

REVIVING A VIENNESE TRADITION OF SLOW FOOD

Andreas Gugumuck is a man who knows his snails. Several years ago the former IT professional began raising them in Vienna, reviving a long tradition of Viennese snail production. Today Gugumuck supplies Vienna's finest restaurants with snails as well as locally produced snail caviar – the surprisingly delicious white eggs laid by snails. A couple of hundred years ago, he explained, there was a snail market on Graben where the produce was sold. Snails used to be a food for poor people and were valued for their healthy, protein-rich flesh.

We stood on the edge of an open-air snail yard, about the size of a basketball court, where snails reposed in the shadows among new grass, herbs and soup vegetables. It was mid-April and not all inhabitants had woken up from winter hibernation in the ground.

Two different varieties of Viennese snails are raised on the property: *Helix pomatia*, a variety common in Central Europe that has something of a gamy taste, and *Helix aspersa*, the variety most often found in France. Young *aspersa* are bought in from France for their Viennese upbringing.

'The *pomatia* start emerging out of the earth in late March and April and begin mating right away', says Gugumuck, casting a knowledgeable eye around the compound to find a couple in the act. In a stroke of luck, we discover a threesome. 'Most of the mating is done in May. The act usually lasts about 12 hours. They fertilise each other and lay in the earth about 40 or 50 eggs over about 20 days, and out of the earth emerge about 30 baby snails. They're experts in the art of survival.'

He picks up another snail and it emerges gradually from its shell. Behind the snail on Andreas Gugumuck's hand, the wide green fields spill into Vienna's Rothneusiedl countryside on the southern fringe of the capital. This was slow food in its most literal sense.

Check out Andreas' farm, capped off by a snail kebab and glass of wine, on a one-hour **tour** (office@wienerschnecke.at; 10, Rosiwalgasse 44; €10; ☎ 2.30pm Sun May-Oct, reservation required).

mind, good food is never far away, no matter where you are.

The choice of where you eat is not only going to influence the type of meal you enjoy, but obviously its price. Traditional coffee houses, where waiters not only rule the tables but also the spaces between them (which is to say, the world at large) generally serve traditional fare of average quality (see [p172](#)).

Beisl

This venue unique to Vienna is usually a simple beer house featuring wood-panelling, ceramic ovens, plain tables and hearty Viennese cuisine such as schnitzel and *Tafelspitz*, topped off by *Kaiserschmarrn*. Fairly recently, marginally more expensive *neo-Beisl* have emerged – eateries that have added a few new touches to old recipes; see the boxed text, [opposite](#), for our favourites.) Vienna is full of *Beisl* and most these days have gone back to the roots of seasonal, regional cooking. By and large, they are inexpensive midrange options (about €15 to €25 for two courses, sometimes with a drink thrown in).

Heurigen

Heurigen, informal wine taverns mostly on the outskirts of the city, sport overflowing buffets of salads and pork, plus an endless

supply of new wine. Standout examples include Zawodsky ([p186](#)) and Göbel ([p184](#)). For more about *Heurigen*, see [p173](#).

Restaurants

Vienna is a fine place for formal or informal restaurant dining. In keeping with the Habsburg tradition, if a restaurant has a French influence, it will invariably be more expensive. For the price, however, you can eat snails bred and lovingly raised for your plate in Vienna, and in some cases (as in *Aubergine*, [p155](#)) even snail caviar (yes, the eggs). At the other end of the scale, informal or alternative and offbeat places like *The Point of Sale* ([p161](#)) and *Kantine* ([p164](#)) offer budget food and the chance to use free WLAN. Ethnic (non-Austrian) restaurants and takeaway joints also abound for those looking for a shot of sushi or Punjab pickle.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Vegans are less well catered for in Vienna's restaurants, and the few places that serve vegan food are low-budget alternative-style eateries. Vegetarians, however, will have no problem finding dishes based on pulses and beans, fruit and dairy products. Some of them, such as the low-budget burger eat-in and takeaway *Die Burgermacher* ([p164](#))