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The entrance of the famous Hotel Sacher is pictured in Vienna. — AFP photos



General Director of the famous Hotel Sacher, Matthias Winkler poses in the hall of the Hotel in Vienna.



A wall with historical photographs of the inventor of the "Sacher Torte" Franz Sacher (left) and Anna Maria Sacher (right) is pictured in the famous Hotel Sacher in Vienna pictured.

# ICONIC VIENNA HOTEL TURNS TO DRIVE-IN CAKE AS PANDEMIC BITES

The coronavirus pandemic may have forced many of Vienna's luxury hotels to close indefinitely as global travel restrictions keep away the many millions of tourists who usually visit the Austrian capital every year. But the city's iconic Hotel Sacher is determined not to let fans of its world-famous chocolate cake go hungry. The hotel's concierge, Uwe Kotzendorfer, is selling "Sacher Torte", as the rich delicacy is known, on a drive-in stand just across the road from Vienna's prestigious State Opera house. "I do a bit of everything now," says Kotzendorfer, standing next to a small two-wheel cart stacked high with cakes, as he hands an imperial red bag containing one of them to a customer driving past in his BMW. "I thought it was a fantastic idea," says another customer, Claudia Bednar.

"Because we can no longer travel, I am going to send one to my aunt in Germany for her 65th wedding anniversary," she explains, then pays for the cake, which typically costs between 50 and 60 euros (\$60 to \$71), with her credit card. The vast majority of the Sacher's staff are now on government-subsidized furlough. And the rooms and dining halls in the six neoclassical buildings-decorated with autographed images of previous guests such as Britain's Prince Charles, Franco-German film star Romy Schneider and US opera singer Jessye Norman-are deserted.

Nevertheless, the hotel insists on displaying fresh flower arrangements in honor of the five business travellers currently staying there. For those parts of the hotel not currently occupied, the management is taking the opportunity to carry out some much-needed maintenance, and Kotzendorfer often guides workmen around the deserted swaths of the building.



The Madame Butterfly Suite is pictured in the famous Hotel Sacher.

### Past crises

According to owner and managing director Matthias Winkler, the Sacher is the last five-star hotel in Vienna that is still in family hands. But it has survived a number of existential crises in the past and during the global economic crisis in 1934 event went bankrupt. "We've gone through many trials since the creation of the brand and our family is still planning for the long term", said Winkler, who took over the hotel from his mother-in-law in 2015. The current virus-induced economic downturn is also taking a heavy toll.

International travellers typically account for more than 90 percent of the hotel's annual 23,000 overnight stays, with rooms costing anything between 400 and 2,300 euros (\$480-\$2,700) per night in the low season. However, with the virus lockdowns, that source of income has now been all but wiped out. Sacher's cakes, which are shipped and sold across the world, are helping keep the brand alive.

Although competition in the upscale hotel industry can be ruthless and international brands have larger financial resources, Winkler believes that being family-run is turning out to be an advantage during the pandemic. "Here, decisions are made at a family meeting, without taking orders from abroad,"



A corridor in the hotel with historical photos of famous guests of the Hotel Sacher is pictured in Vienna.

Winkler says.

### Imperial cake

The Hotel Sacher and the Sacher Torte have a long history. In 1832, a young pastry chef called Franz Sacher was working on a new recipe he hoped would become all the rage at the Habsburg's imperial court. The ingredients were whipped cream, a lot of cocoa, jam to add moisture, and a rich layer of chocolate frosting. Forty-four years later, Sacher's son, Eduard, opened the hotel in Vienna's first district. But it was really only after Eduard's death in 1892 that the hotel enjoyed its glamorous heyday under the management of Eduard's widow, Anna Sacher.

As one of the first women to be allowed to own and run a business, the visionary matriarch become well-known for her wit. The city's high society normally gathers for a dinner in the Sacher before the famous Opera Ball-but this year's event has fallen victim to the pandemic. "A part of the history of Austria rests in our hands," says the hotel's deputy director, Doris Schwarz. "More than ever, it is a question of being up to the task," she says, standing underneath an imposing portrait of Anna Sacher, a big cigar in her hand and two bulldogs at her feet. — AFP



The marble hall in the famous Hotel Sacher in Vienna is pictured.



The lobby in the famous Hotel Sacher in Vienna.



Packs of the "Sacher Torte" are pictured in Vienna.

## Museum to record Londoners' COVID dreams

The Museum of London announced a project to collect the dreams of Londoners during the coronavirus pandemic as a way to document the impact of the crisis. The lives of inhabitants of the British capital have changed "not just in the day to day" because of the pandemic, but also "in relation to how we sleep and dream", the museum said. The project, dubbed "Guardians of Sleep", will look to collect the dreams in the form of oral histories. It will also explore what insight dreams might offer into mental health and ways of coping with external stresses, especially in times of crisis. According to a King's College London/Ipsos MORI survey in June, the global Covid-19 crisis can trouble the mind not just during waking hours but also during sleep.

The Museum of London is launching the initiative in partnership with the Museum of Dreams based at Western

University in Canada. Foteini Aravani, digital curator at the Museum of London, said the recording of dreams would allow it to "document a key shared experience from the pandemic" but also to stretch the definition of a "museum object". "Traditionally, when museums have collected dreams it has been in the form of artistic impression, for example, paintings or drawings influenced by the events. However, this can often dissociate the dream from the dreamer," she said.

"We will collect dreams as first-person oral histories with the aim to provide a more emotional and personal narrative of this time for future generations," she added. Sharon Sliwinski, creator of the Museum of Dreams, said the research with the Museum of London "aims to provide a rich resource for further understanding the significance of dream-life as a mechanism for working through social conflict". The project will take place in February 2021 with the public invited to speak about their Covid dreams with an international team of trained experts. The conversations will last approximately half an hour and will then be considered for acquisition. — AFP

## Music icon Cher meets Pakistan PM ahead of elephant's move

American pop icon Cher met Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Friday ahead of the relocation of an elephant from Islamabad's dilapidated zoo to a Cambodian sanctuary. The famed singer, who has for years campaigned for Kaavan the elephant and is helping pay for his move,

arrived in the Pakistan capital this week to see the animal before the flight to Cambodia on Sunday. "Appreciating her efforts in retiring Kaavan to an elephant sanctuary, the prime minister thanked Cher for her campaign and role in this regard," a statement from Khan's office read.

Cher tweeted that she thanked Khan "For Making It Possible For Me To Take Kaavan To Cambodia". The plight of Kaavan-an overweight, 35-year-old bull elephant-has drawn international condemnation and highlighted the woeful state of Islamabad's zoo, where conditions are so bad a judge in May ordered all the animals to be moved. A team of vets and experts from Four Paws, an Austria-based animal welfare group, has spent months working with Kaavan to get him ready for the journey to Cambodia. Experts have trained Kaavan to enter a large metal crate that will be used to transport the animal to the airport. Volunteers working with Kaavan say he responds well to music and singing, and Cher is expected to belt out a song or two for the elephant before he departs Islamabad. — AFP



In this handout photograph taken and released by the Pakistan's Press Information Department (PID) shows Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan (right) meeting with American pop icon Cher in Islamabad. — AFP