

Vienna Study Trip 23-06-15 to 27-06-15

DAY 1: After a pleasant flight to **Bratislava** from Birmingham and a short coach journey to the Mercure Hotel, a modern hotel, near the train and bus station, the Group settled into their accommodation. On the way to the hotel we passed the Presidential Palace, gleaming white, near the Old Town and had our first views of the imposing Bratislava Castle, dominating the skyline.



Presidential Palace, Bratislava.

DAY 2: In the morning various **sightseeing trips** were done on foot or by public transport to the picturesque Old Town; the Castle; the Russian War Memorial and the Cathedral. In the afternoon we caught a **Twin City Liner** from the Bratislava Terminus on the **River Danube** and had a scenic one-and-a-half-hour boat ride up the Danube to **Vienna**, passing impressive castle ruins, picturesque villages and traditional fishing huts dotting the banks of the river. The warm weather allowed passengers to appreciate the passing scenery from the open top deck, but a sudden squall sent them scurrying inside halfway through the cruise.



Bratislava Castle seen from the River Danube

A short coach ride from the Schwedensplatz Terminus in Vienna brought the group to the **Hotel Mercure Biedermeier** in the city's **Third District**. This charming building, flanking a cobbled passageway, dates back at least to the beginning of the nineteenth century, and stands next to a house in which Beethoven resided in the year 1817. Perhaps he too walked through this arcade as he travelled to and from the City!

In the evening the Group found local eating places to experience the **Viennese Cuisine**, such as Wiener Schnitzel, a breaded veal escalope, and Kaiserschmarren - a dessert of shredded pancakes with a topping of plum sauce.



The arcade of the Hotel Mercure Biedermeier

DAY 3: The destination this morning was the **Hofburg**, the Winter Palace of the Imperial Habsburg family. As the hotel was situated near to the city centre some of the group walked to the venue, while others took the circular Hop-On/Hop-Off bus or used public transport, the trams, buses and underground trains. At the Hofburg, a vast palace built around a quadrangle, we viewed the **Kaiserappartements**, the State Rooms, which were magnificent and emphasised the immense power and influence of this royal dynasty. Within the apartments was also told the story of Emperor Maximilian I of Mexico, Franz Josef I's brother, who was executed by Mexican revolutionaries in 1867. **The Sisi Museum** told the tragic story of Emperor Franz Josef I and his wife, the beautiful Elisabeth (Sisi). Franz Josef I was the penultimate Kaiser before the First World War, dying in 1916. We began to understand the power and size of the Habsburg Empire in the pre-WW1 days, extending over vast territories in Europe and the political connections with other countries through strong dynastic marriages.



The Hofburg, Vienna

We were also able to visit the Imperial Silver Collection, the **Silberkammer**, with its vast collections of china, and gold and silver dining sets. Minton (UK) was one of the suppliers of fine china on display, as was crystal tableware from England, but the provenance (Stourbridge?) was not given. Outside the Hofburg, the Fiakers (horse-drawn carriages) were taking visitors on a tour of the city.



The Silberkammer, Vienna

In the afternoon the Group were free to explore this historic city on their own. The various venues seen by the Group over the Study Tour visit will be listed in Day 5. In the evening the group again found local places to eat and enjoyed the cuisine of this European capital, with dishes such as: Schinkenfleckerl, ham with noodles in a creamy sauce, and Mohr im Hemd, a chocolate hazelnut pudding.

DAY 4: Another warm and sunny day gave the group the opportunity to sit out on the Terrace for breakfast. This terrace was part of an eighteenth century through passage between the tall and stately buildings surrounding it. The first visit of the day was to the **Schönbrunn Palace**, the summer residence of the Habsburg dynasty. Queen Maria-Teresia lived here and, as a child, so did her daughter, Marie-Antoinette, who married King Louis XVI and tragically was executed in the French Revolution. Again, the European dynastic connections were much in evidence. Another daughter of Maria Teresia married Napoleon. The Schönbrunn Palace was based on Versailles in France, (another European link), and was magnificent in its pomp both indoors and outside. Especially notable was the Mirrored Grand Salon (again based on Versailles), which is 40 metres long, 10 metres wide and as tall as a house.

