Annual Theme 2027: Vienna, Grand New

Vienna is known around the world for its imperial history. Few other cities anywhere in the world have such a magnificent and well-preserved imperial heritage as Vienna. Imperial Vienna is an international shorthand and a globally understood code that instantly places Vienna in context and makes it comprehensible within seconds. No other city can make that claim. That is why the Vienna Tourist Board is drawing on its most powerful image of Vienna in 2027 and retelling it in an accessible, contemporary way. Not through nostalgic glorification, but with a fresh perspective on Imperial Vienna as part of the city today: visible in its architecture, parks, coffeehouses, rituals, language, and above all in everyday Viennese culture.

A contemporary interpretation of the monarchy

The 2027 theme year presents Imperial Vienna not as an isolated historical imperial world, but as something that continues to shape the city to this day. This encompasses not only famous sights such as the Hofburg, Schönbrunn Palace, and the Ringstrasse, but also rituals, attitudes, and everyday practices that extend from the Habsburg Monarchy into the present. Vienna thus emerges not as a historical backdrop, but as a real urban space in which a vanished empire lives on in its architecture, coffeehouse culture, theater and concert-going, language, and urban codes. This is precisely where the theme's strength lies – the familiar asset of "Imperial Vienna" is not charged with nostalgia, but interpreted in a contemporary way. The focus is not on glorifying a past order, but on the question of what remains of it, what it still reveals about Vienna today, and how it can open up current issues: diversity, migration, gender roles, democracy, social ambiguities, and Vienna's distinctive position as a cultural crossroads between Eastern and Western Europe. "Vienna, Grand New" is intended to create relevance for the present while also offering new reasons to visit. "Vienna, Grand New" goes out of its way to avoid two things: the uncritical retelling of Habsburg biographies and the glorification of a political system from which only the elites benefited.

What still resonates from that era today?

The content focus is on everyday and social history. The narrative focuses not on the dynasty, but primarily on life within the empire: urban rituals, bourgeois displays of status, polite distance, Viennese wit, the culture of titles, bureaucratic order, and coffeehouse culture as a kind of imperial living room. It is precisely in these seemingly small things that the extent to which imperial influences still resonate throughout the city today becomes apparent. This perspective makes the theme accessible, contemporary, and relevant because it reveals the imperial not only in monuments, but also in behavior, atmospheres, and social codes. The legacy of the Habsburg Monarchy is present throughout the city, both tangibly and intangibly.

Undiscovered imperial sites and treasures

Equally important in 2027 will be the shift in perspective toward what shall be referred to as "Hidden Gems": imperial everyday landscapes and sites beyond the established canon, including the Small Gloriette, the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, the city's many townhouses, the Augarten, the Josephinum, the Imperial Carriage Museum Vienna, the Garden Palace Liechtenstein and City Palace Liechtenstein, as well as the newly renovated Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art, the Museum of Military History, and the Furniture Museum Vienna, where courtly everyday life is conveyed particularly vividly. These sites in particular reveal new imperial facets of Vienna while also helping to spread offerings more widely across the city. "Vienna, Grand New" turns its attention to places that have so far received less attention from tourism.

Fresh approaches to classic themes

In line with this concept, the following content approaches are proposed for articles, stories, and formats. For instance, Vienna's most internationally renowned historical figure, Empress Elisabeth, also known as Sisi, is presented from an entirely new perspective: "Sissi goes China" explores the extraordinary popularity of Ernst Marischka's Sissi trilogy in China. The famous film series starring Romy Schneider was among the first Western, non-communist films to be dubbed in China in the 1980s. It had an incredible impact: Sisi became a pop culture icon and the quintessential princess, who is now a ubiquitous figure in advertising. Sisi was used to advertise everything from skincare products and lingerie to real estate and online games. Around the Chinese New Year, the films still reach an audience of millions in China.

More broadly, "Vienna, Grand New" takes new approaches to the Habsburg dynasty: the "Dark Habsburg" format tells the story of the imperial house through the popular true-crime genre. It is not only the world-famous murder-suicide drama surrounding Crown Prince Rudolf in Mayerling in 1889 that reveals the dynasty's darker side: over the centuries, the imperial house also faced the murder of uncles, document forgery, and bitter power struggles in the style of "Game of Thrones".

"Vienna, Grand New" also takes up current topics, such as the Habsburg jewels believed to have been lost for 100 years that resurfaced in Canada in 2025. "Vienna, Grand New" tells this crime story while also taking a look at former Purveyors to the Imperial and Royal Court such as the Köchert jewelers, as well as contemporary jewelry designers. A story centered on Viennese luxury.

