SIT SCHOOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAINING
STUDY ABROAD

Vienna, Budapest, and Belgrade: Comparative European Perspectives on Conflict and Democracy

COUNTRY OVERVIEW & PACKING GUIDELINES

Spring 2027

Country Overview: Austria

GENERAL INFORMATION

Austria is a small, highly developed Central European country of approximately nine million people, located at the crossroads of Western and Eastern Europe. It borders eight countries: Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein. Historically, Austria has functioned as a political, cultural, and economic bridge between German-speaking Europe, the Balkans, and Central and Eastern Europe—a role that remains visible in its diplomacy, migration patterns, and intellectual life.

Vienna, Austria's capital, has long been a center of diplomacy, international organizations, music, philosophy, and political thought. Today it hosts major international institutions including the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), making it a uniquely global city despite its relatively small size. Vienna consistently ranks among the world's most livable cities, but it is not a museum city—it is an active site of political debate, social change, and international engagement.

Austria is a federal parliamentary republic and a member of the European Union, the Schengen Area, and the Eurozone. It ranks highly on global indices related to quality of life, public safety, public transportation, healthcare access, and environmental protection. At the same time, Austrian politics—like much of Europe—reflect ongoing debates around migration, national identity, European integration, neutrality, and the rise of populist and far-right movements. These dynamics form an important backdrop for the academic themes of conflict, democracy, and governance explored in this program.

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Vienna is Austria's political, academic, and cultural hub. It is home to major universities, research institutes, cultural institutions, and a vibrant civil society sector. While the city often feels orderly and highly efficient, it is also intellectually lively and socially diverse. Students should expect a city that functions extremely well—but that also values rules, punctuality, and clear social boundaries. For students new to studying abroad, this combination will be both reassuring and challenging.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Vienna, Austria:
AVERAGE LOW/HIGH TEMPERATURES (°F)

FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
30/41	36/52	45/63	54/72

SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
55/70	46/59	38/48	30/41

Austria has a temperate continental European climate with four distinct seasons. Vienna lies in the Danube River Basin at relatively low altitude, while much of the rest of the country is mountainous with the Alps. Weather can change quickly, particularly in spring.

Both fall and spring semesters typically include cool mornings, warmer afternoons, and periodic rain. Snowfall is not unusual in Vienna in the winter. Students should plan for layered clothing and waterproof outerwear. While extreme weather is uncommon in Vienna, excursions to other regions (including alpine areas) may involve colder temperatures, wind, or snow. Sun exposure can be stronger than expected in spring, particularly during long days outdoors. Sunscreen, sunglasses, and hydration are important even when temperatures feel mild.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

During your time in the program you will learn more about the local customs and behavior in everyday interaction. There is no list of dos and don'ts; it's all about you becoming a good listener and observer. As a student on this program, you will have to learn, in addition to regional politics and history, how to listen to different arguments and narratives.

Austrian social norms tend to be more formal than in the United States, especially in public, academic, and professional settings. Politeness, punctuality, and respect for personal space are highly valued. Greetings typically involve direct eye contact,a brief verbal greeting, and possibly a handshake; physical familiarity with strangers is uncommon. Titles such as *Professor* or *Doctor* are still used in universities and formal settings.

Public behavior is generally restrained. Speaking loudly on public transportation, eating or drinking on public transportation, or ignoring basic rules (such as standing on the right side of escalators) can attract negative attention. These expectations are not meant to exclude newcomers but reflect a shared social commitment to order and consideration for others.

Political discussions can be direct and intellectually rigorous. Students may encounter viewpoints that differ sharply from U.S. discourse, particularly around neutrality, migration, or social policy. Listening carefully, asking questions, and avoiding quick judgments are essential skills for successful cultural engagement. You will encounter many different opinions and various explanations as related to the themes of the semester: conflict and democracy.

Dress norms are generally more formal than on many U.S. campuses. Even casual clothing in Vienna tends to be neat and understated. Students should expect occasions—academic events, conferences, seminars, concerts, receptions, and cultural outings—where more formal attire is appropriate.

