


THE HABSBURGS AND THEIR LEGACY



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The Habsburg family ruled in Austria and over large parts of Central Europe for more than half a millennium and have intrigued scholars and laypeople alike for generations. The empire over which they ruled has famously, and unfairly, been characterized as a “prison of nationalities” and portrayed in largely negative light. But there is so much more to the legacy than the merely political. No aspect of life was untouched by their influence, affecting as it did almost every sphere of activity of a vast territory. Language, architecture, social structure, cuisine, literature, and not least of all music, reflect a heritage of which many traces remain more than a hundred years after Habsburg rule came to an end in 1918.

Our itinerary endeavors to uncover some parts of this rich legacy, focusing on the two major geographical areas at the heart of Habsburg rule: Austria and Bohemia. Beginning in Prague and ending in Eisenstadt, our experiences aim to impart a sense of what these lands owe to this Habsburg legacy and, by extension, what Europe owes to the rule of this remarkable family.

ART & ARCHITECTURE

Over 600 years of Habsburg rule have left indelible traces on the landscape of Bohemia and Austria, perhaps most striking in architecture and art. Arguably more than in any other European land, the architectural styles spanning this period were about more than just beautification – they were a language of power. Various styles came into vogue and then passed, but the one that is perhaps most closely associated with the Habsburgs and this corner of Europe is the Baroque. From the castles and palaces of the nobility and the dynasty; to the cathedrals and monasteries of the Catholic Church, the Baroque stood for the might of the Habsburg family and its close ties to a triumphant Catholicism.

- With your private guide visit the vast Prague Castle complex, said to be the biggest castle complex in the world. A UNESCO World Heritage site, it consists of a large-scale composition of palaces and ecclesiastical buildings of various architectural styles. Going back in history as far as the 9th century, the castle was the seat of power for Bohemian kings, Holy Roman emperors, leaders of Czechoslovakia, and is currently the President's official residence. Its art gallery contains a permanent collection consisting of European painting from the 15th to the 18th centuries. With its sweeping city views, Castle hill includes the Gothic St. Vitus Cathedral, known for its stained-glass windows and home to the country's crowns jewels, and St. George's Basilica, famed for its red facade and Romanesque interior.



ART & ARCHITECTURE

- Walk in Jozefov, the former Jewish ghetto. Dating back to the tenth century, Jozefov is dotted with somber reminders of its past. These include the Pinkas Synagogue and the weathered tombstones of the Old Jewish Cemetery. Discover the architectural styles of its buildings, forming the best-preserved complex of historical Jewish monuments in the whole of Europe, and get access to the Jewish Museum and its huge collection of cultural artifacts.
- Private access to the Lobkowitz palace. One of world's best museum curated experiences, it is the residence of the noble Lobkowitz family, Princes of the Holy Roman Empire and one of the oldest Bohemian noble families, originating back in the 14th century. Today it remains the home of the present head of the family. This wonderful palace houses an incredible private art collection - with treasures that span nearly five centuries – including works by Canaletto, Bruegel and Velázquez, as well as an early manuscript of Beethoven 5th Symphony dedicated to the Lobkowitz family, the composer's faithful benefactor. Listening to the stories of the family that lived in this palace since 16th century will provide you an insider view of life in Bohemia.

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ART & ARCHITECTURE

- A tour of Český Sternberk castle, overlooking the River Sázava; founded in 1240 and the family seat of the lords of Šternberk. Although it was later modified several times, the original medieval nucleus has been preserved, an interesting example of the development of fortified architecture. Inside an eclectic collection of treasures from Renaissance chests to Rococo furniture. The Šternberk family's eight-pointed star is prominent throughout the 15 representative rooms filled with intriguing artifacts and richly decorated furniture.
- Visit the Hluboká castle, due to its scale, character, original furnishings and extensive park, one of the most significant Romantic monuments in the European and world context. With its snow white facade, intricate design details and immaculate gardens, Hluboká Castle is considered one of the most impressive castles in the Czech Republic. First built in the 13th century as a military fortification overlooking the Vltava River, it has been transformed throughout the years as it changed hands. The chateau saw Baroque and Romantic updates in the 18th and 19th centuries, the elegant interiors are dressed with masterpieces dating back as far as the 16th century: woodcarvings, rich tapestries, dazzling chandeliers and portraits. Explore the private rooms and the castle gardens where rows of manicured hedges frame the rose bushes, and lush foliage and pathways lead up to the grand front gate.
- Access to Rožmberk nad Vltavou castle. One of the oldest castles in South Bohemia, Rožmberk was built in the mid 13th century. In 1522 the Upper Castle burnt down completely with the exception of the freely standing defence tower, after which extensive reconstruction in 1556 had decorated the Castle in Renaissance style. Rožmberk Castle boasts an almost eight century long glorious history; the impressive setting of the castle in the romantic landscape and the richly decorated and furnished interiors will enchant you.
- Together with a resident monk enter Melk Abbey, one of the foremost baroque ensembles in the world. Planned by the famous Austrian Baroque Architect Jakob Prandtauer in the first half of the 18th century, the Melk Abbey complex, where Benedictine monks still live and dedicate their work to culture and education, extends over 320 metres. Melk Abbey is the symbol of the Wachau Valley and its steep, terraced vineyards overlooking the Danube. The centrepiece of this complex is the library, its main hall boasting 16,000 volumes and graced with a ceiling fresco by Paul Troger. A spiral staircase leads to another set of 12 library rooms, usually not open to the public, containing more than 100,000 volumes, some of which are extremely valuable. It is easy to understand why the Italian writer Umberto Eco drew inspiration from this site for his novel "The Name of the Rose".



