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REVIEW:

## Hotel Motto: First In

*A colorfully chic Vienna boutique hotel that's just a short walk from Museumsplatz.*



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Hotel Motto

#### AMENITIES

Bar

Free Wifi

Gym

#### ROOMS

91

Reviewed by **RICK JORDAN**

### Why book?

For the elevators with old-fashioned arrows indicating the floors, the top-floor view down into a stairwell that unfolds like a paper concertina, and the wrought-iron-balcony, fin-de-siecle glimpses of **Vienna**. But mainly because this is a lovingly designed, fully homegrown and very reasonably priced (from \$245 per night) hotel that gives guests a vivid insight into contemporary Viennese life while being swooningly infatuated with 1920s Paris (if *Midnight in Paris* had a sequel here, Motto would have surely featured, Owen Wilson hobnobbing in the lobby with Klimt and Jung). Oh, and the hotel's ensuite bakery does the softest, flakiest sourdough croissants in town.

### Set the scene

Many people come to Vienna looking for the clichés. You know, the powdered-wig operatics, the dirndl-stretching apfelstrudel, Freudian slips in high-arched coffeehouses, the Harry Lime noir of *The Third Man*, and the prancing ballet hooves of Lipizzaner. And Vienna does them very well, waltzing visitors around on a grand tour of 18th- and 19th-century neoclassical grandeur. But there's a living, breathing culture here too; a fresh dynamism sparked by well-connected creatives and restaurateurs keen to move the city

forward. So while the Motto will satisfy those looking for nostalgia, it's also drawing a youthful crowd of locals who head past the fanciful, picture-book mural of pink-suited

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## The backstory

Those familiar with Vienna's Donaukanal area will have spotted the sleek Motto am Fluss restaurant, moored like a double-decked ocean liner on the south bank. It was launched in 2010 by Bernd Schlacher—who had already made a name for himself with Motto bar (home, for a time, to a young bartender called Helmut Lang)—with an all-day menu of comfort-food favorites and boisterous summer evenings when the canal side becomes one of the buzziest parts of town. While Fluss riffs on Fifties Venetian design, for his first hotel Schlacher turned to his love of Art Deco-era Paris, partly inspired by a favorite Lacroix-designed hotel in the Marais called Petit Moulin. He bought old chandeliers from the Ritz Paris at auction, using them as templates for new designs, while bedrooms are soft-focus, powder-pink boudoirs. The wedge-shaped building itself has a history going back to the 17th century, with appearances by the Strauss family and 19th-century bohemians, and as Hotel Kummer appeared in John Irving's *Hotel New Hampshire*, based on the American author's time in the city. That playful bellhop-and-cheetah mural in the lobby is the work of Chez Dede studio (also behind the interiors at Rome's Hotel de Ricci), while Viennese-based fashion designer Lena Hoschek, who draws on Fifties rock 'n' roll and traditional cuts, took the vintage floral-bird fabric print in the bedrooms as inspiration for her staff uniforms.

## The rooms

Set on both sides (one can get confused) of the showpiece staircase, its railings and steps restored, bedrooms have parquet floors, Deco curves and black metalwork, with pendant glass lamps, and rugs and chairs in soft pinks and two-tone blues. Many have commode sinks and brass faucets, standalone tubs and showers set within an industrial-chic frame. Some are a little small (perhaps another nod towards Paris), others have perhaps a little too much furniture (mine had a bottom-of-the-bed couch, fine, but with two extra chairs behind that). But all are quiet and peaceful. Little details included a pack of Je Veux condoms, and Viennese craft ale in the fridge. Fabric with a beautifully lush chinoiserie print of long-tailed birds and blossom is used throughout on bedheads and wardrobe doors. Aim for a room on the sixth floor, which all have balconies or terraces depending

on category; though 307 has a grand crescent-shaped balcony in the bow of the hotel, watched over by a long-haired Art Nouveau visage carved on an ornate column.

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smoothies and acai bowls flips to French/Austrian bistro classics later on, including crispy artichoke, coq au vin with spaetzle, and a showpiece bouillabaisse—plus desserts such as a baked apple and a baba with orange sorbet. Twirly-moustached Ivo behind the bar mixes classic cocktails with a few new inventions, such as The Scream (gin, Campari, passionfruit, creme de cacao), and curates a wine menu that understandably gathers up some of Austria's finest organic and natural labels. Vienna has always had a thing for bread, but the baking here is a notch above thanks to the hotel's ensuite bakery downstairs, which has cafe tables on the street and a daytime menu of croissants, baguettes and pudgy sourdough loaves (ask nicely and they'll bag one up for you when you leave).

### **The spa**

Up on the seventh floor, the small wellness space has a mixed sauna big enough for four (Austrians tend to dispense with modesty, so choose your moment carefully), with a relaxation space and a wooden-floored gym that seems almost too elegant to work up a sweat in.

### **The neighborhood/area**

Like Paris, Vienna's divided into numeric districts wrapped tightly around the 1st, which contains most of the big-hitting sights such as the state opera, Hofburg Palace, and the Albertina Museum. The Motto's in the 6th near Neubaugasse metro station, which is no bad thing: its vibe is a little West Village-y, albeit with more cobblestones and courtyards, but still a short walk to the Museumsplatz. It's a neighborhood to wander around on foot, sniffing out small independent outfits such as Disco Volante for pizza, Dogs Run Free and Luster bars for cocktails, Phil bookstore/coffee shop, and traditional cafés such as Kafka, Sperl, and Jelinek—Cafe Ritter, right opposite, is a real local favorite. The main street outside the Motto, Mariahilfer Strasse, is Vienna's main pedestrian-only shopping drag, and a little prosaic, but it's easy to head down a side street and find something interesting. A short walk away is the Haus des Meeres, an aquarium built in a former WWII anti-aircraft battery (though it's best to skip the fish and catch the elevator straight to the top to

get your bearings). The local cinema, Top Kino, hosts a human-rights film festival every November. As for the city's hotel scene, there are plenty of grand addresses and

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### **The service**

The friendly front-desk staff can arrange local experiences such as boxing or yoga classes nearby, or tickets to the Leopold Museum. This isn't a "full service" hotel; the only bell hops are the ones painted on the lobby walls, and there's no room service or phones in the room. Instead, guests are encouraged to pick up something from the bakery below, while the front desk can arrange ice for in-room cocktail mixing (each room has a side table with spirit, shaker and lemons).

### **For families**

It's better suited for those with much younger children than older, perhaps, though some adjoining rooms can be booked—607 and 608, for example, both of which have terraces.

### **Accessibility**

It's a listed building, so limited, but two rooms are fully accessible, as is the restaurant.

### **Anything left to mention?**

A salon space for private events and meetings aims at bringing a little Soho House-style coolness to corporate events, something Vienna is relatively unfamiliar with. The wraparound rooftop bar is opening in spring 2022, with far-reaching city views.

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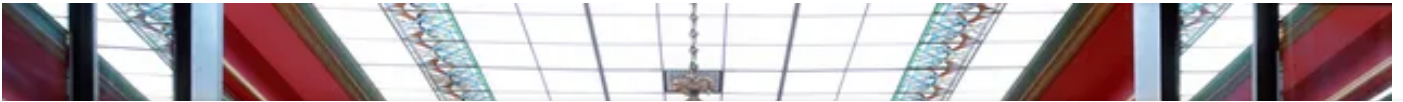
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