Austria

Overview

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Austria is a landlocked country located in central Europe, bordered by Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and the Czech Republic. The German-speaking country is a popular destination for foreign travelers. As a modern parliamentary republic, the country is economically prosperous and politically stable, and concerns are MINOR. It is also a member of the European Union (EU) and well integrated within the European community; however, it often remains neutral regarding international affairs. Corruption is a LOW risk and is unlikely to affect travelers or those doing business in country.

Security concerns are minimal in Austria. Petty crime is a LOW concern as incidents are infrequent. While protests and other forms of civil unrest occur, these rarely lead to significant disruptions or clashes, presenting a LOW risk. Terrorism is a LOW concern, and no incidents have occurred in Austria in recent years.

Due to Austria’s mountainous terrain and alpine climate, there are risks associated with severe winter weather and associated natural disasters.

Political conditions

Political conditions

- Political conditions in Austria are a MINOR concern as the country is politically stable and is unlikely to experience any major shifts.

Austria is a federal parliamentary republic with three main branches of government. The executive branch is headed by President Alexander van der Bellen, who is head of state. The chancellor serves as the head of government; however, this post is vacant following a vote of no confidence in May 2019. Snap elections are expected in Fall 2019 to determine the next head of government and the composition of the Austrian legislature. The judiciary is led by the Supreme Court of Justice, whose members are appointed by the president. The Austrian parliament is composed of an upper house known as the Bundesrat and a lower house known as the Nationalrat. The Nationalrat holds more influence than the Bundesrat in passing legislation and other legislative matters. Austrian politics were previously dominated by a coalition between the center-right Austrian People’s Party (OeVP) under former Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and the far-right Freedom Party of
Austria (FPOe), headed by former Vice Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache. The two parties took power in December 2017 after agreeing to a second-time coalition. The coalition maintained an anti-migration but pro-EU balance which proved popular with constituents until an alleged corruption scandal implicating Strache developed in May 2019. FPOe government leaders left the government, and Kurz was ousted as prime minister after a vote of no confidence shortly thereafter.

The popularity of conservative leadership was tested during the May 2019 European Union parliamentary election, as this was the first national election since 2017. Although the domestic impacts of EU parliamentary elections are somewhat limited, potential impacts lie in the upcoming snap election. Fallout from the EU election and the corruption scandal could drive a wedge between OeVP and FPOe leadership as they actively compete in the snap election, drawing a distinction between the center-right OeVP and the far-right FPOe.

The popularity of conservative leadership will likely be tested during the May 2019 European Union parliamentary election, as this will be the first national election since 2017. Although the domestic impacts of EU parliamentary elections are somewhat limited, potential impacts lie in the former coalition between the OeVP and the FPOe, and the effects on the upcoming snap election. OeVP leadership will actively compete with FPOe leadership in the election, drawing a distinction between the center-right OeVP and the far-right FPOe. The primary distinction can be seen in the parties’ two lead candidates – Othmar Karas of the OeVP remains a supporter of EU influence and membership, while Harald Vilimsky of the FPOe has an extensive history as a Eurosceptic. The division between lead candidates may drive a more significant wedge between the two right-wing parties, further alienating the parties from each other and potentially eliminating the possibility of another coalition following the snap elections.

In the October 2017 elections, both the OeVP and FCÖe campaigned on stronger borders and tougher immigration policies. Unemployment and economic indicators were secondary issues and the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPOe) ran on a primarily economy-focused agenda. The SPOe took second place in the election, narrowly edging out the FPOe as both coalition parties earned growing support for their more stringent migration concerns. Kurz – who became popular with a tough immigration stance as foreign minister during Europe’s 2015 immigration crisis – also promoted a pro-EU stance and, in coalition negotiations, required FPOe ministers to stop calling for Austria to leave the EU. After taking power, the right-wing government unpopularly pushed for a reversal of a smoking ban in restaurants, bars and public spaces in a move touted as an increase in direct and local democracy. A national outcry and unprecedented petition campaign forced a stop to the measure in March 2018. In June 2018 the government announced plans to more strictly monitor Islam in country amid concerns of radicalization, closing several mosques and expelling dozens of imams.