ART & ARCHITECTURE

In Vienna with your personal guide visit some of the highlights of the city's architecture:

- St. Stephen's Cathedral, the symbol of Vienna. Its construction commenced in the 12th century. Today, it is one of the most important Gothic structures in Austria.
- St. Charles church, a magnificent religious building with a large cupola, is the last work of the eminent baroque architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach. The church is consecrated to the patron saint of the Habsburg emperor, Saint Charles Borromeo, Bishop of Milan.
- Belvedere is one of the best-known palaces in Vienna, with wonderful ceremonial rooms. Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663-1736), successful general and art connoisseur, had Belvedere garden palace built by Johann Lukas von Hildebrandt as his summer residence – at the time it was still outside the gates of the city. It is not only a magnificent Baroque palace, but also houses one of Austria's most valuable art collections – with key works by Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and Oskar Kokoschka.
- Schönbrunn, the former summer residence of the Habsburgs, impresses with imperial ceremonial rooms and magnificent gardens. Maria Theresa, Emperor Franz Joseph, Empress Elisabeth and others once resided here. Schönbrunn Palace is one of Europe's most beautiful Baroque complexes and has been in the possession of the Habsburgs since 1569. The palace and garden complex created from 1696 onwards following the siege of Vienna was completely redesigned under Maria Theresa after 1743. Today, due to its historical significance, its unique layout, and magnificent furnishings, the palace is a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- The Secession: in 1897, Gustav Klimt and a number of other artists quit the conservative Künstlerhaus and founded a new art association called the Secession. The building of the same name was completed in 1898; on the site made available by the city administration, Joseph Maria Olbrich constructed a modern, Art Nouveau style exhibition building for the association, which remains one of the best-known buildings in Vienna to this day.
- The Looshaus, a building designed at the beginning of 20th century by Adolf Loos, regarded as one of the central buildings of Viennese Modernism. It marks the departure from historicism, but also from the floral decor of the Secession.



MALERIE ARCHITEKTUR PLASTIK

EXPLORE

The natural beauty of cities and towns like Prague, Vienna, and Eisenstadt, as well as the stunning landscapes of southern Bohemia and the valley of the Danube, will give us a chance to appreciate a small portion of the beauty to be found in the once vast Austrian Empire. Czechia (Bohemia and Moravia), the Salzkammergut region of Austria, Vienna, and the Burgenland offer a wealth of opportunities for travelers. We will take the chance to explore city life not only in famous destinations like Prague, but also in small towns. Excursions to villages such as Holašovice in Bohemia would allow us an opportunity to get a taste of life for the common people in the monarchy. A boat ride down the Danube towards the magnificent abbey of Melk in Lower Austria allows us to see the Danube valley unfold before our very eyes and reinforces the role played by landscape and by architecture in conveying a sense of majesty.

- Enter into the heart of České Budějovice's old town: its main square, with colorfully decorated townhouse facades, is a picturesque and very lively place to gather and sip a coffee in one of the many traditional shops. The town hall, originally from 1387, but rebuilt several times, has a roofline featuring a tall clock tower. The statues, representing Justice, Bravery, Wisdom and Prudence, watch over the square from its rooftop.
- Explore the well-preserved medieval brick farmstead of Holašovice, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Holašovice is an exceptionally complete and well-preserved example of a traditional central European village. It has a large number of outstanding 18th- and 19th-century vernacular buildings in a style known as 'South Bohemian folk Baroque' and preserves a ground plan dating from the Middle Ages.
- Get access to Český Krumlov, a small historic town, UNESCO World Heritage city, in South Bohemia. Known for its medieval castle and the many magnificent buildings, it is like entering into a fairytale-like old town. Situated on the banks of the Vltava river, the town was built around a 13th-century castle with Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque elements. It is an outstanding example of a small central European medieval town whose architectural heritage has remained intact thanks to its peaceful evolution over more than five centuries.



