

Thema: Prater Wien

Autor: k.A.

# how to ... ... SURVIVE GROWING UP IN VIENNA

Coming of age in Vienna in Vienna can be frightening, freeing and exhilarating at the same time – just like growing up

by Naomi Hunt



Hanging out in the Burggarten all day long is one of the many perks that teenage life offers in Vienna.

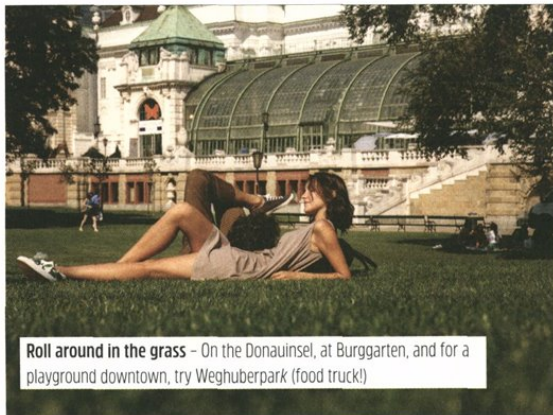
METROPOLE



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## GROW UP THE VIENNESE WAY



**Roll around in the grass** - On the Donauinsel, at Burggarten, and for a playground downtown, try Weghuberpark (food truck)



**Take a hike** - Forest bathe in the Prater or Lobau, or hike the Wiener Hausberge. For a younger-kid-friendly adventure, take the Seilbahn (cable car) up the Rax and then wander.



**Swim all year** - When it's cold, try *Therme Wien*, *Hütteldorfer Bad* or *Dianabad*. In summer, jump in the *Alte Donau* or for a view, try *Krapfenwalbad*.



**Play to learn** - Visit the *Naturhistorisches* and *Kunsthistorisches Museum* (affordable annual passes, free under-19s); the *Technisches Museum* features playgrounds. For live animals, try *Haus des Meeres* or the *Tiergarten Schönbrunn*. At the Museumsquartier (MQ), the *Zoom Kindermuseum's Ocean* (0-5) is fabulous and requires almost no German.

Arriving in Vienna at 14 was like being let out of a cage. At least that's how I remember it: Set free in a paradise of jewelry-box architecture, art and independence. At the *Heuriger*, adults offered me actual wine. Suddenly I was an adult! Vienna was a place that saw me as myself, and didn't mind.

To begin with, the city was accessible. And safe. Our apartment was in Rudolfsheim-Fünfhaus, later revealed to be an "off" neighborhood. Not to us; I thought it was great. I hadn't yet learned the fine Viennese art of taking public services for granted: The sidewalks were clean, the buses on time, and restaurants and parks just down the street.

My teenage friends and I roamed the city at all hours. We settled into the *Burggarten* or *Heldenplatz* by day and hit up dive bars and clubs by night. And everywhere, people smoked. Which they still do, of course. As Gustav Mahler famously said, tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire - in this case, literally.

Adults left us to our own devices, unconcerned by adolescent sex, booze and late-night shenanigans. It was normal. *G'hört dazu*. At the same time, we soon learned to conceal our barbarism on command. In the company of adults, teenagers had to be civilized - *salonfähig*. We were expected to contribute intelligent conversation, flatter the old folks, use the right cutlery and generally behave ourselves.

For me, this was a fundamental re-ordering of life's rules, of personal freedom vs. responsibility. Where I had come from (an American bubble in Asia), there was a children's table. And crayons. Freedoms were limited, privileges earned by showing you could "be trusted." In Vienna, my teen life was my own to navigate, or destroy.

My friends' parents talked to us about their lives, things like deaths or the ragged ends of love affairs. Initially, I found this horrifying. Where I came from, adults didn't reveal what they really thought or felt, at least not to children, and broadly acted like the stain of the

human condition could be washed out with a little spit and elbow grease.

In Vienna, it was widely acknowledged that secrets existed - selfish mistakes and terrible fates were the foundations of life, like the *Keller* (cellars) under the buildings. The best way to deal with these and other ghosts was to look straight at them.

### LIFE, LOVE & TRIBULATIONS

Knowing that everyone has secrets is very Viennese. Here, my generation was raised by postwar parents who, in turn, accused their parents of complicity in the horrors of National Socialism, of having papered over evil with *Kleinbürgerlichkeit*, with petty proprieties. In rebellion, our parents wore their underpants on the outside, rejecting bourgeois practices, like curfews, bikini tops or going to church.

