

# Destination Austria

Let's say you wake one morning in Austria and make your way bleary-eyed to a newspaper stand. What you see in the press will probably be at odds with this country you imagine: nothing about those idyllic mountain lakes or spectacular snow-dusted peaks, or even a picture of sweaty mountain bikers in centrifugal frenzy on a windswept forest trail. You are more likely to be greeted by the news that Austrian farmers are dying out, that state finances have been squandered on 18 Eurofighter jets, the ruling coalition government lacks true leadership, and that Austria's youth is guzzling itself comatose on alcopops. Maybe on another page, you see a picture of a somehow familiar politician holding up what looks like a town signpost.

It's no surprise that beautiful landscapes rarely get a showing in the national press – not unless they're being threatened, at any rate. What may strike you, though, is that these are not issues that break a country's back.

Austria has invested a lot into political and social calm. The result today is that while some countries lack direction, Austria is flying ahead with the continent's highest growth rates and standard of living. It has weird architecture, a buzzing capital with an even weirder dialect, and the tendency small countries sometimes have to occasionally drive themselves into strange mental and cultural landscapes. Part of this quality of life also comes from the wonderful physical landscape and opportunities outdoors. Meanwhile, it has a 50th anniversary of neutrality under its belt, and in that same year (2005) Austria joined the European Community while still officially staying neutral.

The death of former president and UN secretary Kurt Waldheim in 2007 did, however, give cause for retrospection. Waldheim had been at the centre of an international uproar in the 1980s after it was alleged he knew about or participated in war crimes during WWII. He died without ever understanding how he had suddenly become a world issue. For Austria, he symbolised a generation of silence post-WWII.

On the political stage, in 2007 a grand coalition between the Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (SPÖ; Social Democrats) and the conservative Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP; Austrian People's Party) was revived, this time under the tutelage of SPÖ's Chancellor Alfred 'Gusi' Gusenbauer. The previous incarnation had lasted 13 years (1987 to 2000) and was followed by international controversy when a conservative government took over the reins with the support of the right-wing Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ; Austrian Freedom Party), at that time strongly influenced by populist Jörg Haider.

Haider himself fell out with his own party and headed a new one, the Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (BZÖ; Alliance Future Austria). Today, he and his party, which is the dominant partner in a ruling coalition in Carinthia, are at the centre of the so-called Ortstafelstreit (locality sign conflict). This conflict dates back to an article in Austria's 1955 State Treaty recognising Slovenian and Croatian as official languages in regions with substantial minorities, and it is the one issue today that jeopardises neutral Austria's amicable relations with its neighbours.

Which brings us back to our bleary-eyed jaunt to the newspaper stand. Grab a newspaper, retire to a coffee house, tolerate your aloof waiter if he's Viennese, maybe get prickly with him at your own peril, get excited and do what Austrians everywhere seem to make a pastime out of – enjoy this quality of life that is Austria.

## FAST FACTS

Population: 8,281,950

GDP: €257.9 billion

Inflation rate: 1.8%

Unemployment rate:  
6.3%

Growth rate: 2.7%

Median net income per  
year: €16,626

Number of dogs in  
Austria: 560,000

Percentage overweight  
or obese: 43.3% women  
& 57.7% men

# Getting Started

When it comes to planning for your trip, Austria is a breeze. Infrastructure and services are excellent, which means the amount of advance preparation you need to do in order to ensure access to cash, or to special dietary and other personal needs, is minimal. Nor do you need to spend much time planning how to get from A to B, even if you've set a tight schedule. The distances between sights are usually easily manageable by foot or a short ride, and catching a distance train or bus will require just a quick check of timetables. In terms of budgets, almost all towns have a very good range of accommodation options – from the cheapest to four-star hotels or the occasional five-star-spangled option. See p380 for more accommodation information.

## WHEN TO GO

Visiting Austria at any time of year is a great experience, but remember that the season will influence what you can do. Summer is the obvious time for hiking, mountain biking and lake swimming, but ski conditions also make Austria a fantastic place for winter breaks. Festivals take place year-round, but the majority of music festivals are held between May and October.