EXPLORE

- In Bad Ischl privately enter the Kaiservilla, the summer residence of Emperor Franz Joseph I and Empress Elisabeth (Sissi); a modest, low-built villa set in parkland in Upper Austria. Its classical-style frontage, washed in a subdued Imperial yellow, remains today as still the best point of entry to the character of the man who ruled the vast sprawling Habsburg domains from 1848 to 1916. The engagement of Emperor Franz Josef I with Princess Elisabeth of Bavaria in 1853 took place in the Kaiservilla. On this occasion Archduchess Sophie gave the estate as a wedding gift to the Imperial couple.
- Explore the Wachau valley, UNESCO site, a stretch of the Danube Valley between Melk and Krems, a landscape of high visual quality. It preserves in an intact and visible form many traces of its evolution since prehistoric times. Architecture, (monasteries, castles, ruins); urban design, (towns and villages); and agricultural usage (principally the cultivation of vines), make this a 'must see' area. The architecture in the towns and villages of Wachau shows the development of the region and its society over many centuries, while the castles and ruins are the perfect backdrop for tales of love and heartbreak, particularly from medieval days.
- Visit the Austrian region of Burgenland, an area with a long tradition of nature conservation that fundamentally differs from the usual image of Austria. You will search in vain for mountains here; the landscape features wide plains, central Europe's easternmost steppe lake, rolling hills, woodland, wetlands, and vineyards as far as the eye can see. Here the Neusiedler Lake area, UNESCO site, has been the meeting place of different cultures for eight millennia. This is graphically demonstrated by its varied landscape, the result of an evolutionary symbiosis between human activity and the physical environment. The remarkable rural architecture of the villages surrounding the lake and several 18th- and 19th-century palaces adds to the area's considerable cultural interest.



MUSIC & TRADITIONS

- In addition to architecture, the Habsburgs have long been world famous as patrons of the musical arts. From Mozart in Salzburg and Prague; to Beethoven and Schubert in Vienna; to Haydn, who served as court musician for the powerful Esterházy family in Eisenstadt, we will avail ourselves of the opportunity to learn about their music in the towns where they lived. Nor shall we forget less “high-brow” music. The famous Viennese Schrammelmusik and the waltzes of the Strauss family will also be sampled. And speaking of sampling, one cannot travel to this area of Europe without tasting the local traditional delights, including Czech dumplings and Jewish cuisine, Budvar beer, wine in the Wachau and Burgenland districts, Tafelspitz (Franz Joseph’s favorite meal) at Plachutta restaurant in Vienna, and sweets of all sorts. Cafes in Vienna are home to not only the world-famous Sachertorte, but to a myriad of other confections.
- In Prague, in the splendid Art Nouveau’s Smetana concert hall, sitting in the best seats assist to a concert featuring Bohemian composers, such as Leoš Janáček, Antonín Dvořák, Bedřich Smetana, and Bohuslav Martinů, that have changed the music world and left an indelible trace on how we understand and enjoy music nowadays.
- In the Lobkowitz palace of Prague attend a private concert in the baroque concert hall of the family that has been leading European patronage of classical music.
- In Holašovice, the inhabitants seem frozen in time – living the traditional rural Bohemian way of life. This makes visiting the village akin to taking a time machine and getting teleported to the 17th or 18th century. See their traditional dances in colorful costumes, feel the pulsating music, and maybe even learn a few steps of their dance.



MUSIC & TRADITIONS

- Those who love Vienna dine at the Griechenbeisl, the oldest inn in town, a rustic restaurant opened 1447. Enjoy traditional Viennese dining, with signature dishes such as Wiener Schnitzel and Tafelspitz (boiled beef Viennese style), in a cozy historical ambiance. Find yourself in the same room in which famous guests like Strauss, Beethoven, Mozart, Luciano Pavarotti and Mark Twain enjoyed their dinner.
- In Vienna listen to the unmissable Schrammelmusik: capturing the charm, sophistication and revelry of old Vienna before the tumult of WWI. This music is a unique style which rose from humble origins to become one of 19th-century Europe's most beloved genres. Named after folk composers Johann and Josef Schrammel, it is considered a cultural mainstay of contemporary Austria. For those looking to unearth Austria's rich musical traditions, exploring Vienna's thriving Schrammelmusik scene is a must.
- In Eisenstadt enter the Haydnsaal, named after the composer, with its Baroque frescoes, now one of the world's best and most beautiful concert halls. Musical highlights, a magnificent interior, and stunning architecture impress Austrian and international musicians and guests from all over the world. As a VIP guest assist to a concert in Haydnsaal with one of the world's most outstanding acoustics.

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DR. PETER WOZNIAK



Dr. Wozniak is an historian specializing in 19thc Habsburg history, he took his Ph.D. in 1987 and then spent the next twenty-five years teaching at private high schools and universities in the US and Europe.

Although born in the US, “Dr. Woz”, as he is affectionately known by his students, has been fascinated by all things Habsburg for a very long time. His grandfather was born in Austrian Galicia before WWI and regaled him with many stories about his youth in the old monarchy. This personal connection is something that has informed Dr Woz’s worldview as much as it has his professional life. It has been said that, even though he is American, he most certainly possesses a ‘Central European heart!’

Retiring from active teaching in 2010, Dr. Woz is something of a world traveler, having lived at various times in Austria, Poland, Germany, Bulgaria, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. In addition to his native English, he speaks German, Polish, Bulgarian, and a smidgin of both Cantonese and Putonghua.

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