This suspicion of religion was new to me, the daughter of a Methodist pastor. Identifying as Christian was often considered silly at best, and fascist at worst. "Why should your



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**Burn energy** – For ages 0-2, Mini&Me, Vollbuntes Wohnzimmer. Ages 2-10: Jump Around, Monki Park. For older kids, try Ocean Park, Bogi Park or Family Fun Park



**Go to the movies** – Artis and Haydn show blockbusters in English, and there is a range of artier cinemas that show films in their original languages. Try searching this website with the "OV" box checked (for original version): [film.at/kinoprogramm/wien](http://film.at/kinoprogramm/wien)

**Go to the Burgenland** – If you have time for a whole-day trip out of town, do try Family Park (not to be confused with Family Fun Park), which is a charming, toddler- and kid-friendly outdoor adventure park near Eisenstadt that is totally worth the entrance fee. Just remember to pack your kids' swimsuits so they can really enjoy the water attractions.



**Go to the fairgrounds** – Take the whole family to the fairgrounds at the Würstelprater, where you pay only for the rides, fun houses and games that you play. If you're feeling peckish, there are hot dogs, ice cream, cotton candy and *Langos* stands everywhere, or for a real meal, try the classic restaurant *Schweizerhaus* (which has a small outdoor playground). Or, even better for kids, try the *Luftburg*, which serves pizza and pig feet but also features several large bouncy castles.

religion be true just because you inherited it?" I was asked, repeatedly.

Instead of religion, Viennese teens inherited their family's politics. After one embarrassing dinner where I thought everyone was being racist (my German was still weak), I realized that labeling families "deep Black" or "deep Red" indicated their politics, not their ethnicity. Their children would either do likewise, or rebel, and vote Green for the next 15 years.

On the upside, teenagers took the philosophical underpinnings of politics seriously: My boyfriend actually read Marx and Engels for fun. As the artist André Heller said, "*Die jungen Leute in Wien kommen mit siebzig auf die Welt und leben sich dann auf fünfzig herunter.*" (The young in Vienna are born 70 years old and work their way back to 50.) My friends were religiously political and by 16 already cynical, having learned, as every Viennese knows, that things had been better before and were clearly getting worse.

But we were young and beautiful enough and the Prater, the Donauinsel and the

Wienerwald were just train stations away. Fleeing into nature is deeply Viennese. As soon as they can walk, Viennese children are taken on character-building hikes up the sides of the Raxalpe or the Schneeberg in the summer and strapped to skis and pushed back down in the winter. The pan-Austrian idea of mountain-as-respite remains entrenched in the urban Viennese mind. As a good friend complained recently, "*Gott, ich brauch einen Berg,*" she sighed. ("God, I need a mountain.")

It has been twenty years now and I have a wonderful husband and children. But mine are still young, and the *laissez-faire* approach that teens enjoy doesn't yet apply: Here, kids are lectured by strangers, exhorted to tidy up or take turns at the playground, to take their feet off the seats on the tram. Intense socialization is the name of the game – this is a city whose shared spaces are spotless not least because everyone enforces the rules. So children (and dogs) can be taken to restaurants and use the *U-Bahn* alone.

Teens still stay out until 4 a.m. (as a parent,

that can be scary). But I'm not too worried. My kids will learn how to handle themselves. Vienna's salient characteristic, despite all the complaining, is that in important ways, it never changes. The writer Alfred Polgar once said: "*Ich muß über diese Stadt ein vernichtendes Urteil abgeben: Wien bleibt Wien.*" (I must pronounce upon this city a devastating judgement: Vienna remains Vienna.)

The touristy streets may be sprinkled with quinoa-and-kale mongers, but the next booth sells roast chestnuts, and at the *Heuriger*, people have their *Rostbraten* at long green tables and, with former Mayor Michael Häupl, drink their white wine spritzers out of glass mugs. At the Staatsoper, standing room is €4. And in the yellowing coffeehouses of the Würstelprater, the comfy mess and throwback scruffiness are lovingly neglected.

Vienna never changes – it's *gemütlich* here. My Chinese/WASP-y upbringing bumped hard against the Viennese ethos. But, as for Häupl, it was no contest: *Man bringe den Spritzwein.* ☺

PHOTOS: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MINI&ME; WIEN BEI CLIP; UNPUSH