Imperial classics, reimagined

Well-known sights, too, will be told anew. Rather than mere splendor, the focus is on hidden layers and new narratives: servants' corridors behind the walls, living quarters away from the state rooms, imperial lifestyles beneath the official stage, and stories told from feminist, immigrant, queer, and discursive perspectives. In short: more people, less dynasty. Poverty and social injustice, too. True crime instead of imperial kitsch. A pop culture edge in the vein of "Bridgerton", "The Empress" "The Great", and the like: imperial history presented in an engaging, accessible, and contemporary way. Many of these sites, such as the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, are shaped by the Habsburgs' passion for art and collecting. "Vienna, Grand New" therefore speaks very directly to visitors interested in art and culture. The Vienna Tourist Board's strategic goal of increasing the share of this target group is supported by this content.

Discover the legacy of the monarchy

The empire may be a thing of the past politically, but its legacy can still be encountered in Vienna today. Everyday perspectives make the topic accessible to a modern audience. They open up new formats, target groups, and partnerships, from guided walks to culinary offerings, and from audio formats to exhibitions, pop-ups, or themed programs for convention guests. It is precisely these lasting effects that we want to highlight in 2027. We want our guests to see Vienna not only as a city of grand palaces, but as a vibrant place where history continues to resonate to this day – in its buildings, habits, stories, and urban atmospheres. This creates a modern approach to a familiar theme that offers present-day relevance.

Facts and figures

· 27 palaces (Source: 'Auf den Spuren von Prunk & Pomp' by Christina Rademacher)

· 2 former imperial palaces (Schönbrunn Palace and the Hofburg)

· 163 townhouses (Source: www.viennatouristguide.at)

· Schönbrunn Zoo: the world's oldest still-operating zoo (since 1752) (Source: www.zoovienna.at)

· Vienna's Ringstrasse is 5.3 km long (Source: Freytag & Berndt)

· The Hofburg is one of the world's largest palace complexes. Expanded gradually since the 13th century, it now covers more than 300,000 m² of built-up area.

· Imperial Crypt: Burial place of 150 Habsburgs (including 12 emperors, 19 empresses and queens) (source: www.kapuzinergruft.com)

· 280 imperial parks and gardens (Source: 'Parks und Gärten in Wien' by Peter Autengruber)

· Spanish Riding School: the only institution in the world to preserve the classical art of riding in the Renaissance tradition of the "Haute École" for 450 years. The horsemanship of the Spanish Riding School was placed on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in December 2015. (Source: www.srs.at)

· The world's largest collection of paintings by Gustav Klimt at the Upper Belvedere: 24 oil paintings (including "The Kiss"). (Source: sammlung.belvedere.at/collections/248982/gustav-klimt)

· The world's largest collection of drawings by Gustav Klimt at the Wien Museum: 400 drawings (not on permanent display) (Source: www.wienmuseum.at)

· The world's largest Egon Schiele collection at the Leopold Museum: 44 paintings and more than 200 watercolors, drawings, and prints (source: www.leopold-museum.org/de/sammlung/egon-schiele)

- · Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna:
  - o The world's largest collection of paintings by Pieter Bruegel the Elder: 12 paintings
  - o The world's largest collection of Flemish painting: 800 paintings
  - o One of the world's largest collections of Venetian painting (with works from every period of Titian's career): 400 paintings
  - o The world's largest and most significant Kunstkammer: 2,200 objects
  - o (Source: www.khm.at)
- · Albertina:
  - o 1.2 million works
  - o Including 65,000 drawings and around one million prints spanning all major artistic periods, from the Late Gothic era to contemporary art
  - o Contemporary art: around 70,000 works
  - o (Source: albertina.at)

- · MuseumsQuartier Wien: one of the world's largest cultural districts (covering 90,000 m²), with more than 50 cultural institutions. (Source:: www.mqw.at)

Hidden Gems: Internationally lesser-known sights and museums

- Augarten (porcelain)
- Academy of Fine Arts Vienna
- Hermesvilla
- Josephinum
- Imperial Carriage Museum Vienna
- Garden Palace Liechtenstein
- Stadtpalais Liechtenstein
- Furniture Museum Vienna
- Narrenturm (Fool's Tower)
- Imperial Treasury Vienna
- Otto Wagner Court Pavilion Hietzing
- Weltmuseum Wien
- Collection of Historic Musical Instruments
- Museum of Military History
- Green Prater – Lusthaus
- Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art

- Augustinian Church
- Theater Museum