, border crossings and post offices.

## Employment

### The job market

Austria is extremely wealthy and has a healthy, stable economy, despite recent economic downturns. While it was once a difficult place for foreigners to find work, especially since Austrians are known for being hard-working and well-educated, laws have loosened to allow more prospective employees through the border.<sup>4</sup>

Tourism is a cornerstone of Austria's economy, coupled with other big industries such as food and luxury commodities, mechanical engineering, steel construction, chemicals and vehicle manufacturing. Bespoke arts and crafts also play an important role, while the service industry is the country's fastest growing sector.<sup>5</sup>

### Income tax

Expats are considered tax residents if living in Austria for more than six months in a year. This means that income earned both locally and internationally will be taxed. Residents who stay for less than six months in a year will only pay tax on income earned in Austria.<sup>6</sup>

Employers will automatically deduct tax from salaries, as well as social security contributions. The rates of taxation function on a progressive scale, meaning they will change based on the amount of income earned. The rates range from 0% to 42%<sup>7</sup>

2 <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/austria/transport/getting-around/local-transport>

3 <https://www.austria.info/au/basic-facts/how-to-get-there/driving-in-austria>

4 <https://www.austria.info/us/basic-facts/about-austria/trade-industry>

5 <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/working-abroad/work-in-austria>

6 <http://www.expatarrivals.com/austria/banking-money-and-taxes-in-austria>

7 [http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/work/taxes/income-taxes-abroad/austria/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/work/taxes/income-taxes-abroad/austria/index_en.htm)

## Retirement

Retiring to Austria comes at a price as the cost of living is high, especially in the bigger cities. Foreigners wishing to retire in the country will need a Permanent Residence Permit as there's no specific retirement visa.<sup>8</sup> While the very cold and snowy winters may put some off, Austria's efficient public transport system and gorgeous natural surroundings make it a lovely spot to retire in peace.

## Business etiquette

The Austrian workplace isn't dissimilar to most in the Western world. With a strong focus on respect and politeness, Austrians are fairly conservative and serious about meeting business objectives. Hierarchy remains important, with decisions made entirely by a small, senior group. Colleagues are always referred to by their titles unless instructed otherwise.<sup>9</sup>

Punctuality is very important to Austrians, with lateness considered a cause for offense and extremely rude. If running late, it's imperative to let colleagues know and provide an explanation. Famously meticulous and bureaucratic, Austrians will religiously stick to an agenda but don't be surprised at a little small talk at the beginning of a meeting. They focus on fostering long-term relationships, rather than short-term deals.

Austrians will not be swayed by an emotional argument, so expats must be sure of the facts and have material to back them up. A firm handshake is the standard greeting, with some Viennese men traditionally kissing women on the hand. During conversation, eye contact is vital.

As befitting their nature, office attire is formal. Men and women both wear dark suits, while the latter may also choose to wear conservative dresses. Business cards should have both a German and an English side, while also including any noticeable academic degrees or honors.<sup>10</sup>

## Finance

### Currency

The official currency is the Euro (EUR), which is divided into 100 cents.

Money is available in the following denominations:

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.austria.org/residence-permit/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.commisceo-global.com/country-guides/austria-guide>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.expatarrivals.com/austria/doing-business-in-austria>

- Notes: 5 EUR, 10 EUR, 20 EUR, 50 EUR and 100 EUR
- Coins: 1c, 2c, 5c, 10c, 20c and 50c, and 1 EUR and 2 EUR

## Cost of living

While expats may enjoy an exceptional standard of living in Austria, it doesn't come cheap, with both rent and grocery prices seen as some of the most expensive in Europe. Naturally, those who live in rural areas will not feel the pinch as much as city dwellers.<sup>11</sup>

Families will also contend with the cost of education. Expat parents are more likely to send their kids to international schools and these institutions normally have school fees that go through the roof.

The cost of public transportation is reasonable. Many choose to cycle, while those who don't mind the extra cost make use of the reliable tramlines, buses, underground metros and suburban railways. While Austrians love their cars, owning one is pricey, mostly due to the high insurance rates.

## Banking

Austria has an advanced and stable banking system, with a large selection of banks to choose from. A useful quality of ATMs in Austria is that there aren't any extra fees when drawing from a machine that isn't one's chosen bank.

Opening a bank account is an easy process; the only major requirement, aside from paperwork, being an initial financial outlay. This sum will change from bank to bank. Expats will need a passport, proof of residence, employment details and a Residence Registration Form.<sup>12</sup>

Some of the most popular banks in the country are Erste Group Bank, RZB Group, UniCredit Bank Austria AG and Raiffeisen Bank International AG, among many others.<sup>13</sup>

Most banks are open from 8am to 3pm.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.expatarrivals.com/austria/cost-of-living-in-austria>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.confiduss.com/en/jurisdictions/austria/business/bank-account-opening/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/careers/companies/top-banks-in-austria/>

## Health

The standard of healthcare in Austria is of the highest standard. Paying into the government health insurance scheme is compulsory for both Austrians and expats, with the excellent medical facilities and services funded by the taxpayer. The entire system covers the insurer's family for accidents, healthcare and pension while private facilities and private insurance are available for expats who want an alternative.<sup>15</sup>

14 [https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/country\\_result.jsp?country=Austria](https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/country_result.jsp?country=Austria)

### Private medical insurance

Businesses make sure employees are registered with the healthcare and social insurance programs within their first week of work.<sup>16</sup> They will then receive a green e-card which contains social security numbers, date of birth and claims to doctors and dentists.<sup>17</sup>

Services offered by Austria's public healthcare include hospital treatments, basic dental work and various specialist appointments or procedures. Private health insurance leads to exclusive access to private medical professionals and hospitals.

### Emergencies

Expats can dial 112 for emergency medical services, with operators usually able to speak both German and English. 122 will contact the fire brigade, 133 will contact the police and 144 will contact ambulance services. Paramedics are highly trained and can often speak English.<sup>18</sup>

### Health Risks

There are no major health risks associated with travel to Austria.

### Vaccinations

There are no specific vaccinations required. However, routine vaccinations such as measles, mumps, rubella, tetanus, polio, pertussis, diphtheria and chickenpox are recommended.<sup>19</sup>

### Pharmacies

Pharmacies are common in the country. Some are open 24 hours a day, but most operate from 8am to 6pm during the week, closing at 12pm on a Saturday.<sup>20</sup>

The purchasing of medication is heavily monitored, meaning over-the-counter drugs in one's home country may need a prescription in Austria. These prescriptions are normally covered by public healthcare insurance, with only a nominal fee being charged.

15 <http://www.expatarrivals.com/austria/healthcare-in-austria> 16 <http://www.migration.gv.at/en/living-and-working-in-austria/austria-at-a-glance/the-social-security-system/>

17 <http://www.austria.org/health-care/>

18 <https://www.austria.info/au/basic-facts/how-to-get-there/driving-in-austria>

19 <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/austria>

20 <http://www.expatarrivals.com/austria/healthcare-in-austria>