For warm weather, aim for the months between April and October, although these two months can be changeable. Crowds and prices peak in the July and August high season, when temperatures can also climb to uncomfortable levels and many famous institutions close down, including the opera, the Spanish Riding School and the Vienna Boys' Choir. Consequently, June and September are often the best times for city trips.

You'll find cities less crowded in winter and (except in ski resorts and over Christmas and Easter) hotel prices lower, although it can get bitingly cold. Winter sports are in full swing from mid-December to late March, with the high season over Christmas and New Year and in February. Alpine resorts are very quiet or close down from late April to mid-June, and in November and early December.

Austria lies within the Central European climatic zone, though the eastern part of the country has a Continental Pannonian climate, with low rainfall, hot summers and mild winters. The Alps have high precipitation, short summers and long winters, and visitors should be prepared for all temperatures there. Seasons are distinct. Summer falls between June and August and has the highest temperatures, but also the highest levels of rainfall. Winter can bite hard, especially in December, January and February. Spring and autumn bring changeable weather, but quite often the most comfortable temperatures.

## COSTS & MONEY

Compared to other European cities, Vienna is cheaper than London, Paris, Zürich or Rome, similar to Munich, and more expensive than Prague or Budapest. With the exception of ski resorts such as Lech and Kitzbühel, the Austrian countryside is noticeably cheaper than Vienna. Overall, Britons and Americans will probably find things very affordable.

Accommodation will be your most expensive item (see p380 for accommodation costs), but it can be significantly reduced if you use hostels or share in twin rooms and doubles. If you are travelling alone on midrange options, expect to pay about €50 to €60 per night (with breakfast) in a hotel. Prices for a lunch special are around €6 to €9. An evening meal with a glass of wine or beer costs about €15 to €20, while a day pass on public transport in cities averages about €4.50. Museum entry is €5 to €7 in most cases (though

The three most popular provincial capitals in terms of overnight stays by visitors are Vienna, Salzburg and Innsbruck.

See Climate Charts (p383) for average temperatures and precipitation in Austria's major cities.

Don't spend it all at once – visitors spend €13 billion each year in Austria, compared to the €7 billion spent by Austrians travelling abroad.

**DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...**

- Double-checking the visa situation and your passport expiry date (p392).
- Organising a good health-insurance policy (p387).
- A spattering of the language, or a phrase book – a little goes a long way (p411).
- Polite servitude; Austrians love their greetings, titles, pleases and thank yous (p413).
- A good relationship with dogs; in Vienna, owners take them everywhere, including bars and restaurants.
- Good hiking boots and a swimming suit; this is the land of mountains and lakes.
- A curling tattoo across your lower back – *Arschgeweih* (ass antlers) are still almost cool.

many are cheaper and a few €12 or more); everyday toiletries (buy them in a *Drogerie* or supermarket, not a pharmacy) as well as splurges, blow-outs and luxuries, plus transportation will also need to be budgeted. We arrived at almost €350 for The Big Trip itinerary (p26) with side trips by public transport but excluding city transport. Taking these into account, about €125 per day is realistic.

If you're on a tight budget and choose to stay in hostels, eat cheaply, buy your drinks from supermarkets, and walk rather than use public transport in cities, you should be able to manage on about €70 or €80 per day. If you want to go below that budget level, you'll need to pick and choose the sights you visit carefully. Students and children get discounts for some museums and activities, and family deals often apply.

**HOW MUCH?**

Deerskin Lederhose €600

Achtel (wine) at a  
Heurigen/Buschenshank  
€1 to €1.50

Wiener schnitzel €8  
to €15

Double room in pension  
from €45

A 24-hour ticket on  
Vienna's public transport  
€5.70

**TRAVEL LITERATURE**

Austria is still waiting for its definitive travel description because most writers focus on its rich cultural heritage rather than the trials and tribulations of the everyday traveller. There are a few very interesting ones around, though, providing a fine backdrop for your journey.

A superb starting point is *A Time of Gifts*, the first volume of Patrick Leigh Fermor's trilogy detailing his epic and inspiring walk from the Hook of Holland to Constantinople in 1933–34. Written 40 years after his feet took him along the Danube Valley and through Vienna, this rich, evocative tale gives an insight into Austria between the world wars.