Vienna is also famous for its ball season, which runs roughly from January through March. Traditional balls (e.g. university balls, professional association balls, or the Vienna Opera Ball) require formal evening dress: tuxedos or dark suits for men, and long evening gowns for women. Balls are an important part of the fabric and identity of Viennese society, so students should be aware of this cultural tradition.

Clothing in Austria—and in Europe more generally—is often more expensive than in the United States, especially for brand-name items. Students are encouraged to bring essential clothing with them, particularly items such as winter coats, comfortable shoes, and business casual wear as needed. That said, Vienna has several affordable and student-friendly clothing stores, including C&A and H&M, as well as other European chains that offer reasonably priced basics. Second-hand and vintage stores are also common in Vienna and can be a good option for both affordability and sustainability.

LOCAL DIET

Participating in the local food culture is a central aspect of daily life in country. Special or restricted diets may not always be fully understood by your host family if you are in a homestay, although they may have previously hosted a student with similar dietary restrictions. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture.

Meals in Austria are structured but flexible. Breakfast is usually light, lunch is traditionally the main meal, and dinner is often lighter than in the U.S., and served later. Austrian traditional cuisine includes meat, bread, dairy, and seasonal vegetables, but Vienna also offers extensive international food options. Vegetarian and vegan diets are common and manageable, especially in Vienna (though not as easy on our excursions). Gluten-free products are widely available in supermarkets, though selection may be more limited than in the U.S. Kosher and halal options exist but the former isrelatively limited and may require advance planning.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform the office of Student Health, Safety & Wellbeing prior to the start of your program (studenthealth@sit.edu).

We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is essential to having a successful study abroad experience.

SIT recommends you do research prior to departure about the health, safety, and security specifics of the country(ies) you plan to visit. Consult the U.S. Department of State website and search their Countries and Areas Archive for international travel information and current travel advisories for each country. Search the Center for Disease Control Traveler's Health page to see travel health notices and vaccine requirements and recommendations for any country(ies) you plan to visit.

SIT recommends doing research ahead of time to stay up to date on It will be critical that you educate yourself about the potential health and safety hazards that may exist in your areas of travel and make informed decisions about what preventative measures to take prior to departure. You should also reference the Health, Access, and Identity information on your program's webpage.

Austria is considered one of the safest countries in Europe. Violent crime is rare, and public transportation is safe and reliable. The most common risks students encounter are petty theft (such as pickpocketing) and bicycle-related accidents.

Austria has an excellent healthcare system. Doctors' offices, hospitals, and pharmacies (*Apotheken*) are widely available. Many pharmacists speak English and can advise on over-the-counter medications. Students using prescription medications should bring an adequate supply and a copy of the prescription; mailing prescription medication internationally is not permitted.

Austria has excellent access to sexual health services, and students should feel comfortable seeking care.

- Condoms are widely available at pharmacies (*Apotheken*), supermarkets, vending machines, and drugstores.
- Emergency contraception (the "morning-after pill", in Austrian German "die Pille danach") is available without a prescription at pharmacies.
- Birth control pills require a prescription from a doctor in Austria.

HIV prevention and care:

- PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis) is available at hospitals and emergency departments and must be started within 72 hours after potential exposure.
- PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) is legally available in Austria through specialized clinics and physicians, though access may require appointments and out-of-pocket payment.

Pharmacists in Austria are well trained and can provide confidential advice in English. SIT staff can assist students in locating appropriate clinics or services if needed. Students are encouraged to prioritize safe sex practices, understand local healthcare access early in the program, and seek support promptly if questions or concerns arise.

Emergency numbers:

- Police: 133
- Ambulance: 144
- Fire: 122
- General emergency (EU-wide): 112

The legal drinking age is 16 for beer and wine and 18 for spirits. Smoking is regulated, and indoor smoking is prohibited in most public places. Recreational drug use is illegal.

The U.S. Embassy in Vienna: https://at.usembassy.gov has useful information for American citizens.

Students receive detailed safety briefings during orientation and ongoing support throughout the program. If you have any questions, please reach out to the Student Health, Safety, & Wellbeing Team.
Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are updated throughout the semester if and when circumstances change. For information regarding safety and security, emergency communications, SIT policies, health and personal property insurance, and general program tips, please read the Safety, Security, and Health document and Student Handbook.

