

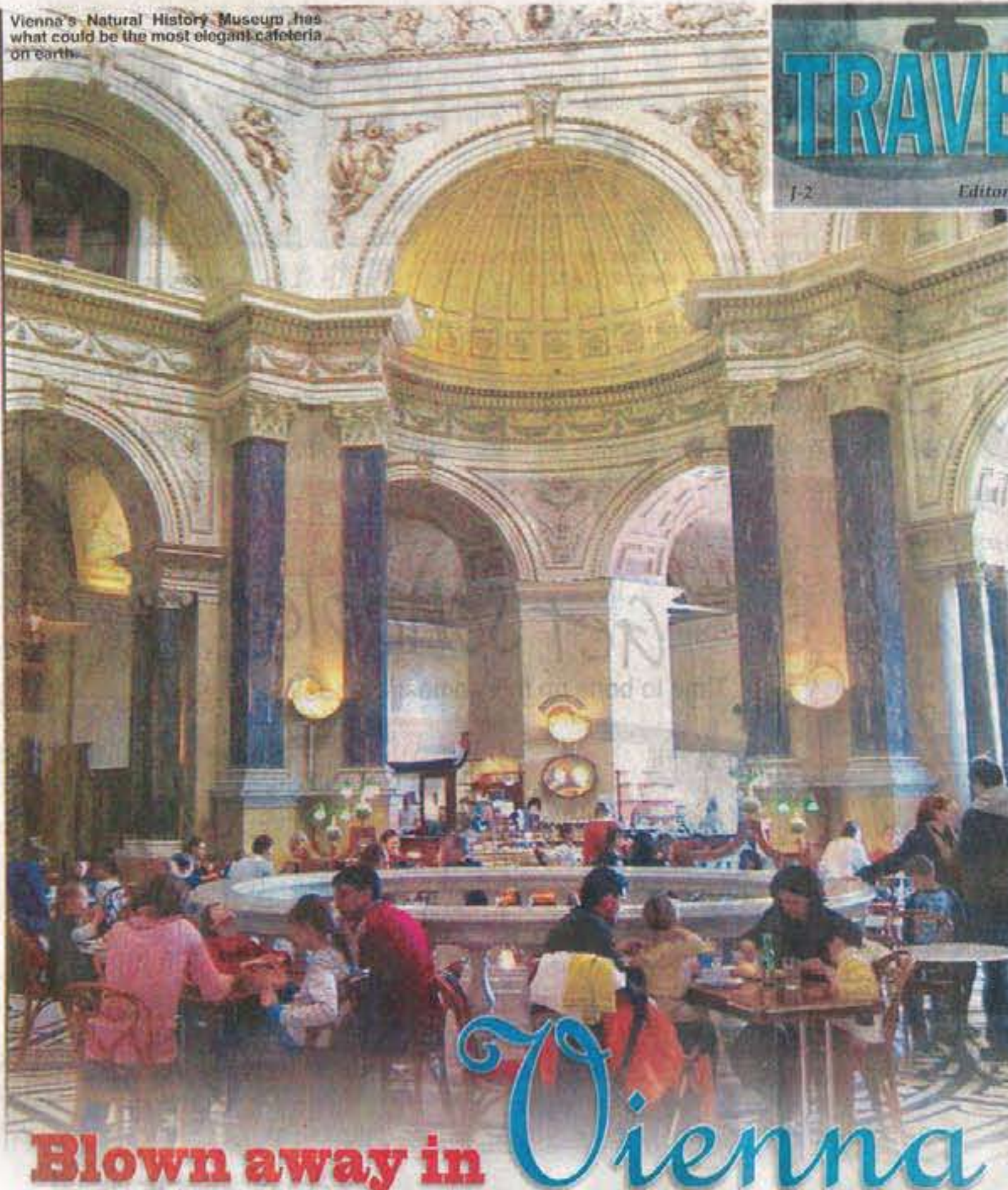
Vienna's Natural History Museum has what could be the most elegant cafeteria on earth.