In *Danube*, Claudio Magris passes an erudite, Italian eye over the length of the Danube in his travel journal from the mid-1980s, and naturally spends time in Austria. His sharp, individual style tackles topics like the source of the Danube (a leaky tap in a remote mountain farmhouse, according to one sedimentologist) and larger-than-life characters such as Wittgenstein and Kafka.

Edward Crankshaw combines travel literature and historical detail in *Vienna: The Image of a Culture in Decline*. This study of the golden city in the early and mid-1930s is certainly nostalgic but still manages to tell it like it is.

Arguably the best account of Jewish life in Vienna between the world wars is *Last Waltz in Vienna: The Destruction of a Family 1842–1942*, by George Clare. This heartbreaking autobiography details one family's fate at the hands of the Nazis; it's a superb read and an insight into how the ordinary lives of so many were forever changed from one day to the next.

Stefan Zweig's *The World of Yesterday* is an extraordinary account of *fin de siècle* Vienna, a time when intellectual brotherhood tried to stop the destruction of Europe. It's all that more poignant considering Zweig,

who had been forced into exile by the Nazis, committed suicide in 1942 on completion of the book.

**TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY**

Since our inception in 1973, Lonely Planet has encouraged our readers to tread lightly, travel responsibly and enjoy the magic independent travel affords. International travel is growing at a jaw-dropping rate, and we still firmly believe in the benefits it can bring – but, as always, we encourage you to consider the impact your visit will have on both the global environment and the local economies, cultures and ecosystems.

On the whole, Austrians are very much aware of ecology issues, including those on the big issues of winter sports in the Alps and the impact of tourism. Along with seven other countries it has signed up to the Alpine Convention to promote sustainable development in the Alps, while also implementing its own sustainability plan. With such a large tourism industry, the contribution of individuals travelling in the country can also make a big difference (see p85).

**Getting There & Around**

Getting to Austria by train or bus is easy from within Europe. From London, this can reduce your footprint by about 90% or more compared to plane travel. Once inside the country, avoid using cars when it's not necessary. In this guide we've included two driving tours, as sights are otherwise difficult to do in one grab. If you're fit or have the time, you can do exactly the same tours by bicycle. In Vienna, a nifty bicycle rental scheme in summer will help you get home from late-night clubbing on an ecofriendly footing (p159), Tulln has a free city bicycle scheme (p173) and Waidhofen an der Ybbs in the awkward-to-travel Mostviertel solves the problem by offering free use of mountain bikes for up to a week.

Using public transport is another obvious alternative – and easy because it's so good in Austria. Trains run through some beautiful and isolated spots, and any gaps in local networks can be plugged by taking along a bicycle or hiring locally. Although using buses becomes a problem on Sundays, you can get around this by planning a weekday trip.

One of the best sources of information about carbon offsetting in Austria is the German-language website [www.myclimate.at](http://www.myclimate.at). There you can read around the issue locally, such as one proposal to set up donation boxes in Austrian travel agencies so travellers can make a direct donation to a carbon offsetting scheme. Whether this proposal can be implemented, however, remains to be seen. The website also allows you to calculate your carbon emissions from a flight and buy a myclimate ticket online (London to Vienna is €6) to offset your footprint.

For more information on reducing carbon footprints, see p396.

**Sleeping & Eating**

Austria is on the move in regard to ecofriendly accommodation. Using water wisely (and towels more than once) is where you can make the biggest contribution. Some hotels have low-allergy, ecofriendly fittings, serve organic breakfasts, or have sound waste management principles; you can help by disposing of recyclable materials separate from the rest in your hotel room. Restaurants serving organic foods are plentiful in Austria, even more bountiful are those serving local produce, and markets always have at least one stall selling organic produce. The Greendex (p436) at the back of this book lists many establishments with environmentally friendly practices.

Austria's most popular festival is the Salzburg Festival in summer, when over 200,000 people descend upon the venues.

'Austria is a labyrinth in which everyone knows the way.'

KABARETT ARTIST HELMUT  
QUALTINGER (1928–86)

Want to stay in a castle?  
Check out [www.schloss-hotels.co.at](http://www.schloss-hotels.co.at).