HOMESTAYS

As many SIT Study Abroad alumni will tell you, the homestay experience can be one of the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of the program. We hope you will come prepared for the experience and committed to moving beyond cultural immersion as you begin to question, distinguish, and analyze the host culture vis-à-vis your own culture and come to a deeper understanding of both.

Family structures vary in every culture. SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families, and your family may include a single mother of two small children or a large extended family with many people coming and going all the time. Additionally, please bear in mind that, in many countries, the idea of what constitutes a "home" may be different from what you expect. You will need to be prepared to adapt to a new life with a new diet, a new schedule, new people, and new priorities, and expectations.

Each program's homestay coordinator will be responsible for placing students in homestays. These placements are made first based on health concerns, including any allergies or dietary needs, to the extent possible. **Please note: in order to ensure the best fit for students and families, SIT may make final adjustments to homestay placements after student arrival in country. Therefore, SIT will not provide information about your homestay family before you depart for the program.**



We seek to foster increased cross-cultural understanding in students by immersing them in local culture through daily life in a new family and community. Students are expected to assume roles as family members, respecting and following host family norms around communications, visitors, and activities of daily living. SIT homestay students in Vienna receive breakfast every day and one dinner a week with their host family.

OTHER ACCOMMODATION

Students may also opt to stay in a student residence during their semester in Vienna. This will be organized and paid for by SIT. The student residence is located in a safe area of the city with convenient transportation options to the SIT Learning Center. No meals are included in this housing option, though students have access to a kitchen, nearby stores, and restaurant/café facilities in the student residence at their own cost.

Students should expect to share a hotel room or other accommodation with one or more students while on excursions to Budapest and Belgrade. There is usually an opening and a closing group dinner while on excursions, and other meals are at the students' own expense.

TRANSPORTATION

Austria has a highly developed public transportation system, with safe, fast and clean city transport and regional, long distance, and international trains. Vienna airport is accessible by public transportation (trains and airport buses). Vienna has one of the most efficient public transportation systems in Europe, including subways (U-Bahn), trams, and buses. Most students rely entirely on public transport and walking. Monthly student passes are affordable and cover the entire city. Taxis are available, and the Uber app works. Students will be provided with monthly transportation passes to cover public transit within the city of Vienna. We recommend that you download and use the apps for the Austrian state railways: ÖBB Scotty and Vienna public transportation: Wien Mobil.

COMMUNICATION

While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the term abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, and changing program activities can complicate communication.
It's important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the term. Many students recommend making an appointment to call home or to receive a call. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion.

Visit our Contact & Communication page for practices on program communication, emergency communication, and home institution communication.

PHONES AND INTERNET

Cell Phone Policy

As part of SIT's commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working cell phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls, including a data plan so that your phone is operational when you are away from wi-fi. If needed, during orientation SIT staff can assist students in purchasing a local SIM card and acquiring minutes for calls and texting. Failure to maintain a working phone capable of making and receiving calls/texts will be considered a conduct violation and a breach of our student code.

Students are encouraged to balance staying in touch with family and friends at home while engaging fully in local life. Time-zone differences (6 hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Time) require advance planning for calls.

Austria uses GSM / LTE / 5G networks compatible with most U.S. phones.
Voltage: 230V / 50Hz
Outlets: Type C and Type F (two round pins)
A plug adapter is required. Most modern electronics are dual-voltage—check labels carefully.
Local SIM cards and eSIMs are widely available. Major providers include:

- A1: https://www.a1.net
- Magenta: https://www.magenta.at
- Drei (3): https://www.drei.at
- Free Wi-Fi is common in universities, cafés, and public spaces. The SIT Learning Center has free high speed Wi-Fi available for you at all times.

MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package here in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive** and **problematic**. Customs agents must inspect all packages and you, as the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. In addition, there are cases of items being lost in the mail or taking so long to reach the recipient that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged. Mailing prescription medication abroad is illegal.

For this program, **DHL, FedEx, and UPS services are available to ship to Austria**. Despite cheaper prices, reliance on the US Postal Service is not advised due to delays and unreliability. When given the option, it is always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package.

