

EDITION 1 february 2003

gay europe guide

Special issue

Oh Vienna...

An intoxicating mix of
pride and passion

- Sleepless in Amsterdam
- Rome – the Eternal City
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London and Manchester





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*Fancy a waltz with a dashing Viennese?
Or a first date at Vienna's State Opera?
Here the culture's as rich as the coffee.*



oh VIENNA!

Vienna means many things to a lot of people, even if they haven't visited Austria's august and stately capital. For some, it's the birthplace of psychoanalysis, or the natural home of the waltz, or it's where you'll see the lion's share of Gustav Klimt's work. Located on what is probably the world's most romantically envisioned river, the not-so-blue Danube, the former seat of the Hapsburg Empire even has the unique cachet of having a hot drink named after it.

For a relatively compact European city (population: 1.6 million), Vienna's reputation exceeds itself. The Wien Staatsoper – the Vienna State Opera – is, along with the Met and La Scala, a must on any prima donna's list, and no wonder. Past artistic directors include Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss.

Then there's the bad press that Austria in general has had to weather; a highly individualistic and elitist culture that gave imperial England a run for its money in terms of expansionism and subjugation. A slyly manoeuvring empire, literally at the crossroads of Europe, whose dominion losses became the catalyst for a world war, not to mention its complicity with, and gross underestimation of, Hitler's Nazism. Anschluss, anyone? Result: the extermination of more than 70,000 (mostly Viennese) Jews in the Second World War, not to mention other ethnic minorities and “undesirables” such as homosexuals.

Since those terrible twin peaks however, the Republic Of Austria has managed to squeeze itself into



Pride and passion ... Vienna can easily lay claim to the title 'Paris of the east'.

respectable political shape, enabling its shining jewel of a capital to stake a sizeable claim on the European stage. Vienna, Budapest and Prague have all vied for the ubiquitous “Paris of the east” moniker, but the former's case has been helped immeasurably by the fact that it managed to avoid the (now) highly unfashionable Iron Curtain. While the eastern bloc was busy erecting concrete bunkers and dull-as-dishcloth socialist squares, Vienna was busy passing a law for “eternal neutrality”, re-galvanising its reputation in the fields of fine arts,

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Vienna. Delightfully Queer.

Vienna is known for its waltzes and arts, for tasty apple strudel and grandiose architecture. Only too often do people forget about the queer life and history of the city. The local community claims the architects of the State Opera and Franz Schubert as gay historic celebrities and the Life Ball is the most exhilarating queer charity event in Europe. Whether you want the gaudy nostalgia of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, inspiring art nouveau from the 19th century or hip events of today: Vienna waits for you.

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for you*

architecture and music, and becoming a third centre for the United Nations.

Today, autonomous Wien doesn't play second fiddle to anyone or anything – including the country which surrounds it. The Viennese generally consider themselves removed from the rest of Austria in the same way as Parisians are Parisians first and French second. In this city, the wearing of furs never went out of fashion. Conservative values are still fairly dominant, no doubt helped along by a strong Roman Catholic tradition. Ergo, Vienna is a strange and alluring dialectic of old and new, conservative and modern, classical and avant garde.

The Vienna Regenbogen (Rainbow) Parade, held each year on Vienna's Ringstrasse, draws a crowd of around 60,000. It's a motley cavalcade of floats, motorbikes and people, and the parade inevitably ends with everyone waltzing in the street.

But the Rainbow Parade is by no means the only social event on the gay and lesbian calendar. With a gay liberation movement that is roughly 20 years old, and a commercial scene half that age, there is still lots to see and do at other times of the year. Vienna just wouldn't be the birthplace of Johann Strauss without a ball, and queers are well-catered for with two such annual events.

The Life Ball, held every May in city hall with fashion shows and international performers, is a must in every party poof's social register. On the other hand, the Rainbow Ball, held every February, is a classical black-tie Viennese ball complete with ballroom dancing.

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Vienna's bar and club scene is small and intimate, with about 30 venues catering to most tastes. Although a kind of ghetto exists around Neubaugasse, south-west of the centre, it is by no means exclusive and many venues – including Vienna's five gay saunas – are sprinkled throughout the city. If you're after some Lederlust try Eagle, Vienna's only leather bar. Ring the doorbell and you'll be admitted to a warren-like establishment with enough nooks and crannies to keep the most cynical traveller bug-eyed with wonder.

A unique feature of this history-laden city is its thriving cafe culture, and gay coffee houses are no exception. Ever since the Turks invaded Austria in the 16th century – bringing a strange and stimulating brew with them – Vienna has been coffee crazy. The Viennese do high



Gustav Klimt "Death and Life" 1911, © Leopold Museum.

culture well and they're more than a little proud of it. Many queers here are dismissive of bars and clubs, preferring the gentility of cafes and restaurants – where the art of conversation is alive and well – or the tradition of theatre and live music.

Try Café Willendorf, where ingenious vegetarian fare is served with caffeine and alcohol. (This venue also houses Rosa Lila Tip – the gay and lesbian information centre and library.) Not to be missed is Santo Spirito in the city centre, a raucously chic Mediterranean restaurant with a mixed clientele where arias from Carmen and the like are blasted out at 90 decibels till well after midnight.

If you've got the schillings, book well ahead for a night at the State Opera or try one of the many reduced-ticket outlets to see a symphony in the baroque splendour of the Musikverein.

Art galleries also abound. The monolithic Kunsthistorisches Museum has the largest Bruegel collection outside the Netherlands, as well as many works by Dutch and Italian masters. Head to the Upper Belvedere Palace for works by Austrian legends Klimt (here you'll find *The Kiss*), Oskar Kokoschka and Egon Schiele. Die-hard fans of Klimt shouldn't miss the gold-domed Secession building where you'll find his stunning Beethoven Frieze, painted in response to Ludwig's 9th symphony.

Wandering through Sigmund Freud Park (neurotic queen that I am), I fail to locate the Penis Envy Memorial Corner, but I do see the lace-like spires of the neo-Gothic Votivkirche poking through the fog before me like twin candlesticks. Although I know it is silent, the ghosts of last night's concert swirl around still, entreating me to hum a few mellifluous bars. Do I hear a waltz? ★

*Text: Tony Magnusson. Reprinted courtesy of (not only) blue magazine.
Photos: Vienna Tourist Board*

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PHOTO: WWW.CHRISGEARY.COM

european calendar of 2003 events

March 15 – 22

European Gay Ski Week, Club Med Alpe d'Huez, Grenoble www.alternative-holidays.com

May 24

Life Ball, Vienna www.lifeball.org

June 20 – 29

Pride Celebrations, Oslo, Norway www.skeivedager.no

June 2003

Pride Celebrations, Rome www.mariomiel.com

June 28

Pride Celebrations, Paris www.fiertes-lgbt.org

June 28

Rainbow Parade, Vienna www.pride.at

June 28

Pride Celebrations, Berlin www.csd-berlin.de

July 30 – August 3

Pride Celebrations, Stockholm www.interpride.org

July 31 – August 3

Pride Celebrations, Amsterdam www.amsterdampride.nl

August 8 – 9

Pride Celebrations, Reykjavik www.interpride.org

August 15 – 25

Europride, Manchester www.manchester.mardigras.com

Date TBA 2003

London Mardi Gras www.london.mardigras.com

October 24 – 26

Vienna in Blac www.lmc-vienna.at



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cor blimey, guv!

There's nothing like a local to take you on a whirlwind tour of old London town.

Call me biased, but I happen to think London is the greatest city in Europe. It's certainly the biggest, and although Paris may come a close second in terms of attractions, they... well, how do I put this politely? They all speak French! And I was too lazy in school to learn the language.

London also easily boasts the best gay scene than any of its European counterparts – rivalling New York and San Francisco. Unless you stay only in your hotel and venture out no further than the nearest Walkabout (a charming Aussie chain of bars that we're so grateful you imported over here...), it would be impossible to have a dull time. Just bring plenty of money, because it can be pricey.

Flying in from the southern hemisphere? You'll touch down at Heathrow airport. Don't be tempted to take the Heathrow Express. Not only does it cost a lot, but it only takes you to Paddington, which is probably not near anywhere you want to go. Catch the tube instead (www.londontransport.co.uk).

Talking of which, don't even try to make sense of the tube. Make sure you pick up a map (investing £5 in an A-Z from any newsagent or station kiosk would be even better) and prepare to queue with all the other tourists for tickets. Alternatively, ask someone who looks like they live local – we don't bite.

If you want to get straight into town and track down some English homosexuality, head for Old Compton Street in the heart of Soho, itself in the heart of London's West End. Gay bars like Comptons, Village Soho, Admiral Duncan and the recently launched G.A.Y Bar are always busy, as is Balans Café or restaurant. You can also pick up local gay mags with listings.

You wanna see the tourist sites? Although pricey, those tourist buses are the most comfortable way of seeing Central London's sites. If you've got the energy, most sites are within walking distance. Always worth a visit are Piccadilly Circus (the one with all the neon signs), Leicester Square, the Houses of Parliament, the British



Man about town ... it's impossible for London to be dull.

Museum, Buckingham Palace (if the Queen's in then the flag will be flying at full mast), and the London Eye. The latter is the huge ferris wheel on the south bank, which was opened to mark the millennium, and affords incredible views of the city. However, be prepared to queue as it's extremely popular. Check out the excellent www.londontown.com for more details of all the touristy stuff.

An alternative and enjoyable way of seeing London is to make your way to Embankment station, next to the Thames. Catch one of the river cruises, which takes you to Greenwich and back, and past many famous London sites. Greenwich itself is also well

worth a visit (Greenwich mean time – GMT – is where the world measures its clocks from ... see how us English cling to whatever global influences we still exert!). There's the historic Greenwich observatory, a great market and lots of interesting little shops.

By the way, annoying native Londoners is ridiculously simple. Just walk at a snail's pace along the pavements, stopping often to admire the architecture around you. It's even better if you do this on crowded areas such as Oxford Street. If you're in a group, then make sure you all walk side-by-side to block the pavement. To put yourself at maximum risk of physical violence, stand on the left side



Camden market in north London is huge and very busy. You can wander round the stalls, enjoy a pint in local gay bar The Black Cap, or take a barge ride around the north London canal system.

of the escalator when descending the tube station. It drives us bonkers.

Due to our antiquated licensing laws, most bars shut at 11pm, but things are loosening up and some bars now stay open later. However, it's probably because of such laws that we have such a great club scene.

If you want to hit the big weekend clubs, head for G.A.Y (famous for the star PAs from the likes of Kylie, Westlife, S Club 7 and assorted ex-Spice Girls...), Heaven, Popstaz or new-kids-on-the-block Crash or Action. The latter two are both in Vauxhall (just south of the river) and are packed to the gills with Muscle Mays. XXL, in the Dickensian area of London Bridge, is Europe's biggest bear club – attracting up to 1,000 hirsute and hairy buggers every Saturday night.

If you want small and quirky clubs, head for Shinky Shonky, Duckie, the Ghetto (opened six months ago and ridiculously hip at the moment), or Queer Nation at SubStation. There's around 100 gay bars scattered across London – pick up local newspaper *Boyz* for further details.

Filth? There's plenty of saunas (Chariots in Shoreditch is by far the biggest and best), and many cruise clubs have backrooms. It's not really legal, but no gay club's been raided in many years. However, none of them are in the West End, so you'll have to venture further afield. Recommended sleaze clubs include The Hoist and the once-a-monther Sleaze.

The Candy Bar in Soho is the hangout for London's dyke community, while venues

such as the Vespa Lounge, First Out Café and the Glass Bar also have women-only sessions.

Outside the West End, do make a point of venturing into the East End, with its many cockney markets, or the more upmarket West London, around Notting Hill and Portobello Road. On Sundays, Camden market in north London is huge and very busy.

You can wander round the stalls, enjoy a pint in local gay bar The Black Cap, or take a barge ride around the north London canal system. Pick up *Time Out* from a newsagent, which is the London listings magazine. It carries details of shows, exhibitions, cinema, shopping and markets (www.timeout.com/london/). ★

Text: David Hudson. Photos: British Tourist Authority. David Hudson is the editor of Boyz, the UK's weekly gay magazine. See www.boyz.co.uk for weekly updates on London's clubland.



Cruising Canal Street

Many Mancunian moons ago, the gay village in Manchester consisted of only two pubs: The Rembrandt and The Union. Today, the village is recognised as the UK's second liveliest scene, with new bars such as Bar Below and Barr Barr rubbing shoulders with the old gang.

The Rembrandt is one of Canal Street's oldest gay venues and, unlike many of its newer neighbours, remains a male domain. The Rembrandt attracts an older crowd out for a booze and a cruise. Open until 1am on Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Manto, also on Canal Street, is where Manchester's queer clubbers come up before moving on. The thumping tunes attract a mixed mob out for a mental time. In nearby Richmond Street, Company attracts leather chaps in leather chaps. Cruise across the car park toward Major Street and you'll spot Cruz 101. A members only club (you can become a member on the door or via the net), Cruz sells itself as a safe gay space. Around the corner in Princess Street is Mutz Nutz. A somewhat schizophrenic space, with an indie room and a pop-trash room. Expect an unpretentious pissed mix. But be warned. The in-between alcove produces a cacophony that will make your brain bleed.

Manchester's newest dance space, Essential, operates a door policy that ensures 80 per cent of its customers are gay. And whether in the upstairs bar, or down below on the main floor, they boogie down and whoop it up. As kicking as it gets. Churns out the choonz till 4am. For a quieter time of it head to Gigai. Situated in Sackville Street, Gigai is the perfect place to flake out. With ambient sounds and swanky sofas, acting laid back couldn't be easier. ★

*Text: Courtesy of OutUK.com
Photo: Marketing Manchester.
For more info, visit www.shortbreaks.destinationmanchester.com/lesbianandgay*



Rome in summer is a city with sex on its mind.
You can feel it, see it, smell it, and taste it.
Thank God the Vespas drown out the fifth sense!



Roman holiday

The minute I got off the plane at Leonardo da Vinci airport into the 30 degree heat of a Roma summer's day, I was seduced like the first time a man kissed me.

Rome is the most sexed city I've ever been in. And I mean sexed and not sexy. Sexy to me still lies in the beholder. By sexed, I mean that sex is innately part of the makeup of something, something the sexed object can't avoid being and something no-one who comes within a coin's toss of the object is in any doubt about.

Okay, so I'm talking Roma central here, having no experience of the suburbs (except when I get lost on a foray on a Vespa). And I am talking high summer here. I've been told that in winter, Rome can be about as changeable, cold and dreary as Melbourne, and maybe the sex drains out of it, too.



Sex, the pleasure of it, the surprise of it, the danger of it, to me is the ether of the city's communication. It crackles like static in glances. There are days I can just reach out a hand into the naked air and grab handfuls of it. It's the warp and woof of the linen suits that hang languidly on its men. It's the black of sunglasses. It's the tailored white jackets and stilettos of the parking cops on the Campo di Fiori. The gaping mouths of zucchini flowers. The red bliss bombs of cherry tomatoes. It's the growling of a herd of Vespas throttled at a traffic light. The white buttocks (arse is too banal a word) and biceps and thighs and cocks and breasts of its fountains that draw your hand to cup and smooth their coolness. It's the bare feet and ankles listlessly stirring the pools of water spilling profusely from

Imperial grandeur ... Rome's fountain and piazzas are a focus for life and love.



I love buying a bag of tomatoes or figs and wandering around Rome dipping into them, having them burst in my mouth like the surprise of finding a new square and a new fountain.



the mouths of the dolphins in the Piazza di Spagna. It's the young carabinieri with their uzis, peaked black caps and black trousers with a thin red line down the outside seam – and are they really that young, or am I just doing a Maurice Chevalier in *Gigi*? It's an artichoke in the Jewish style, deep-fried crisp outer leaves and a soft, fleshy melting heart.

Goethe in his Italian Journey said of Naples that living among such natural people one might become natural oneself. Well, maybe that's what it is about Roma for me, that being among such naturally sexed people, one might become sexed oneself. Oh, yeah, and there's all that old stuff, too. For one thing, no dog lover could fail to fall for a city whose foundation myth is about twin boys being suckled by a she-wolf.

My ultra favourite place in Rome is the Campo di Fiori, the marvellous market/piazza just off the Corso Vittorio Emanuele II and down from the Largo di Torre Argentina (where, by-the-by, is the only cat refuge I've come across, right there among the ruins, a range of moggies in various stages of disrepair but who all now get to rest, be fed and be safe, and pee happily – yes, the acrid smell can be almost violent in high summer).

I can think of nowhere I would rather spend my last years than at the Campo. The first time I saw the square with its fruit and vegetable market, its statue of Giordano Bruno, a homosexual heretic burned in the square, its cafes and trattorias, and its dogs happily licking at the water pouring in a steady flow from its public taps, I broke into the hugest smile, and it happens again and again as I go back there, no matter what time of day.



I love the morning before the stalls are set up, when the street-sweepers brush up the beer bottles and papers and cigarette stubs of the night before with their twig brooms they swoop in a curious sideways motion.

I love sitting sipping the first espresso of the day and chomping down on bread and soft cheese as the fruit and veg is un-crated, washed, chopped for salads or nonchalantly arranged just right to display its perfection. I love the cigarettes hanging from the lips as the salads are made.

I love buying a bag of tomatoes or figs and wandering around Rome dipping into them, having them burst in my mouth like the surprise of finding a new square and a new fountain. I love that fish and meat is sold here open to the dust and the heat, you just know you are devouring microbes and bacteria that are going to get your system's antibodies pumped and ready for the next round.

I love lunchtime over a glass of beer and a foccacia watching it all come down again, when some stallholder starts singing, others yell him down or shout encouragement, gypsies with child at hip are combing through the leftovers and the buskers start moving in. Then the drift into evening and the first white wine and crostini topped with roe and mayonnaise.

Finally, walk to Dittirambo, on Piazza della Cancelleria. I tried and went ecstatic over anchovy pudding with tomato, olives, fennel and radicchio; thin tagliatelle with a sauce of finely chopped vongoli and octopus in a fish broth; marinated octopus with lime, radicchio and red beans; carpaccio de spigola con marinata – sea bass carpaccio with marinated leeks and a corn salad and a desert of mandarin, plum and walnut sorbets in their respective shells.

Try the house white of grapes from vines on the outskirts of Roma. And wait till the city councils in Sydney see how close to the traffic you eat – you can shake hands with a Vespa just by reaching across the bay hedge. ★

*Text: Paul Van Reyk
Photos: Roma Turismo*

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sleepless in Amsterdam



Lazy afternoons, wild nights, and t-shirts to perplex the innocent: the pleasures of going Dutch.

Rembrandtplein is bustling. Some people catch the twinkling eye of a toe-tapping accordion player, who's entertaining diners outside one of the square's many bars. They smile as the tune he's playing registers. It's a sped-up, camped-up, Dutched-up version of New York, New York.

"Rembrandt must be spinning in his grave," a local bemoans as he scans the tourist-filled horizon.

I contemplate doing a little jig to the infectious strains of New York, New York; decide against it, and wander into a café. A few minutes pass while I try to work out whether I need to order at the counter or not. A staff member appears and starts chatting to me in Dutch. "Sorry," I say, "I only speak English." "Sure, no problem!" she smiles, "What would you like?"

'Sure, no problem' could be Amsterdam's tagline. It seems that, given any problem – anything at all – this city has it sorted. Streetwalkers giving the locals and tourists grief? Pop them in a shop window. Drug laws need reform? Sell

the softer ones over the counter. Lesbians and gay men discriminated against? Sanction same sex unions. Squatters who refuse to budge? Accept that they have rights too. The occasional cadaver found floating (with tell-tale open trousers) in a canal? Install appropriate receptacle on every popular corner to minimise the chances of (stoned, male) tourists drowning while relieving themselves.

Of course, Amsterdam's solutions to such "social problems" aren't perfect – but at least they try. The Dutch are known for their pragmatism as much as their progressiveness and these characteristics enhance the good times that are here to be had. The city is abuzz, with a sense of freedom that's palpable. Nothing is a problem ... and anything is possible.

The "gay capital of Europe" offers many a camp moment, and more. It's a beautiful, historic and happy place. I spent most of the weekend just walking around in a daze, breathing it in, soaking it up.

When I couldn't stand the blister-induced pain any longer, I sought a reprieve aboard a boat. I chose a middle of the range cruise, with pre-recorded commentary in Dutch and English.

Amsterdam is abuzz with a sense of freedom. The "gay capital of Europe" offers many a camp moment, and more. It's a beautiful, historic and happy place.

It was pleasant enough, and I disembarked knowing quite a bit about the city, thanks to the voice-on-tape.

Also de rigueur in Amsterdam is a visit to the red light district and a smoke or space cake. I didn't partake in either. The thought of gawking at the women offended my feminist sensibilities (even the guidebooks remind visitors that the red light district is not a zoo). The dope I can only enjoy on familiar turf, lest I pass out or do the paranoid thing.

Instead, I did the more standard versions of window-shopping and café hopping. In between walking and grazing, I marvelled at the glorious architecture, queued for the must-see museums, cruised the Vondelpark (aka "Fondelpark" because of the local propensity to get one's gear off during summer), rode the trams, watched the buskers in Dam Square and day-dreamed about staying for good.

Amsterdam's nightlife is of course wild, with gay bars, dance parties and squat parties galore, plus a very healthy leather scene. The city was recently voted "best dance city" in Europe, rating second in the world overall, after Miami. Amsterdam has a host of similar accolades, for a range of reasons. It has the "best airport" in the world, too.

Let's not forget the "world's first" memorial to persecuted gays and lesbians, the Homomonument. I took a moment to contemplate its quiet intensity, as a boat full of gay men passed by, busily capturing the moment on their camcorder.

Nearby, is the Pink Point of Presence – an information kiosk and souvenir shop that aims to increase gay and lesbian visibility. Not that this is at all necessary – the whole city is just teeming with poofs and dykes. I watched, bemused, as straight tourists look at the t-shirts on display, tilting their heads to the left and the right til they finally figure out what those graphics mean.

I explored the gay areas – Reguliersdwarsstraat, Amstel and Kerkstraat – and trekked over to Saarein, a lesbian café on Elandsstraat. Here, I giggled when my hummus dip landed on the table in the shape of a pair of breasts, with two black olives for the nipples. I smiled as the woman with the deep, sexy voice leant across me to light the candle on the table, for "a little bit of atmosphere". It was almost 10 o'clock, not even dark yet, and it felt like it never would be. ★

*Text: Vanessa McQuarrie
Photos: Netherlands Ministry
of Foreign Affairs*

***Rollin' along ... camp moments
abound in the land of windmills.***

