

# Following in footsteps of Harry Lime to magical city

Tourists have chance to visit locations in Welles movie

Orson Welles' cult movie *The Third Man*, shot on location in 1949, will always be synonymous with post-war Vienna.

In the film, its shattered baroque splendour supports a society that is riddled with conspiracy and haunted by paranoia. The complicated personality of the anti-hero Harry Lime seems entwined with the tumbledown locations and the culminating chase through the city's sewers.

Fast forward more than 60 years and modern-day Vienna presents a very different face to the world.

## Edgy

This gracious, rather self-satisfied, place evokes Strauss, Mozart, the Vienna Boys' Choir, art, museums, sedate parks and hot chocolate with whipped cream.

It's a very long way from the sinister vibes of the *Third Man*, and so perhaps it's not surprising that for many years the Viennese did not warm at all to Welles' masterpiece.

However, time has blurred even the privations of that edgy, desperate period, and now visitors to Vienna can tour the movie locations.

The crumbling courtyards and alleys have been cleaned and repaired, but they are



■ Much of the filming for *The Third Man* took place in sewers under Vienna

still beautiful.

The Central Cemetery is worth visiting at twilight, and there is the chance to explore the big sewer system under the Karlsplatz which featured so memorably in the film.

You reach the sewers by climbing down a claustrophobic spiral staircase, which takes you to the shore

of a dark, covered-in river.

As you set off into the gloom, the distant semi-circle of daylight at the end of the tunnel quickly disappears. Eerie, echoing clangs and bangs are a reminder of traffic running far overhead, and the torch's swinging light reveals a confusing network of narrow tunnels through portcullis gates off

the main sewer.

The 1949 film had no budget for constructing replica sets, so the movie's actors and crew had to work down here for weeks, in much worse conditions than exist today. They are reported to have been sickened by the stench of sewer gas and debilitated by the lack of light.

Even though the sewers are now scrubbed, lighted and with walkways alongside the channel, an hour or so of the unwholesome atmosphere will probably be enough for most visitors.

Author Graham Greene drew heavily on real life in his story, and the film's director Carol Reed had to work under what were often very difficult political as well as physical conditions.

At the time, Vienna was divided into occupied zones, administered by the British, Americans and Russians. None of them were inclined to co-operate much with each other, and the Russians were particularly hostile to the Westerners.

The film's assistant director, Gino Wimmer, once recalled how the Russians confiscated their equipment as



■ The beautiful city of Vienna



■ Vienna is known for its frothy coffees and whipped cream

Not as exciting as travelling with Harry Lime, for sure, but it is pleasant to eat strudel while ascending into the night sky with a panorama of Vienna outside the gently rocking windows.

The huge Hotel Sacher, right in the city centre, is another important location in the movie.

After the war, the hotel was commandeered and it was drab and functional, a scruffy headquarters for the British occupiers.

In the post-war period, it was Greene's real-life home for a while, and some of his fictional characters lived there too.

Of course one would expect it to be different now, but it is hard to believe that the modern Hotel Sacher is the same place as the austere building in the movie.

Famous for its sticky chocolate-and-jam Sacher Torte, the hotel has regained its place as one of Austria's finest.

## Bourgeois

It is a favourite with wealthy tourists who spend the night in solid luxury then descend to a panellied breakfast room with crystal chandeliers to stuff Sacher-Torte and whipped cream for breakfast.

Perhaps it's just me, but there seems something depressingly bourgeois about eating a dish of insanely expensive chocolate cake for breakfast. But I am sure that the lean and rascally Harry Lime, never one to pass up an opportunity, would have scoffed as much Sacher Torte as he could get – and happily stayed in the best suite too, if he'd had the chance.

■ For more information, contact the Vienna Tourist Board: <http://www.wien.info/en> or go to <http://www.austria.info/us/austria-unique-like-you/in-the-footsteps-of-the-third-man-1478539.html>



■ Take a ride on the Reisenrad at Prater amusement park