**Economy**

Austria’s economy is somewhat diverse with strong manufacturing, tourism/service, healthcare, and financial/business sectors. The country’s real GDP grew in 2018 and is forecasted to grow at similar rates in 2019 following lower growth in previous years. The recent growth has coincided with higher government and private consumption as well as improved exports and regional investments. Government finances have been boosted by increased private consumption and market investment.

**Corruption**

- **Corruption levels are LOW in Austria, and most known cases involve government or public officials.**

Corruption is a low concern in Austria and does not cause significant disruption to daily activities. Corruption cases, though rare, tend to occur within the government and are investigated by authorities. In May 2019 a high-profile corruption case involving then-Vice Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache caused Chancellor Sebastian Kurz to dissolve the coalition government between Kurz’s OeVP and Strache’s FPOe. The scandal,
which involved a video of Strache offering a foreign investor to fix state contracts, caused Strache to resign and has spurred growing doubts of the FPOe. Several separate cases of high-level corruption have come to light in recent years involving the international body governing world football. Multiple prominent sporting organizations and businesspeople in Austria were implicated in the scandal, relating to graft payments over sporting politics.

Transparency International, a non-governmental organization that monitors global corruption, gave Austria a score of 76 out of 100 in its 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). The CPI measures levels of perceived corruption ranging from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (extremely transparent). Austria’s score suggests low levels of corruption, and the country was rated as the 14th least corrupt out of 180 surveyed.

Security issues

General crime

- Crime is a LOW concern in Austria. Most criminal acts involve petty theft and burglary while violent crime is rare.

Austria has generally low levels of crime nationwide, with rates usually on par with other regional countries. Petty crime is the most common crime-related concern in Austria, and rates tend to be elevated in major cities. Offenses such as pick-pocketing and bag-snatching are the most frequent types of petty theft reported. These acts tend to be opportunistic and nonviolent in nature, as victims often do not realize they have been robbed until after the crime has been committed. Criminals frequently target popular tourist sites and crowded places such as public transportation systems. Individuals are typically targeted due to perceived affluence.

Violent crimes such as assault and homicide are infrequent and do not pose a serious concern in Austria. The number of such crimes largely dropped in most areas in 2018. Violent crimes that do occur are typically related to domestic disputes and are unlikely to affect travelers. Additionally, armed robberies, residential burglaries and vehicle break-ins do occur, with many taking place in more affluent areas. Multiple high-level armed robberies targeting jewelry stores and other high value targets have been reported in Vienna and Salzburg in recent years, resulting in the deaths of multiple security personnel. These events were extensively reported in national media due to the relative infrequency of such crimes. Incidents of this nature occur most frequently during the holiday shopping season and are typically carried out by a group of assailants.

Overall government statistics indicate that crime levels nationwide in 2018 reduced compared to previous years. While still low, Vienna state experiences a significantly higher rate of overall crime due to a variety of factors, including its status as a tourist destination, pockets of high income disparity and a high population density. Austrian police are generally well-equipped and well-trained, and the number of active police officers in large cities has regularly increased in recent years.

Cybercrime

The risks posed to travelers by cybercrime are generally minimal, although rising rates of internet-related criminal activity have raised concerns from security forces. The government has made a robust cyber security infrastructure a priority and is making strides in fighting online scams and other cyber threats.

Terrorism

- Austria experiences a LOW risk of terrorism; however, there is an underlying threat stemming from extremist organizations.
No major terrorist attacks have occurred on Austrian soil in recent history; however, various factors contribute to an underlying threat of targeting by terror groups. This threat primarily stems from Austrian nationals traveling to Iraq and Syria to fight for the Islamic State (IS), which named Austria as a potential target in 2017. Security forces are proactive in carrying out counterterrorism operations that target those suspected of planning attacks and fundraising for terror groups.

A secondary risk involves a Turkish terror organization known as the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party (DHKP/C). The DHKP/C, which generally targets U.S. and Turkish government assets, has not carried out any attacks in Austria itself; however, authorities have arrested several alleged members of the group, indicating that the organization maintains some presence in the country.