## TOP 10



## BEST READS

There's no better way to get a sense of place than by immersing yourself in a good book – these page-turners have won critical acclaim in Austria and abroad. See p55 for more.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 <i>Measuring the World</i> by Daniel Kehlmann                           | 6 <i>Setting Free the Bears</i> by John Irving                              |
| 2 <i>Lust</i> by Elfriede Jelinek   | 7 <i>Radetzky March</i> by Joseph Roth                                      |
| 3 <i>Night Games: And Other Stories and Novellas</i> by Arthur Schnitzler | 8 <i>Man Without Qualities, Vol 1</i> by Robert Musil                       |
| 4 <i>Play of the Eyes</i> by Elias Canetti                                | 9 <i>Vienna Coffeehouse Wits, 1890–1938</i> by Bernhard Harold B Segel (ed) |
| 5 <i>Cutting Timber</i> by Thomas Bernhard                                | 10 <i>Burning Secret and Other Stories</i> by Stefan Zweig                  |

## MUST-SEE FILMS

One of the best ways to do a bit of pre-departure planning is to curl up on a sofa with a bowl of popcorn and press play. These flicks range from the best-known films about Austria to the cheesiest. See p56 for more details.

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|--|--|
| 1 <i>The Edukators</i> (2004) directed by Hans Weingartner | 6 <i>Siegfried</i> (1924) directed by Michael Haneke                     |
| 2 <i>The Third Man</i> (1949) directed by Carol Reed       | 7 <i>Dog Days</i> (2001) directed by Ulrich Seidl                        |
| 3 <i>Amadeus</i> (1984) directed by Milos Forman           | 8 <i>Lovely Rita</i> (2001) directed by Ernst Marischka                  |
| 4 <i>Foreigners Out!</i> (2002) directed by Paul Poet      | 9 <i>The Sissi Trilogy</i> (1955–57) directed by Jessica Hausner         |
| 5 <i>Funny Games</i> (1997) directed by Fritz Lang         | 10 <i>Der Bockerer</i> (1981) directed by Franz Antel and Rainer C Ecker |

## OUR FAVOURITE FESTIVALS &amp; EVENTS

Austrian is never short of a good festival – you can always count on some kind of celebration going on around the country. These are some favourites, but others appear in the Directory chapter (p385) and throughout this book.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 <i>Wiener Festwochen</i> (Vienna Festival Weeks), May and June (p141)         | 6 <i>Salzburger Festspiele</i> (Salzburg Festival), July and August (p274)                        |
| 2 <i>Musikwochen Millstatt</i> (Millstatt Music Weeks), May to September (p309) | 7 <i>Lange Nacht der Museen</i> (countrywide; Long Night of the Museums), September (p141)        |
| 3 <i>Styriarte</i> (Graz), June and July (p229)                                 | 8 <i>Halleiner Stadtfestwoche</i> (Hallein City Music Weeks), September (p284)                    |
| 4 <i>Milka Schokoladenfest</i> (Bludenz; Milka Chocolate Festival), July (p377) | 9 <i>Viennale</i> (Vienna International Film Festival), October (p141)                            |
| 5 <i>Bregenzer Festspiele</i> (Bregenz Festival), July and August (p370)        | 10 <i>Wörthersee Festspiele</i> (Klagenfurt; Wörthersee Festival), late June to mid-August (p293) |

## GET HITCHED IN STYLE

This is probably going to set the father of the bride back €1000. For that he'll cover the local registry costs and the expense of hiring a staggeringly romantic venue. That might be, say, an Art Nouveau cabin on the 65m-high Ferris wheel in Prater, or the west wing of Lower Belvedere palace (with 'a splendid outlook on the Upper Belvedere as the local spin doctors put it). Sure, getting married in Vienna is kitsch, but it's an idea that seems to have taken off.

The city council offers seven palaces; four sights (including the Ferris wheel); seven 'locations' (which include a city tram or the Hotel Sacher); as well as the Danube and four other 'landscape' locations, where couples can tie the knot. For the low down, see the council's website ([www.wien.gv.at/english/administration/civilstatus/wedding/dreamwedding.html](http://www.wien.gv.at/english/administration/civilstatus/wedding/dreamwedding.html)).