An external feature of the Palace is the distinctive yellow paintwork of the walls, signifying an Imperial residence.

Outside, the gardens were in full bloom, displaying the colours of the Austrian flag in the formal bedding arrangements. The Gloriette, some distance away at the top of a hill, provided magnificent views over Vienna, and would have emphasised the immense wealth and influence of the Habsburg rulers.



Schönbrunn Palace, Vienna

Again, the afternoon was free for the Group to visit other historical properties independently, and this will be detailed in Day 5.

In the evening, a very special opportunity was given for the group to attend a **concert in the historical Kursalon**. With its sparkling chandeliers and elegant drapes we were in the very place where Johann Strauß himself used to direct his orchestra from the position of first violin. Here we were able to enjoy a concert of Strauß, Mozart and von Suppé, with delightful dancers, beautiful arias and duets and plenty of typical Viennese humour. As a second encore, the orchestra played the theme tune from 'The Third Man' which rounded off a most pleasurable concert.



The Group outside the Kursalon, before the performance.



The Kursalon, Vienna.

To reach the Kursalon, the group walked through the **Stadtspark**, where statues to many famous musicians stand, amongst them the gilded statue of Johann Strauß. We also crossed over the **River Wien**, from which the city gets its name. This 'insignificant' waterway plays an important role when flash floods occur about twice a year. The floodwaters from the Vienna woods and surrounding hills pour through this channel and are released into the Donau Kanal by the **Urania** building, thus saving the city from flooding.



The River Wien at the Kursalon.

The Urania, where the River Wien flows into the Donau Kanal.

To finish the evening the group found a local **Stube** (inn) where again we tasted typical Viennese food and drink, such as the **Grüner Veltliner wine**, an Austrian speciality, now available in the UK, and **Radler** - a Viennese shandy, as well as **Weiss gespritzt** - a white wine spritzer.

DAY 5: On the final day of our Study Tour the group was free to explore the City for themselves. Again, some walked into the City and some used public transport.

Amongst the venues visited by the Group during the Study Tour were:

- A guided tour of the **Vienna Opera House**, including a backstage tour.
- **Stefansdom** (St Stephen's Cathedral), including climbing the tower.
- The **Belvedere**, where the historic signing over of the nation of Austria to the people to create a Republic occurred in 1955. Previously, like Germany, it had been occupied by the Allies from 1945 and the City of Vienna and other parts of the country had been under Soviet control. The Belvedere also contains, as an Art Gallery, 'The Kiss' by Gustav Klimt and a selection of Impressionist paintings, as well as other important works.

- A visit to **Restaurant Sacher** to enjoy 'Sachertorte', a Viennese speciality cake.
- A visit to **Plachutta**, where the best 'Tafelspitz' (boiled beef) in Vienna was enjoyed.
- The **Albertina** (art gallery), which contains many Old Masters including Dürer.
- Two guided walking tours of the historical inner city.
- **Grinzing** - the wine making area of Vienna, with many 'Heuriger'.
- A visit to the **Donauturm** - the tall rotating tower, which gives excellent views over Vienna and beyond.
- The '**Hundertwasser Haus**' - a block of flats designed to be eco-friendly and painted in bright colours, with trees growing from it. Hundertwasser is one of the foremost modern architects.



Hundertwasserhaus.



Donauturm.



Stefanskirche.

- **Karlskirche** (St Charles' Church), one of Vienna's greatest and most interesting buildings. Commissioned by the Emperor in thanks for answered prayer, the beautiful Baroque structure was also designed to glorify the Habsburg Empire.
- **Uno City** - the seat of the United Nations, one of only three locations in the world.
- Footbridge over the River Danube and the **Donauinsel** - the man-made Danube island, used for leisure purposes by the Viennese. At the time of our visit 1,000,000 people were on the Donauinsel enjoying the Donaufest, an annual musical festival.

- The **Soviet Memorial** in Vienna.
- The **Augustinerkirche** where the hearts of 54 Habsburg rulers are kept in silver urns.

We assembled in the early evening to catch the coach to Bratislava airport for our return flight sensing that we had only experienced a fraction of the historical delights that Vienna had to offer. Hopefully this was just '**Auf Wiedersehen, Wien**' (Until we see you again Vienna).

Heidy Hague