TRAVEL / TOURISM

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Editor: ANTONIO R. PANO

Friday, June 11, 2010



Blown away in Vienna

By MANNY GONZALEZ
Plantation Bay Resort & Spa

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Well, not really, though the city is fairly flat, and it was pretty windy. But I quickly felt right at home. My taxi driver from Meidling train station was a Turk who has lived in Vienna for 30 years and spoke no English. A cheerful and resourceful fellow, he was nonetheless able to extract precise information about my family (not here), the purpose of my visit (not business), and how much German I spoke (not much). When we parted, I wished him and his three children good fortune, and he wished me and my — I think it was shoes — a pleasant stay.

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Yet another draw is the Spanish Riding School. Now this one I went to. About 400 years old, the Riding School has been training its trademark white Lipizzaner stallions and relieving tourists of cold cash for some time, and it is a must-see. So you must go. The horses prance on tiptoe, canter on a diagonal, and other impressive tricks, though the riders did not stand up on a galloping horse and shoot the pip out of an Ace, as I once saw in a movie, or was it a comic book. Anyway, a formal show costs 80 euros for a goodish seat, but for a mere 20 euros, you can watch daily exercises and get a stable tour, which is practically as good. Finally, you could wait outside the stadium and watch them pooping on the street as they cross back to the stables, for free.

One thing that impressed me at the Riding School was that, when a fat Russian woman elbowed past me in the queue, the ticket agent stopped her cold and told her to get in line. Ordnung!



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History lesson. Like much of Europe, Vienna has a complicated history, so let's simplify. During Roman times it was a military camp, in the Middle Ages a prosperous trading center. Austria was originally part of Bavaria, but around 1150 AD was spun off as the "eastern realm," *öster-reich*, which foreigners with lazy throats shortened to Austria. Austrian rulers kept marrying well, increasing their domains, until around 1450 a Duke of Austria was elected Holy Roman Emperor, which suddenly made Vienna the capital of a big chunk of Europe, while Austria's status jumped from "Duchy" to "Empire."

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There is, for example, the Belvedere palace. Sorry for bailing on the Vienna Boys' Choir, I did go there. However, Schloss Schönbrunn, an Imperial summer palace, is the bigger attraction. Right next to a metro stop, it is surprisingly easy to get to, not like Berlin's Sans Souci, which is really in Potsdam, or Washington DC's Monticello, which is really nowhere. To get back to Schönbrunn, you should go. But when I went, in the dead of winter, there was a 30-minute long wait at the box office. So buy your ticket in advance over the Internet, unless you enjoy standing in line for

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Europe trying to capture her lost youth and he finally got a mistress. Their son the Crown Prince committed suicide with his girlfriend (or both were murdered, take your pick). The Emperor's brother got executed in Mexico by revolutionaries. And, finally, Sisi herself was assassinated, pretty much by accident, by an anarchist in Geneva who couldn't locate his original target.

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And the answer is — if you were Holy Roman Emperor, you commissioned works of art. And told the painters to be sure to include naked women.

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However, the one I liked most was the Augustinerkeller, which is Bavarian, and serves *schweinebraten* (roast pork) for only 12 euros. This is a serious recommendation. Augustinerkeller is very conveniently located, so sooner or later you will walk right beside it, especially if you are staying at the 400-euro-a-night Hotel Sacher, or heading for the 80-euro-a-ticket Spanish Riding School Show.

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It's okay, you can look at it a little longer. It's Art. Enjoy. Observe the delicate rendering of the skin tones.

Across the concourse is the Naturhistorisches Museum, which is about Natur rather than Kunst. It has without any doubt the most beautiful museum restaurant in the entire world (see photo), replete with marble, frescoed dome ceilings, and big game trophies, and is worth visiting just to sit at the restaurant. The food, though, was nothing to write home about.

Twinkies – 1; Sacher Torte – 0. I sense that you have raised your eyebrows in disbelief. You have probably heard that Vienna is renowned for its food. Here I have to be honest with you. Vienna coffee is just coffee. (Unless you order Turkish coffee, which is just awful.) And between Vienna's world-famous Sacher Torte (a cake invented by the Hotel Sacher that sells for 5 Euros or more), and a 50-cent Twinkie, I would take the Twinkie in a heartbeat. But of course that's just me.

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[Vienna 11 Danae] In the days before Internet Porn, Holy Roman Emperors amused themselves by commissioning suggestive paintings. It's okay. You can look. It's by Titian. It's Art.

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