## Resources

Websites in English are few and far between, but the government website [www.lebensministerium.at](http://www.lebensministerium.at) does have a large section in English covering sustainability in forestry, water, foodstuffs and the environment.

The internet portal [www.nachhaltigkeit.at](http://www.nachhaltigkeit.at) (in German) is also good place to explore sustainability in Austria. The Austrian Business Council for Sustainable Development (ABCSD; [www.abcSD.at](http://www.abcSD.at), in German) has a small list of companies committed to the concept, or look into the AlpMedia website ([www.cipra.org](http://www.cipra.org)), with lots of information about sustainability and the Alps.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Austrian Federal Government** ([www.austria.gv.at](http://www.austria.gv.at)) Gateway to various ministries of the Austrian government.

**Austrian National Tourist Office** ([www.austria.info](http://www.austria.info)) The perfect introduction to Austria in a number of languages, with plenty of information and links.

**Austrian Press & Information Service** ([www.austria.org](http://www.austria.org)) US-based site with current affairs and links to a range of topics.

**Austro Search** ([www.austrosearch.at](http://www.austrosearch.at)) Exhaustive online directory of Austrian businesses and organisations.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) General facts on Austria, links to Austrian sites and reports from fellow travellers on the Thorn Tree.

**Statistik Austria** ([www.statistik.at](http://www.statistik.at)) The government's official number-crunching site, with facts and figures on all aspects of life in Austria.

**Tiscover** ([www.tiscover.com](http://www.tiscover.com)) Useful site for information on the provinces; comes complete with online booking facilities.

An Austrian was the first person to put a propeller on a ship. Other Austrians invented the sewing machine, the typewriter and lithography.

# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

Experience high culture and sharp lifestyles in Vienna and the provincial capitals, bathe in refreshing lakes and hike rugged mountains on a 1500km route that does the whole hog by train (and just a few buses) from the capital to the Austrian heartlands.

### THE BIG TRIP

Spend several days in **Vienna** (p111) before catching a train to **Neusiedl am See** (p196) and taking a bus to **Nationalpark Neusiedler See-Seewinkel** (p197). Boat over to medieval **Mörbisch am See** (p194) and **Rust** (p193), continuing to Schloss Esterházy in **Eisenstadt** (p190) before getting on a train to **Wiener Neustadt** (p184). Rail across the **Semmering Pass** (p186) towards **Graz** (p221), Styria's relaxed capital, and continue to **Klagenfurt** (p289), capital of Carinthia, which offers great swimming in the **Wörthersee** (p295). Lively **Villach** (p297) beckons, as does a side trip to Hermagor's **Garnitzenklamm** (p105) gorge. Swing northeast to **Spittal an der Drau** (p305) and via **Kitzbühel** (p350) towards **Innsbruck** (p331) for some Tyrolean days. **Bregenz** (p368), on the Bodensee, is another side trip.

From Innsbruck, head to **Salzburg** (p266), cultural highlight and gateway to the lakes region, bussing to **St Gilgen** (p261) on the **Wolfgangsee** (p260) and to **Bad Ischl** (p247), where train lines run to **Hallstätter See** (p249). Wind by train or road via **Gmunden** (p257) to **Linz** (p200) on the Danube and via the **Danube Valley** (p164), **Melk** (p172) and pretty **Krems an der Donau** (p167) back to Vienna.

### One Month / Vienna to Vienna

### CITIES & LANDSCAPES

Wake up bright and early in **Vienna** (p111) and visit the palace and gardens of Schloss Schönbrunn. Kids will enjoy the zoo and Tyrolerhof there too. The route from here leads west along the **Danube Valley** (p164). **Krems an der Donau** (p167) is one highlight in a region that flows with wine and good living, **Dürnstein** (p171) is especially good for splurging in top-notch hotels, and **Spitz** (p172) has a low-key atmosphere and some enjoyable hikes through vineyards and forest to castle ruins. Also try to take in the views and church at **Maria Taferl** (p166), a spectacular hilltop town that brings the faithful to their knees. The road or railway continues west to **Linz** (p200) – an industrial city with exciting museums. The trail to **Steyr** (p211) will restore the rural flavour, from where you make your way to **Eisenerz** (p242), with its larger-than-life mines, and **Graz** (p221), Austria's second-largest city and arguably its most chilled-out. After taking in its restaurants, bars and cultural sights, you might feel ready for the open country again. It's a 200km rail journey from Graz to **Hallstatt** (p250), but along the way spend a few hours in **Leoben** (p241) to visit the MuseumsCenter before rolling into the **Hallstätter See** (p249) region. After that, **Gmunden** (p257) and the **Traunsee** (p257), though less spectacular, will call you gently back into town life, and **Salzburg** (p266), the next stop, will immerse you in the city again. From here zip across to the pistes or trails of **Kitzbühel** (p350), one of Austria's premier ski resorts, to **Innsbruck** (p331), where you can take your choice between culture or hiking trails.

