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I INTRODUCTION

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Austria (German *Österreich*), republic in central [Europe](#), lying mainly in the [Alps](#).

Close to three-fourths of Austria is mountainous. Austria was formerly, under the [Habsburg](#) monarchs, the heart of an extensive empire that was a major power. [Vienna](#) (Wien), which was the imperial capital, is still one of the world's great cities, famous for its elegance, its splendid baroque architecture, and its music and theater.

Vienna remains Austria's capital and largest city.

At the end of [World War I](#) (1914-1918), the multinational empire headed by Austria was split up into separate nation states. Austria became a small landlocked republic about the size of the state of Maine. As the new

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nations put up trade barriers, Austria lost easy access to its former markets and sources of fuel. Its economic survival depended on foreign aid. The depression of the 1930s was ruinous for the Austrian republic. Conservative forces grew. In 1934 the Socialists, who had made Vienna a model of social democracy, were crushed, and a right-wing dictatorship entrenched itself. In 1938 Austria was annexed by Nazi Germany.

After Germany's defeat in [World War II](#) (1939-1945), Austria was occupied by the Allied forces, including troops from the United States and the [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics](#) (USSR). Austria's independence was restored in 1955, and it experienced a remarkable economic revival. Today, Austria is a prosperous nation and a member of the [European Union](#), with thriving export industries and a large income from tourists. Visitors are attracted to Austria by the magnificent mountain scenery and the rich culture of Vienna.

II LAND AND RESOURCES

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Austria is about 580 km (about 360 mi) long from east to west and has an area of 83,858 sq km (32,378 sq mi). It is bounded on the north by [Germany](#) and the [Czech Republic](#); on the northeast by [Slovakia](#); on the east by [Hungary](#); on the south by [Slovenia](#), [Italy](#), and [Switzerland](#); and on the west by [Liechtenstein](#) and [Switzerland](#).

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Austria is predominantly a mountainous country, with an average elevation of about 910 m (about 3,000 ft). Most of the land falls within the eastern division of the [Alps](#). In general the major mountain ranges of Austria run in an east-west direction and are separated from one another by rather broad valleys. The northernmost line of ranges includes the North Tirol (Tyrol) Alps and the Salzburg Alps. Among the central ranges is the Hohe Tauern, which culminates in the [Grossglockner](#), the highest elevation (3,797 m/12,457 ft) in the country; the Pasterze Glacier, one of Europe's largest, descends from the Grossglockner peak. The southernmost ranges include the Ötztal Alps, the

Zillertaler Alps, the [Carnic Alps](#), and the Karawanken Mountains. Besides these east-west ranges, several series of mountain spurs extend in a north-south direction.

The mountain barriers of Austria are broken in many places by passes, including the [Brenner Pass](#) in the west and the [Semmering Pass](#) in the east. The Brenner Pass, which has been used since Roman times, is famous as the historic gateway to [Italy](#) from northern Europe.

The areas of Austria not within the Alps are primarily in the north and east. In northern and eastern Austria the Alps descend to an area of low hills, gentle slopes, and many lakes. In the east the area of the Danube basin includes Vienna and a plain that extends into Slovakia. The northern section consists of rolling upland.

A Rivers and Lakes

The principal river of Austria is the [Danube](#), one of Europe's great rivers. It enters Austria at Passau on the German border and continues its southeastern course, past Linz and [Vienna](#), to [Bratislava](#) on the Slovakian border. Austrian tributaries of the Danube include the [Inn](#) (forming part of Austria's German border), Traun, Enns, and Ybbs rivers. In the south, important rivers are the Mur and the Mürz.

In addition to the rivers, Austria has numerous lakes, notably [Bodensee](#) in Vorarlberg, which forms part of the border with Germany and Switzerland, and [Neusiedler Lake](#) in Burgenland, on the border with Hungary. The lake is the country's lowest elevation point (115 m/377 ft). Austria's lakes, especially those near [Salzburg](#), contribute to the country's beauty and the diversity of its landscape.

B Climate

Because much of Austria is mountainous, climatic conditions vary greatly. The climate varies with elevation; with location in relation to Atlantic, continental, and Mediterranean influences; and with certain local wind characteristics. In general, eastern Austria has a continental type of climate, with cold winters and warm summers, while the climate of the valleys of the west and north is influenced by cool, rainy northwest winds from the Atlantic Ocean. In the Alps temperatures decrease with altitude. In the winter, however, heavy, cold air tends to sink into the valleys, which are then often colder than the nearby slopes.

Spring and fall are usually mild throughout Austria. Summers are short, with moderate temperatures. Cold and often severe winters last about three months in the valleys, where they are usually ended by the foehn, a warm, dry wind from the south that is often accompanied by damp fog and sudden thaws that precipitate [avalanches](#). The foehn is important to Austria's agricultural production, making possible early cultivation of the southern valleys.

Average annual temperatures range between about 7° and 9°C (about 44° and 48°F) throughout the country. Average annual rainfall is 610 mm (24 in) in Vienna and 870 mm (about 34 in) in Innsbruck. In some interior valleys, the average annual rainfall is between about 1,520 and 2,030 mm (about 60 and 80 in).

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