SHOPPING

Shopping hours in Austria may feel restrictive to U.S. students. Most shops in Vienna:

- Close earlier in the evening than in the U.S.,often by 6:00–7:00 pm
- Close earlier on Saturdays, usually at noon
- Are closed on Sundays by law

On Sundays, only limited retail options are available. Students can buy food and basic necessities at:

- Supermarkets located at major train stations (e.g., Wien Hauptbahnhof, Wien Mitte)
- Some gas stations
- Small convenience shops in transportation hubs

In addition, Austrian law restricts the sale of certain items (including alcohol) during late hours and on Sundays, so students should plan grocery shopping ahead of time for the weekends.

MEASURING UNITS

Austria uses the metric system, which differs from U.S. units:

- 1 kilogram (kg) ≈ 2.2 pounds
- 1 liter (L) ≈ 0.26 gallons
- Temperature is measured in Celsius (20°C ≈ 68°F)

Helpful conversion app: Convert Units: https://www.unitconverters.net

USEFUL APPS FOR VIENNA

Public transport (official): https://www.wienerlinien.at/web/wl-en
City information: https://www.wien.gv.at/english/
Maps & navigation: https://maps.google.com
Ride-hailing: https://www.uber.com
Rail travel: https://www.oebb.at

MONEY

In addition to tuition, SIT Study Abroad program fees cover rooming costs throughout the program. SIT will cover daily commuting costs through a Vienna monthly transit pass and excursions that are part of the normal program itinerary. During the ISP/Internship period, students will continue to receive their transit pass and rooming costs in Vienna will be paid for by SIT. **Any domestic or international travel, interpretation services, or supplies necessary for the ISP are the students' responsibility**. Please plan accordingly.

Austria uses the Euro (EUR). Official exchange rates can be checked at: https://www.ecb.europa.eu and http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/.

ATMs are widely available, and debit/credit cards are accepted almost everywhere. Austria is highly cashless, and mobile payment systems such as Revolut and contactless cards are common. Prices in Austria include value-added tax (VAT)—the price you see is the price you pay. Tipping is modest compared to the U.S.: about 10% in restaurants or rounding up in cafés and taxis.

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. If you do not inform these companies that you will be away, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. You should also check on costs of cash withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes be very expensive. Renewing and receiving reissued credit and debit cards while on the program will be an expensive and highly inconvenient process. Before you leave for your program, please check the expiration dates on your cards to ensure that they will not expire while you are abroad. It is also very important that you make photocopies of all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen.

Following are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for textbooks, ISP/Internship-related expenses, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Individual spending habits vary widely and **these costs are averages**.

A suggested total amount of personal spending money to budget ranges from US$2,700 to $3,700. To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical semester at your home school and consider any exceptional expenditures you may have on the program, including travel costs for your planned ISP or a specific personal expense.

Please budget approximately:

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	1,500-2,500 USD
Books, printing, supplies, phone:	150 USD
Up-front medical costs:	500 USD
Potential ISP/Internship expenses:	250 USD
Visa:	300 USD
Typical Internet WiFiusage:	mostly free
Estimated total:	$2,700 - $3,700 USD

Please note that up-front medical costs can vary widely. Though you are completely covered by SIT's travel insurance Blue Cross Blue Shield, which you can read more about on our Participant Insurance page, you still may need to pay up-front for medical care and then file for reimbursement.

VISITORS AND FREE TIME

SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that visits are scheduled for dates after the formal conclusion of the program. Students will not be excused from program components to attend to visitors. See the Attendance and Participation Policy.

If a visitor does come while a program is in progress, they must plan their own independent accommodations; SIT Study Abroad homestay families can accommodate only their assigned student and, due to cultural and contractual understandings with SIT, should not be asked to host students' guests.

INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

Please read our full Independent Travel policy for our definition, guidelines and how to access our independent travel notification form. Please note that independent travel is only allowed during program free time and students will not be excused from program activities to travel.

