



# BAROQUE AND BEAUTIFUL

**BISECTED BY THE FAST-FLOWING SALZACH RIVER, THE CITY OF SALZBURG IS PICTURE-PERFECT. THE OLD TOWN, NESTLED BETWEEN GREEN HILLS, LOOKS MUCH AS IT DID IN MOZART'S TIME, WITH ITS DOMES AND SPIRES, CHURCHES AND FORTRESS, YET FLASHES OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE CREEP IN. GISELLE WHITEAKER STEPS INTO AN AUSTRIAN FAIRY TALE.**



Top left: Kapitelplatz.

Top right: St. Peter's Cemetery is one of the oldest in the world.

Above: The Salzach River cuts through Salzburg.

Strolling down the Getreidegasse, I remember why I loved Salzburg so much as a child. There's a reason it's on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Even on a grey, drizzly day, the picturesque street in Salzburg's old town sparkles. Wrought iron guild signs hang from the tall buildings that seem to lean in to each other to exchange pleasantries, and narrow passageways lead into lovely courtyards. Mozart's birthplace is on this street, the canary-yellow façade marked by an old-school doorbell with three wooden handles – and the groups of tourists clustered outside under colourful umbrellas.

Mozart and *The Sound of Music* are Salzburg's main claim to fame – although according to Martina Gyuroka, the knowledgeable guide tasked with giving us an overview of the city the next day, the film is considered kitsch by the few Salzburgers who've heard of it. It's hard to explain that that's part of the appeal. When we pause by the Museum der Moderne, Salzburg's modern art museum, to take in the spectacular views of the Old Town and beyond, to the green-carpeted mountains of the Tennengebirge, I envisage Maria, arms outstretched, twirling in delight. That's what Salzburg makes me want to do.

Martina points out the landmarks as we wind through the Old Town's maze of cobbled streets, open plazas and market squares, fringed with ornate Baroque architecture: the medieval old city hall; the smallest house in Salzburg's historic city centre, with a width of only 1.42 metres; stores selling Mozartkugel, consisting of a marzipan centre with pistachio and nougat, encased in chocolate; horse-drawn carriages patiently waiting for punters on Residenzplatz Square. We pop into the grand 17th-century Baroque cathedral and St Peter's Abbey, a Benedictine monastery, before finding ourselves in St. Peter's Cemetery, one of the oldest – and perhaps most fetching – cemeteries in the world. The graves are mini garden beds, cultivated by local priests. A highlight is the catacombs, hewn into the rock walls of Mönchsberg mountain. The caves served as hermitages and burial sites and the graves of Mozart's sister and Michael Haydn sit at the entrance. Above it all, guarding the city, Hohensalzburg Fortress, the largest fully preserved castle in Central Europe, is enthroned on the Festungsberg.

Despite the plethora of historical gems, Salzburg is not mired in the past. Scattered throughout the city, the Salzburg Foundation has initiated works of contemporary art – 12 in all – by well-known international artists, such as Anselm Kiefer, Jaume Plensa and Erwin Wurm. A row of gherkins by Wurm sits in Furtwänglerpark; German artist Stephan Balkenhol's nine-metre high "Sphaera" on Kapitelplatz sees a male figure on a golden sphere, gazing at the fortress above; on the opposite side of the Salzach river that bisects the city, Marina Abramovic's "Spirit of Mozart" features a spindly, 15m-high chair surrounded by eight regular-height chairs that passers-by are invited to use. These serve as reminders of the times, merging with the history of the city to form a more modern whole.

By the time Martina leaves us on the doorstep of K+K on Waagplatz, we're ready to sit down. Housed in a historical building, K+K is a warren of vaulted and wood-panelled rooms with a buzzing ambience and the food is superb. We feast on marinated salmon with pumpernickel, a dressing of dill, honey and mustard, and confit of fennel; lukewarm goat



Left: Schloss Mirabell and Mirabell Gardens.

cheese with honey, olive tapenade, bacon and cress; and braised beef cheek with mashed celery, green beans and bacon. It's enough to fortify us for the rest of the day.

In the afternoon, we use our Salzburg Card to good effect. The card offers free admission to all of the major tourist attractions and museums, free use of public transportation and discounts on all manner of activities. We jump on a bus to Hellbrunn Palace, a palatial early Baroque villa in the south of the city. Built in 1613–19 by Markus Sittikus von Hohenems, Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg, it was used as a day residence, a kind of pleasure palace if you will, and is now primarily a museum. It is set within beautiful grounds, which are also now home to the gazebo from *The Sound of Music*. Markus Sittikus had a keen sense of humour, as evidenced by the fountains on site. The series of Mannerist trick waterworks, ranging from a mechanical theatre to a crown dancing on top of a spout of water and a table with water jets built into the seats, leave unsuspecting visitors damp and giggling.

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Erwin Wurm's gherkins.



The views in Salzburg are spectacular.

We have just enough time to visit the Panorama Museum back in the Old Town, the centrepiece of which is an enormous round painting. The artwork has a 26-metre circumference, and shows the historic city of Salzburg and its environs in detail, giving a closer look at the everyday life of Salzburg's residents 200 years ago.

As evening falls, we amble to the Mönchsberg lift. Cut into the rock, it rises 60 metres in 30 seconds, whisking us back to the viewing platform where we started the day. A short stroll along a forested, winding road finds us at our five-star superior hotel, Schloss Mönchstein, perched on top of Mönchsberg like a feather in Salzburg's cap. We collapse in our opulent suite, decked out with priceless antiques, delighted by all we've seen. The semi-circular room within the former castle is clothed in deep burgundy and white tones, giving it a regal, yet peaceful, air and it's so comfortable that we are soon settled in for the night.

Tomorrow, we'll catch the funicular up to Hohensalzburg Fortress and perhaps seek out some of the museums we missed today in the DomQuartier. We'll also find a few hours to relax by Schloss Mönchstein's pool and make use of the spa. On this short visit, we won't have time for the multitude of valleys, lakes and mountains dotted across Salzburgerland, not to mention the Krimml Waterfalls, the highest waterfalls in Europe, and the salt mines that give Salzburg its name. But it's reason enough to visit again – and again. ■

### INFO

Stay in: Schloss Mönchstein [www.monchstein.at](http://www.monchstein.at)

Eat at: K+K [www.kollerkoller.com](http://www.kollerkoller.com)

Buy a: Salzburg Card (and perhaps some Mozartkugel) [www.salzburg.info](http://www.salzburg.info)

Learn more at: [www.salzburgerland.com](http://www.salzburgerland.com)



The rear view of Hotel Schloss Mönchstein.



The pool has views over the city.



The atrium-style Apollo Bar.



Salzburg by night.