

## Four Vienna walks nobody ever does

As my friends will tell you, I like to do things differently. When people zig, I zag. And so with walking, I am keen to explore lesser-known tracks, wherever I am. One of the satisfying aspects of snowfall, is that normal paths in parks or any open space become invisible, and you can see how people adopt new routes to negotiate the space... and you can even follow them.

In Vienna, when people want to make a walk, they usually head for nearby forests, lakes or at least large parks. This reflects the attitude that walking in their hometown is simply a way to get to the shops or to meet friends. It is not viewed as a fun thing to do in itself, but as a practical means of transport. This is a shame. I have always preferred urban to rural walking, because there is more theatre and people and possibilities.

So here are my four recommendations for roads (and routes) less travelled. It is not strictly true that nobody makes these walks, since I have done three of them, but it is likely that few people do them in a year. It will give you something to tell your colleagues and friends on Monday morning, when they ask how your weekend was. To me this is the key to a life well lived - that you have good and ideally slightly odd stories to tell people on Monday mornings. This is in contrast to my wife who is a world-class moocher. *Mooching* is that Sunday lifestyle thing of waking up late, eating some biscuits, taking a long bath, calling your mum, having a snooze, reading a magazine, watching some boring tv, tidying some cupboards, baking a cake for dinner and then realising it is bedtime.

Here is my response to mooching partners. One Saturday morning, just close your front door and wander off in a new direction, until you are completely lost. Without a map. After all, you won't be lost for long. And if you are, so what? Or even more fun, ask your child to boss you around the public transport system, so that they control where you go - ideally using a mix of transport forms, and then wherever you end up, walk home, with adventures along the way. The less familiar they are with the map and lay-out of the city, the more fun this game is.

Just as people in restaurants too often order something they know and love, there is a tendency to make walks you know and like. Don't. We all need new stories to tell, and to explore the city in unexpected ways. On the longest day of this year, we invited all kinds of Viennese to walk through every Vienna district in one day. 31 people made the 10 hour walk, from 9 different countries, and celebrated a new way of looking at the city, and how it fits together, all the while telling stories and making new friends. Do the same in your town.

For those who want a little more structure, here are 4 walks to try (and they could easily apply to any big city in the world, by the way):

1. Schwechat airport to my flat in Leopoldstadt, north central Vienna. (7 hours, with 3 kebabs on the way). I had waved goodbye to my wife as she flew out to South Africa to cover the build-up to the 2010 football World Cup. I felt a bit lonely (it was 6.40am and not yet light on a January morning) and decided to walk it off. I had a rough idea where the city was (Vienna's only airport is not in the city, and indeed not even in the town of Schwechat, east of the city and about half way to the Slovak frontier - and the former iron curtain). Walking around airports is not generally encouraged, and it took me a moment to find my way out of the complex. But then it was a chilled walk through fields of deer and frost, and on past the astonishing welcome to Vienna that is the OMV oil refinery.

Many people arrive into the city anticipating a fairytale, waltzing chocolate cake of a city, and then have this vision smashed to pieces by their first glimpse of the city after the airport: a macho, belching architecture of pipes and fire.

In common with most European cities, Vienna's south east is the poorest part of town (due to prevailing winds, the dirtiest and smelliest areas, when factories were based in the centre of large metropolises). But the Zentralfriedhof cemetery is a refreshing burst of green - containing more dead people than are alive today in the city, including Beethoven and Falco. From there, I headed up to the Danube Canal, and snaked alongside that up to my flat, third kebab in hand.

2. Walking the city limits, across six Saturdays. This is the walk I have not made, but is the subject of a 2015 book by Wolfgang Freitag (*Wo Wien Beginnt, Where Vienna starts*). 136km works out well divided into six walks. And since Vienna features so many good vineyards producing the tart Gruener Veltliner white wine, along its city limits, there will always be plenty of good cheer on such a stroll.

3. Karmelitermarkt (Leopoldstadt) to Viktor Adler Markt (Favoriten). Street markets have become cool in the last 15 years in much of Europe. This walk connects two of Vienna's best known open-air food stores. Karmelitermarkt is a place to see and be seen, to drink good coffee, and pay a lot of money for obscure apples and slow food. It is open for just 6 hours, twice a week (6am-Midday, Fri-Sat). The rest of the time there is nothing on that asphalt, and yet the district is hip because of those 12 hours. I live on top of the market and watch the sad Zen state of the space when it has no apples or coffee. So I wander off to livelier neighbourhoods. The stroll takes just 46 minutes, but transports you to another side of Vienna, more edgy and real and much less Viennese. But the start is to cross off the island I live on, with parts of the Danube flowing by on every side, into the historic inner city, and past Stephansdom cathedral. Then up past the diplomatic quarter, and Franz Ferdinand's former home, now the Belvedere Museum, containing Klimt's Kiss, to the shiny and slightly dull new main railway station.

This marks the most noticeable boundary, separating the fourth district, with much of ORF's classy radio output produced around the corner, and Favoriten, the poorest, most crime-ridden, densely-populated of Vienna's 23 boroughs. Tram number 6 is affectionately dubbed the *Orient Express* by locals, since it rides from Westbahnhof down through mostly Balkan-populated districts to a mainly Turkish terminus, just like the legendary train ride. And at the heart of the action is Viktor Adler Markt. Always loud, full of great smells, inexpensive and great fun. And oddly, the venue for an annual landmark speech by the head of FPÖ, the most popular party in Austria right now, which preaches intolerance and blames 'outsiders' for the country's troubles. As the produce and languages on the market demonstrate, Vienna was always a crossroads, despite what the far-right parties want us to believe.

4. The Most urban Vienna gets: from St Marx to Albener Hafen. On this route, you see almost no people, but plenty of filmic architecture. As I already mentioned, I am keen to refresh the way people see Vienna. This is Europe's fastest-growing city, with perhaps the highest quality of life in the world, and yet the story visiting journalists want to tell is typically about balls, Mozart and Freud. Vienna is judged as having more past than present. We need new stories to tell. And so I have kept my favourite walk til last. We start at the odd-sounding St Marx complex, a former slaughterhouse slowly turning into a media hub. From here you see Austria's busiest road, the elevated motorway linking Prague and Budapest. Underneath it are the striking T-Mobile HQ, a mostly empty, abandoned meat market and the grimmest of welcomes to Vienna, its international bus station. It is mostly an

open air toilet, with no light, warmth or food. Moving north west you find the radical Arena venue, full of graffiti and good music, and then see some gasometers turned into flats, amid cottages and gardens. Next to the Danube Canal are some huge towers making electricity, and, once the canal opens up into the main flow of the river again, you hit the photogenic Albener harbour, with mighty silos and square cranes. Recommended.