

## "Wien, du Stadt meine Traume"

Vienna is certainly a city of dreams when you consider the amazing integrated transport system and the availability of subsidised housing in a capital city for all those earning less than 4000 Euros a month. London, eat your heart out! But Vienna is so much more - a beautifully planned city with all the main important buildings within easy walking distance of each other along the splendid Ringstrasse, not yet 150 years old but a wonderful testament to the city planning of Emperor Franz Josef to create a capital of an empire which was to collapse 50 years later during World War I.

Despite modern Vienna's pride in its new role as capital of a modern republic which hosts many international organisations and which is so often a meeting place for politicians from East and West, it still harks back to the past, and it is its past that offers so many delights to the tourists who flock here every year: the magnificent palaces, the art galleries and museums, the theatres and opera houses, the beautiful parks, and even the cemeteries. And after all that sightseeing, the weary tourist revels in the wonderful cafes and the coffee culture which is so much a part of this great city.



*Vienna from the Belvedere*

The people too are friendly and polite, offering up seats in the trams and helping with directions. Taxidivers are a source of information about the city. From an Egyptian, resident in the city for over 30 years, we heard how easy it had been for him to settle in and how good relations are between all the nationalities in the city except for those from the former Yugoslavia. From a more elderly driver we heard a vivid description of the crowds assembled in the Heldenplatz to listen to Hitler, "so dense that not even a mouse would fit in" and then in 1945, "nobody remembered anything". On the Kahlenberg, we met the owner of the Cobenzl restaurant, a former pilot, who was the proud owner of a bust of Princess Diana where he placed a fresh flower every day. He insisted on giving us a

tour of his garden which had hosted the Queen, Prince Andrew, Kofi Annan and many other notables who visited his restaurant to get the fine view of the whole of Vienna below, but Diana was his favourite.

From our base on Rennweg it was but few steps to the tram stop which whisked us into the centre of the city with speed and efficiency.



Our trip included a tour of the city where we learned of its history from an excellent local guide, a visit to Schonbrunn palace, a cruise on the Danube in lovely sunny weather and a tour of a Schnapps distillery. Some went to the opera, some to concerts of Mozart and Strauss, some to an Austrian evening at the Rathaus and some to the Lipizzaner show. We all had different experiences but agreed that we had had a wonderful time in this charming city. Many thanks to Margaret and her team for arranging it.



Schonbrunn



On the Danube



At the Rathaus

**You can see some more pictures of our trip by clicking on the slideshow link.**