Civil unrest

- **Civil unrest in Austria is a LOW concern and are generally confined to protests, most of which occur peacefully.**

Although a low concern, demonstrations are a somewhat common occurrence in Austria, primarily in the capital Vienna. Protests are generally motivated by both domestic policy and international issues; however, the majority of these events occur peacefully and are well-regulated by police. Protests inspired by domestic concerns occur for a range of reasons, and some issues tend to attract larger crowds than others. Recent demonstrations include a series of protests and rallies held in Vienna during late 2018, including several opposition rallies held outside of parliament.

Left-wing political opposition and community groups have carried out large anti-government, anti-fascism and pro-immigration protest marches and are expected to continue to do so in the medium term. Similar protests in early 2018 and late 2017 drew thousands of protesters. Heightened security measures are expected during demonstrations, which are usually announced in advance and subsequently well-policing. Associated ground travel, business and public service disruptions can also be expected.

Another factor contributing to civil unrest in Austria is the ongoing influx of large numbers of asylum seekers from the country's southern border. While many migrants stay in country, Austria also serves as a major transit country for immigration into Germany. Increasing crime rates and instances of civil unrest have been reported surrounding migrant camps, shelters and registration stations. Accordingly, there has also been a surge in right-wing and conservative protest movements against the large number of immigrants to the country.

Travel logistics

Entering the country

**Entry Requirements**

- All visitors to Austria are required to present a valid passport upon arrival. Citizens of EU countries may also present an EU identification card as a valid passport substitute. Passports held by nationals of non-EU countries must be valid for at least three months past the expected date of departure from Austria; however, some individuals may be required to present a passport valid for six months past their intended date of departure.
- In many cases, visas are not required for visits of less than 90 days for nationals of approved countries including the U.S., Australia, and Canada; however, travelers wishing to stay in Austria past the 90 day period may be required to obtain a visa at an Austrian consulate. Schengen visa holders are free to travel throughout Austria and the Schengen Area for a period of up to 90 days.
- As entry requirements are subject to change, travelers are advised to contact their nearest Austrian diplomatic representation for the most up to date requirements.
**Political/Security Risks**

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- Political conditions in Austria are a MINOR concern as the country is politically stable and is unlikely to experience any major shifts.
- Corruption levels are LOW in Austria, and most known cases involve government or public officials.
- Crime is a as LOW concern in Austria. Most criminal acts involve petty theft and burglary while violent crime is relatively unusual.
- Austria experiences a LOW risk of terrorism; however, there is an underlying threat stemming from extremist organizations.
- Civil unrest in Austria is a LOW concern and are generally confined to protests, most of which occur peacefully.

**Infrastructure**

Infrastructure concerns are LOW, as Austria’s infrastructure is highly developed and well-maintained. Extensive road, rail and air travel networks stretch throughout most of the country. However, winter weather conditions may impact road conditions in some parts of Austria. Electricity, water and telecommunications are reliable and widely available.

- Roads are well-maintained and present throughout Austria.
- Austria’s rail network is extensive and efficient.
- Telecommunications infrastructure, including high-speed internet, satellite television, cellular service and power networks are well-maintained and efficient; however, coverage might be unavailable in some mountainous areas.

**Air travel**

Several modern airports exist in Austria. Vienna International Airport (LOWW/VIE) is the primary airport serving the country and hosts multiple major international and domestic air carriers. Located approximately 11 mi (17 km) southeast of central Vienna, the facility is well-maintained and offers amenities including restaurants, shops, financial and vehicle rental services.

**Getting around**

Austria’s extensive and well-maintained transportation infrastructure allows fast and easy travel throughout the country. Air, rail and road travel allow access to most domestic locations; however, winter weather conditions can cause road conditions to deteriorate.

- **Road** – Road conditions throughout Austria are of a high standard. An extensive road network connects all major cities and towns throughout the country; however, conditions of the roads in rural and mountainous areas may vary depending on location. Private, pre-arranged transportation is recommended for all travel in Austria.
  - **Self-Driving** - Rental vehicles are available at Vienna International Airport (LOWW/VIE) and in other cities and towns. Traffic laws are regularly enforced with fines; drinking and driving, as well as driving while talking on a cellular phone, are illegal. All vehicles in Austria are required to have an official toll sticker; these are available in several locations, including post offices and gas stations. Road conditions can vary due to winter weather in some of the more mountainous areas and drivers must exercise heightened caution in snowy or icy driving situations. Driving takes place on the right-hand side of the road.
Bus - Bus service is available in and between many cities, towns and to other countries. Vehicles are modern, well-maintained and stop at many locations including train stations and airports.

