

ÖSTERREICH / AUSTRIA

SALZBURG BEYOND THE SOUND OF MUSIC

“Oh, is it the one with the kittens and mittens?” my husband asked as city guide Michaela Muhr began to talk about *The Sound of Music* while we walked through the streets of Salzburg. Unknown to me, as a child, he used to watch it every year for Christmas however, most Austrians don’t have any idea what Julie Andrews’ favorite things are. In fact, according to Muhr, it wasn’t until 2002 that the film premiered on Austrian television.

On the one hand, Austrians are bemused by the cultural cinematic curiosities, such as “schnitzel with noodles” when the traditional accompaniment is potatoes; on the other, only twenty years after the war, memories of the Nazi period were uncomfortable, and the 1965 movie simply doesn’t paint a pretty picture. “Salzburgers prefer to think of their city as the city of Mozart instead”, our guide said.

The legacy of one of the world’s greatest composers is noticeable everywhere. There is the statue in the Old Town, the annual Mozart Week and, of course, the Mozartkugel. While the golden chocolate balls have been exported around the world, the original ones are wrapped in silver foil and can be bought where Paul Fürst invented them in 1890—at Café Konditorei Fürst.

Johannes Chrysostomos Theophilus Wolfgangus, now famous as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, was born in Getreidegasse 9, where the family lived for 26 years, on January 27, 1756. The third-floor apartment was by all standards middle-class covering about 1,300 square feet with four rooms and a kitchen. Mozart himself spent a considerable amount of time away from the family home as his father Leopold took him around Europe to showcase his musical talent at the most important courts of the nobility. The longest journey took 1,269 days or 3 years, five months, and twenty days. Today, Mozart’s birthplace with its distinctive yellow façade houses a museum with around 300 exhibits.

Salzburg’s old town, burrowed below steep hills, looks much like it did when Mozart lived here over 250 years ago. The views of the spires of 27 churches, the fast-flowing Salzach River and the snow-covered mountains can be best enjoyed from the towering Fortress Hohensalzburg, one of the biggest in Europe. “It was only attacked twice, never conquered and never destroyed”, Muhr explained. As such, many of the buildings are from the 15th century.

It’s tempting to spend half a day here with the Marionette Museum being a special visitors’ favorite but, pressing on, we descended the steep steps back into town and emerged next to the cemetery of St Peter’s Monastery. Local doctors, lawyers, and nobility as well as composer Michael Haydn, brother of Joseph, Mozart’s sister “Nannerl” and Paul Fürst of the chocolate fame—the last watched over by skull-bearing cherubs—are buried here. The cemetery is also home to the catacombs—cave-like chapels and crypts hewn out of the Mönchsberg cliff face—and the oldest grave is from AD 833.

Everything is really close by, so we strolled further past the cathedral, a masterpiece of baroque art with a bulbous copper dome, through the romantic Goldgasse where lots of jewelry and craft stores are located, across the Salzach River, and finally into Mirabell Gardens. The flowery parterres,



rose gardens and leafy arbors were in full bloom. The adjoining Zwergerlgarten (Dwarf Garden), founded around 1695, is the oldest in Europe.

Since 1077, the fortress has sat on a steep peak, high above the Salzach Valley. In its turbulent history it was besieged, plundered, burned, and nearly destroyed by farmers and peasants in the 16th century. It served mainly as a prison for Protestants in the 17th and 18th century, then fell into disarray under Bavarian rule, followed by the Nazis running the fortress as a military training camp. And then came Hollywood...

In 1968, Hohenwerfen was used as a set for the World War II movie *Where Eagles Dare* which starred Clint Eastwood and Richard Burton. The snow that year was so severe that the latter got stuck with his wife Elizabeth Taylor in the nearby village of Werfen and couldn’t get back to Salzburg.

The cold temperatures in the mountains keep the nearby Eisriesenwelt, the world’s largest ice cave, alive. Armed with warm clothes and old-fashioned oil lamps we explored this “world of the ice giants” as the name translates to. A good chunk of fitness was also required as there were 700 steps to go up, and to go down. One particularly steep section, at a 45-degree angle, is nicknamed the *Seufzertreppe* (moaning staircase) amongst the staff our guide Stefan Mayr revealed.