Take in the large cities and spectacular mountain, lake and river landscapes on a 1000km rail and bus/road route that includes a fine taste of culture, food and wine.



## ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

Across picturesque farmland, into gouged valleys and over precarious, windswept passes – this 900km rail and bus/road route takes in places ideal for striking out into even more remote parts. It includes a fortress town, national parks, waterfalls and the highest peaks between Vienna and Innsbruck.

### MEADOWS, MOUNTAINS & VALLEYS Three Weeks / Vienna to Innsbruck

From **Vienna** (p111) drive or take the train or bus north to the tiny Czech border town of **Drosendorf** (p178). After walking around its medieval town wall, continue by road to Hardegg and the **Nationalpark Thayatal** (p178). From here, the route runs south through the often neglected Waldviertel (via Retz and Horn if on train or bus) to **Schloss Rosenberg** (p177) and **Krems an der Donau** (p167) for a shot of culture and good living. Explore the Danube on a side trip, especially the lower-key regions on the south bank. Make your way to **Waidhofen an der Ybbs** (p177; via Melk and Amstetten if using rail and bus), the perfect spot to begin exploration of the Mostviertel by bicycle. Continue south on rail or road to the Enns Valley, which will provide a spectacular viaduct for the next section of the route. (A side trip from Hieflau goes to **Eisenerz**, p242, to view the ore mines.) The route closely follows the course of the Enns River to Gstatterboden, gateway to the **Nationalpark Gesäuse** (p243), and continues to **Admont** (p243), where you can peek at the Benedictine Abbey. At Selzthal a side trip to **Graz** (p221) is an option, but this route continues along the Enns Valley before heading west to **Zell am See** (p312). Swing south by road from there to **Grossglockner** (p318), Austria's highest peak, in the Hohe Tauern range, and bus or drive on to **Heiligenblut** (p319) and its pilgrimage church. From here continue south to **Lienz** (p323) before swinging northwest to Mittersill, west via the spectacular **Krimmler Wasserfälle** (p317) to **Zell am Ziller** (p347), near **Mayrhofen** (p348) with great activities, and on to **Innsbruck** (p331). An alternative is to go from Mittersill via **Kitzbühel** (p350) to Innsbruck.



# On the Road



## **ANTHONY HAYWOOD** Coordinating Author

Mariazell (p238) in Styria is an unusual town in that it's Austria's most important place of pilgrimage. Wayfaring pilgrim-hikers clack to its basilica with Nordic walking stocks; stalls outside the basilica peddle devotional objects; and incense hangs in the air. Not to be forgotten though are its couple of good mountain-bike trails, pretty forest hiking and the glistening Erlaufsee (Lake Erlauf; p238). Leaving the tumult around the basilica, I went up to Bürgeralpe, the local peak. I think this photo captures the 'other side' of Mariazell: the backdrop of low mountains, some highly atmospheric clouds and Erlaufsee.



**KERRY WALKER** There's something special about a place that, for all its beauty, remains untouched. The Tennengebirge (p97) in Salzburger Land is one of those rare places. This karst plateau is a lonely wilderness of otherworldly rock formations, sheer precipices and rounded heights. The ascent was tough going: a dizzying 1000m scramble in the sweltering midday sun. Exhausted yet exhilarated, I sat beside a cool snowfield at the summit and watched shafts of light pick out the contours of the Northern Limestone Alps, rippling across to Germany. It was breathtaking in every sense of the word.

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*See full author bios page 421*