Taxi - Taxis are available in major cities such as Vienna. Official taxis are usually clean and well-maintained. Travelers can identify an official taxi by looking for the letters TX at the end of a vehicle’s license plate number. Taxi travel in Vienna is inexpensive, and fares are calculated on an electronic meter. Taxis stop at designated areas throughout the city and may also be flagged down.

Culture

- Formal etiquette and the use of titles and surnames are expected in a business setting.
- German is the primary spoken language; however, many Austrians consider themselves distinct from German culture.
- Business customs are formal, with proper dress and punctuality expected.
- There are significant populations of Slovenes, Croats, Hungarians and Turks living in Austria. While there are few significant domestic issues concerning these groups, foreign political developments may constitute sensitive topics for the aforementioned populations.

Important Dates in 2019

- 1 January – New Year’s Day
- 6 January – Epiphany
- 14 April – Palm Sunday
- 19 April – Good Friday
- 21 April – Easter Day
- 22 April – Easter Monday
- 1 May – Labor Day
- 30 May – Ascension Day
- 9 June – White Sunday
- 10 June – Whit Monday
- 20 June – Corpus Christi
- 15 August – Assumption
- 26 October – National Day
- 1 November – All Saints’ Day
- 8 December – Immaculate Conception Day
- 24 December – Christmas Eve
- 25 December – Christmas Day
- 26 December – Saint Stephen’s Day
- 31 December – New Year’s Eve

Health concerns

Healthcare services are modern and widely available throughout Austria. Travelers holding a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) may receive emergency service free of charge from state run medical facilities. Travelers without an EHIC are advised to obtain comprehensive health insurance while traveling in Austria to avoid potential medical costs. Pharmacies are available in most locations and are typically open Monday to Friday from 08:00 – 18:00. Many pharmacies offer Saturday hours, and some offer 24-hour service. Drug costs may be covered by a health insurance plan; however, travelers are often required to pay up front for medications and submit a receipt to their insurance provider for possible reimbursement.

Natural hazards
Few natural hazards exist in Austria; however, avalanches frequently occur during winter and when snow melts in the spring.

Money

- **Currency** - Austria uses the euro (EUR) as its official currency. Euro notes are in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 euros. Coins are available in 1 and 2 euro denominations, as well as 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents.

- **Foreign exchange** - Foreign exchange services are available in locations including airports, train stations, banks, hotels and private vendors. Exchange rates may vary significantly depending on the service provider. Travelers entering Austria from outside the EU are required to declare currency, checks and money orders valued at more than 10,000 EUR.

- **ATMs/Credit Cards** - ATMs are available countrywide, and many major bank cards are accepted. A fee may be required for cash withdrawals. Travelers may be required to inform their credit/debit card company of their travel plans in advance to prevent their card from being locked. Caution should be maintained when using ATMs in dark or isolated areas as criminals sometimes target these locations.

- **Tipping** - Tips of 10 percent are customary for taxi service. Restaurants often include a service charge; however tips may be given for good service.

- **Business hours** - Business hours in Austria are generally Monday to Thursday from 08:00 – 17:00 and Friday from 08:00 – 15:00. Many businesses close for a one hour lunch break on weekdays. Saturday hours vary, and many businesses are closed on Sundays.

Contact Information

- International dialing code: +43
- International dialing prefix: 00
- Police: 112, 133
- Ambulance: 112, 144
- Fire: 112, 122
- Mountain Rescue: 140

Cultural factors

General

Austrian culture features a number of influences from both the geographical landscape and cultural overlap with neighboring nations, both past and present. Similar to Germany and Italy, Austria has a long history of classical influences in art, music, literature and theater. Soccer is a popular sport in Austria, although the mountainous terrain also lends to the wide popularity of winter sports as in neighboring Switzerland.

Cultural tension

- There are significant populations of Slovenes, Croats, Hungarians and Turks living in Austria. While there are few significant domestic issues concerning these groups, foreign political developments may constitute sensitive topics for the aforementioned populations.