SIT is not responsible for any costs of student independent travel including logistics, preparations, cancelation fees, change fees, and any other costs associated with independent travel. We highly recommend you wait to book any independent travel until AFTER arriving on program and receiving the final academic schedule from your program.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments, even during the ISP. Free time for pursuing an independent interest or hobby during the program will be limited. Your admissions counselor can advise you about particular interests you may have. For example, if you must keep in shape for your next athletic season, or if you play a musical instrument and want to know whether to bring it, we can help you to understand your schedule and any concerns or limitations that may exist.

CODE OF CONDUCT AND POLICIES

SIT maintains a Code of Conduct and clear institutional policies regarding student behavior through a commitment to mutual learning and respect for others. Visit the policy page for detailed policies around academic integrity, alcohol and drug use, anti-harassment and non-discrimination, attendance and participation, credit hours, equal education opportunities, grading, housing, independent travel, prohibited activities, religious holiday observance, sexual harassment and misconduct, and withdrawal among others.

Packing Guidelines

LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number of bags and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad. We recommend a small daypack, which will also be useful for short study visits when on the program.

If carrying prescription medications, you should carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit. (Please see the “General Health Tips” section in the Safety, Security, and Health pre-departure document.)

Please check the current requirements of the Transportation Security Administration (http://www.tsa.gov) as well as those of the airline on which you are flying for domestic and international baggage restrictions.

CLOTHING GUIDELINES

See the Packing List below.

EQUIPMENT

If you are one the ISP track, you may need to use a handheld voice recorder for interviews, so bring one if you have it, or plan to use the application on your smartphone. You can purchase one in Vienna, but it can be more expensive than in the US.

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is highly recommended that you bring a laptop computer. If you bring a laptop, the computer will be your personal property and responsibility. It is recommended that you insure your computer, smartphone, or other valuables for full coverage in the event of loss or theft (SIT insurance does not cover personal property).

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters. http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/.

GIFTS

As you might imagine, it is best to be prepared with a gift to offer your homestay family in gratitude for their hospitality and as a means to share a part of your culture with them. We suggest one or two gifts that the whole family can enjoy. You may also wish to consider gifts for people outside your homestay family. Try to choose gifts that represent you or the part of the country and/or community you live in. Think about what your city, state, or local artisans produce. Draw upon your personal interests or hobbies for ideas. Pack a couple of small gifts for children, such as small games, bubbles, or a Frisbee. Even if your homestay family does not have small children, chances are that you will engage with children in your homestay community. Once you are on the program and learn more about the local culture, you will discover other ways to thank your family. Remember to bring pictures of your friends and family to share. Former students have recommended calendars, picture books, postcards, music, or souvenirs from your college bookstore as gifts.

ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or ask an alumni contact: https://studyabroad.sit.edu/admissions-aid/application-process/contact-a-former-student/.

Don’t miss the Packing List on the next page!

Packing List

These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your center director.

GENERAL CLOTHING

- 2–4 pairs pants or jeans
- 1 skirt and/or dress
- 5–6 mixed long and short-sleeved t-shirts
- 2–3 blouses or button-down shirts
- 1 nice outfit (business casual) suitable for a conference or professional event (bring more business casual outfits suitable for wearing in an office if you are planning to do an internship).
- Lightweight clothes including pants, long-sleeved shirts, light T-shirts
- Underwear and socks (10-day supply)
- Warm pajamas or sleepwear
- Slippers or flip flops (for use inside house. Flip flops not recommended for use outdoors because of the cobblestone sidewalks and roads.)
- 1 pair comfortable sneakers
- 1 pair nice shoes
- Sweater/s
- Jacket or fleece
- Scarf
- Gloves
- Winter hat
- Bathing suit
- Rain gear (waterproof jacket, poncho, or umbrella)
- Optional – workout clothes

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of your visa
- 2 passport photos
- Proof of COVID vaccination (encouraged, not required)
- Any relevant vaccine records/documents

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Adequate supply of any medications you use regularly
- Small first aid kit for travel
- Extra eyeglasses and/or contact lenses
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Hat or baseball cap (for sun protection)

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Medium-sized day pack (for day trips and use on excursions)
- Small, quick-drying towel
- Flashlight
- Umbrella
- German/English dictionary
- Reusable water bottle
- Small luggage lock
- Laptop computer (please insure it)
- Students are encouraged to bring a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector