

Tour Bus – Confidential

From: Lars Larsson
To: Anne Michelsen, Tourism Director, Copenhagen
Date: 28 June 2023
RE: Vienna Visit

Here's my report on Vienna's new tourism strategy.

Our tour bus arrived at the Leopoldau ***Visitor Welcome Centre*** (one of six located at U-Bahn stations near major highways). We stepped off, passed through the disinfection tunnel (same as in airports) and entered a bright, comfortable and spacious entry hall. In the adjoining bus parking our driver could rest, shower and eat.

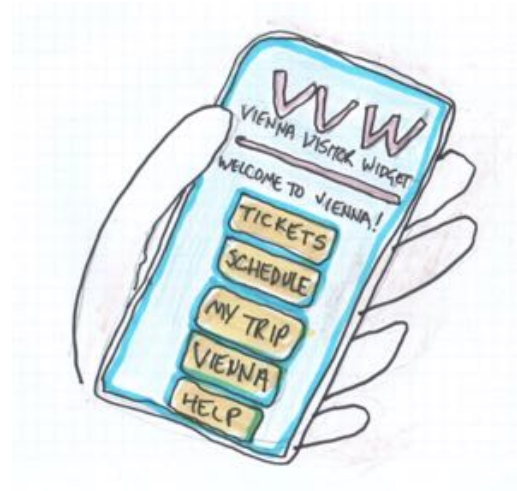
I'd already downloaded my ***Vienna Visitor Widget*** (VWV) at home, so I just scanned my phone and walked to U-Bahn for my trip to the Kunsthistorisches Museum. The VWV contained my ***visitor travel ticket***, tickets to my sightseeing attractions, virtual reality wayfinding directions, and my schedule. And, of course, it had plenty of other features like an information channel and shopping app to make my visit more fun.

Most of my fellow passengers had also downloaded their VWVs and went directly to their choice of transport (U-Bahn, shared bike, shared scooter, electric shuttle bus, or a nice walk). For the others, friendly guides were available to help explain the VWV, load it on phones, lend a device, and trouble shoot. Those who preferred a traditional tour were met by a guide and led to one of the electric shuttle buses.



The VVW is a smart phone application developed by Vienna's **Open City Platform**, itself part of the city's **Rotes Wien 21** program. Rotes Wien 21 is Vienna's plan for creating a healthy and sustainable city designed to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. Most of the OCP is designed for residents, but it also includes the VVW visitor function. Vienna was a leader in recognising that tourists – especially post Covid-19 – wanted to feel like part of the cities they visit not simply voyeurs.

This means the VVW encourages and helps visitors to use public transport, shared bikes and scooters, to explore neighbourhoods and eat at local restaurants, and guides them to the city's great attractions in small groups. All giving visitors an opportunity to take home the best travel memory – meeting a local.



My U-Bahn trip was perfect. The VVW guided me and told me when to get off. It must have been funny to hear Danish on the U-Bahn. The OCP provides free secure wireless internet service throughout the city so that the VVW was always online.

Wireless service is part of the **European City Web Services** cooperative, one of the first OCP projects. It's run like a utility providing the hardware and software for all types of web-based services including secure wireless. The cooperative actively encourages the development of open source applications (like the VVW). Several European cities worked together to develop the technology and today manage the system as a cooperative.



The VVW includes virtual reality wayfinding instructions and standard mapping of outdoor areas and inside buildings (like the U-Bahn stations and museums), but Vienna has also installed very clear wayfinding signs and information kiosks throughout the city. This means you don't always need to be looking at your phone as you walk around in the city.

I followed the clear wayfinding signs in the Karlsplatz U-Bahn station directing me to the right exit for my short walk to the KHM.



I was surprised when I looked across the Ringstrasse and saw the grassy piazza in front of the Staatsoper. On my last visit this had been grey pavement and diesel buses. Now there were pop-up cafes, some grass and people sitting around.

When I reached the KHM I realised why. The old sightseeing buses had been replaced by new ***Vienna Electric Visitor Buses***. The carriages for these buses were designed and built in Vienna, then placed on an electric bus chassis. The buses are organised by the tourist agency, operated privately and are free with the visitor travel ticket. They circulate on several routes stopping at attractions and at the visitor welcome centres. The buses are very nice, big opening windows, glass roof, and comfortable well-spaced seats.



I was early for my KHM visit so I looked at the Wien Museum's **Open-Air Gallery Windows**, placed in the Maria-Theresien-Platz roadway where tour buses used to park. The exhibit's theme was tearing down walls on the Ringstrasse to create a new city – real walls in 1858, and the wall of traffic in 2021.

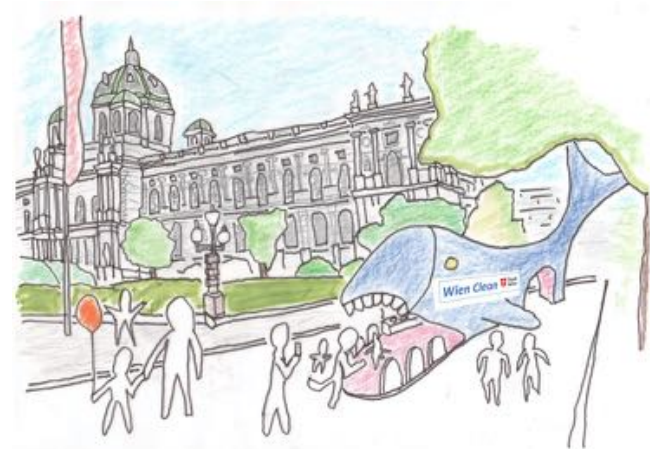
These open-air gallery windows are modular construction and moveable. They have been placed throughout Vienna providing residents and visitors with culture 24/7 in a non-confined space, very important in the post Covid-19 era.



A little further along at Maria-Theresien-Platz was a **Clean Wien**. I had heard about these “public facilities for post Covid-19”, so it was nice to actually visit one.

Vienna has an on-going competition to design Clean Wiens, so they are all unique. This one was a huge walk-in whale, a fun idea so close to the Naturhistorisches Museum. And, if you ever want to get kids to wash their hands, well, this design did a whale of a job!

All the Wien Cleans I saw on my trip were extremely well designed architecturally, practically and in terms of public health. They were staffed with people keeping them clean and well supplied throughout the day.



At the KHM I scanned my VVW and entered immediately. One of the VVW's functions is spreading out visitor arrival at attractions. This reduces crowding, helpful in post Covid-19 times, but also making visits much more enjoyable. The VVW's scheduling application starts with your welcome centre arrival time, uses your transport choices to calculate arrival times at attractions, and books time-set entry reservations.

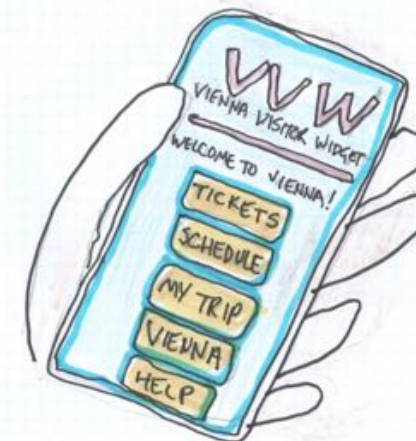
After viewing the exhibits I stopped in the museum store. My VVW's shopping app allowed me to buy the exhibition catalogue and have it shipped directly home so I didn't need to schlepp it around with me – encouraging me to buy a second book!

Most of Vienna's museums and stores participate on Open City Platform's sustainable and fair **Shopping and Logistics Service**. It's attractive to museums and merchants because it reduces inventory costs and allows them to display more merchandise, the additional sales are nice too.

While shopping I found I couldn't get my mind off the green in front of the Staatsoper. I decided to go back and take a closer look.

So, I opened the VVW schedule app, cancelled my visit to the Naturhistorisches Museum (It's OK, I'll be back), and entered the Staatsoper as a new destination. Luckily, there was an available tour. The VVW said it would be a 10-minute walk from the KHM and I'd arrive 20-minutes before the tour started. I confirmed the tour and decided to have a coffee in what I learned was now called **Staatsoper Piazza**.

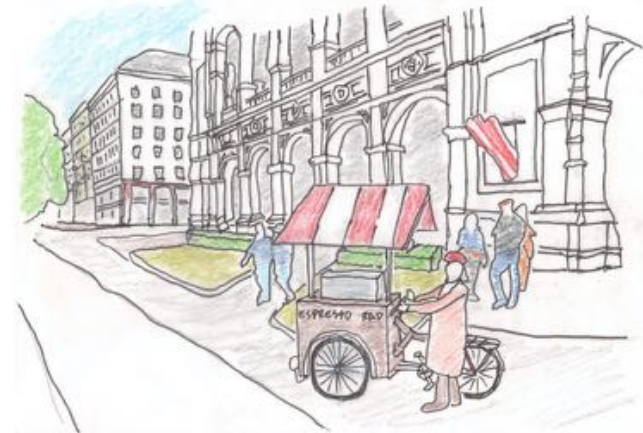
Since the VVW is always online, you can change your schedule if you want to stay longer at an attraction, change a transport or attraction choice, or are delayed. The VVW's **Restaurant and Hotel Application** also allows you to book and change dining and accommodation reservations. It's well liked by Vienna companies because, as part of the Open City Platform, it costs them a lot less than competing web-based travel applications.



At the Staatsoper, I mentioned to the Barista – not knowing she was a city planning student selling coffee part time – how ugly this place used to be. She said the Rotes Wien 21 plan was filled with sustainable transport projects like the Staatsoper Piazza, including cycling superhighways, neighbourhood street calming, and replacing parking with year-round outdoor cafes, trees and wider sidewalks. Calming made it easy, safe, and attractive to cycle, scooter, walk, or just hang out.

But, most important – she said – was the fact that these transport improvements increased the sense of community, first noticed during the Covid-19 crisis, by encouraging people to shop locally. This meant getting take-out coffee from the corner café, sharing experiences with neighbours you hadn't met before, organising community improvement projects like pop-up shanigartens, and even starting new businesses. The city's economic development agency provided grants to start new neighbourhood businesses, and these businesses helped the Viennese recover, financially and psychologically, from Covid-19 crisis unemployment.

When I said I'd love to see one of these revitalised neighbourhoods she suggested I cycle back to the welcome centre. She joked that Vienna has electric cycles for old guys like me. So, back to my VVW, the Staatsoper tour would finish at 15:30, giving me time to cycle out to the welcome centre, but no time for the neighbourhood visit. The app suggested cycling to Nestroyplatz, walking down the Praterstrasse – one of the neighbourhoods enhanced by the new traffic calming and local development – to the Praterstern and then catching the U-1 to Leopoldau. The VVW said I'd have about 30-minutes to explore Praterstrasse. I confirmed the suggestion.



The Staatsoper tour is given in person – you can't have people wandering around alone through the dressing rooms! It was a great tour, beautiful building, interesting information and very nice integration of the guide's presentation with historic photos and performance videos on the VVW app (I bookmarked a couple to view back in Copenhagen). After leaving the Staatsoper, I drank a quick espresso from my barista friend and told her I was cycling back. She smiled and gave me a free Mozartball!

Well fuelled, I walked to the shared cycle parking, quickly found my reserved bike, scanned my VVW, the bike unlocked and the VVW mapped the best cycle route to Nestroyplatz. The VVW's cycling app was built by the Bike City Guide and provides real time directions, attraction information, and a feedback function.

I really enjoyed the ride, not only was the route along the Ringstrasse easy to follow, smooth, comfortable and safe – what a change from the crowded and discontinuous path I remembered from my last trip! – but the exercise was great after my museum and Staatsoper visits! Here again I was reminded of Vienna's strategy for helping visitors fully experience the city, not simply visit attractions. It worked for me, I felt like a resident making a quick cycling errand on a sunny afternoon.

The VVW guided me to the shared cycle parking at Nestroyplatz and I locked my bike in an empty rack. I used the adjacent Clean Wien to wash and sanitise my hands after the bike ride. It was very reassuring to have so many Clean Wiens providing the possibility for washing-up on my travels through the city.

I began walking up Praterstrasse. The VVW suggested stops in several local businesses it thought I might like based on my user profile. I have stored my interests in my VVW account on the European City Web Services. Unlike web services based on surveillance capitalism, ECWS does not provide information to any third party without my express permission. Complete data privacy is fundamental to the design and operation of ECWS and possible because it is a government-controlled utility.



Since it was happy hour, I dropped into a Beisl (Viennese for pub) and asked for a beer. The bartender suggested trying a local beer from down the street. I said, "Great! I want to experience the real Vienna." Well, that got things started. She let me taste several beers, one of which was a traditional Vienna lager, and then, the brewer walked in. We started discussing beer and Vienna. And, I lost track of time.

After a few minutes my VVW reminded me I should be at Praterstern boarding the U-Bahn to Leopoldau. I updated the app on my position, and it sent me new directions for getting to the welcome centre in time for my bus departure. I still had time to walk to Praterstern and take the U-Bahn, otherwise the VVW would have ordered an electric cab for my return.



After a rushed trip back to Leopoldau I had a few minutes to relax. The welcome centres have shops with gifts from Vienna and cafes serving Viennese specialties. I sat down, enjoyed a lovely glass of Wiener Gemischtes Satz and started talking to my neighbour. She told me one of the couples on her bus decided, spur of the moment, to stay an extra night because of how much they enjoyed Vienna. The VVW app was able to arrange everything including re-arranging their travel.

Our driver, who was relaxed and rested, greeted us warmly as we boarded the bus. When I sat down, I realised how tired I was and what a good time I had visiting Vienna, which is saying something from an old tourism pro like me. I love Copenhagen, but we could learn a lot from Vienna.