Etiquette and norms

- Formal etiquette and the use of titles and surnames are expected in a business setting.
- German is the primary spoken language; however, many Austrians consider themselves distinct from German culture.
- Business customs are formal, with proper dress and punctuality expected.
Useful information

Useful information

- Public holidays
- Weather forecast
- Maps
- Austria National Tourist Office
- Electricity: 230 volts, 50 Hz; for the most commonly used plug types, please click here.

Contact details

Important contact details

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Emergency numbers

- Police: 112, 133
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- Mountain rescue: 140

Embassies

Australian Embassy
Mattiellstraße 2-4
1040 Vienna
Tel.: 43 1 506 740
Fax: 43 1 506 741 85
Email: vienna.embassy@dfat.gov.au

British Embassy
Jauresgasse 12
1030 Vienna
Tel: +43 1 716 130
Fax: +43 1 716 132 900
Email: press@britishembassy.at

Chinese Embassy
Metternichgasse 4
1030 Vienna
Tel: +43 1 714 3149
Fax: +43 1 713 6816
Email: chinaemb_at@mfa.gov.cn

French Embassy
Technikerstrasse 2
1040 Vienna
Tel: +43 1 502 750
German Embassy  
Gauermannngasse 2-4  
1010 Vienna  
Tel: +43 1 711 540  
Fax: +43 1 713 8366

Japanese Embassy  
Hessgasse 6  
1010 Vienna  
Tel: +43 1 531 920  
Fax: +43 1 532 0590  
Email: info@wi.mofa.go.jp

Mexican Embassy  
Renngasse 5, 1st Floor, 5-6  
1010 Vienna  
Tel.: +43 1 310 7383  
Fax: +43 1 310 7387  
Email: embaustria@sre.gob.mx

Saudi Arabian Embassy  
Formanekgasse 38  
1190 Vienna  
Tel: +43 1 367 2531  
Fax: +43 1 367 2540  
Email: atemb@mofa.gov.sa

South African Embassy  
Sandgasse 33  
1190 Vienna  
Tel.: +43 1 320 6493  
Fax: +43 1 320 6493 51  
Email: vienna.consular@foreign.gov.za

United States Embassy  
Boltzmanngasse 16  
1090 Vienna  
Tel: +43 1 313 390  
Fax: +43 1 310 0682  
Email: viennausembassy@state.gov

Health advisory

Health infrastructure

Medical care is of a high standard and widely available throughout Austria. Comprehensive health insurance is recommended when traveling in the country. Patients without a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) may be required to pay for non-emergency care in advance and seek reimbursement from their insurance provider.

Pre-travel recommendations
The following vaccinations are recommended or required if traveling to Austria:

- Hepatitis A (recommended)
- Hepatitis B (recommended)
- Measles (recommended)
- Rabies (recommended)

Travelers should ensure that routine vaccinations are up to date for diseases including influenza, chickenpox (or varicella), measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and polio vaccine.

Travelers are advised to visit a doctor or clinic that specializes in travel-related medicine at least four to six weeks prior to their intended departure. This should allow the necessary time for most prescribed vaccinations to take effect. Even if travel is to be undertaken in less than four weeks, a visit to a medical professional is still recommended.

Comprehensive medical insurance is strongly recommended. Travelers are also advised to take an appropriate supply of any prescription medication; this should be accompanied by a doctor's written instruction, explaining the need for the medication and justifying the quantities required.

**Significant diseases**

The following is a significant disease that might affect travelers to Austria:

- Tick-borne encephalitis is a viral infection of the central nervous system spread by ticks. Travelers visiting heavily forested areas are a heightened risk of contracting the disease.

**Food and water safety**

Although water sanitation standards are high in country, individuals are advised to only consume bottled or purified water as a precaution. Travelers should avoid consuming unpasteurized milk products.

**Emergency response**

Austrian police can be reached by dialing 133. Ambulances may be summoned by dialing 144. The fire department can be contacted at 122. The General European emergency number is 112. Emergency responders in the country are responsive, effective and prompt; however, response times may be delayed in more rural or mountainous areas of the country.