Imperial Vienna – timeless elegance

A stroll around Vienna can be like a journey back in time to the days of the empire – it comes as no surprise that the historic city center is a UNESCO world cultural heritage site. There are more than 27 palaces and upwards of 163 mansions in Vienna; at every turn, you can discover priceless cultural treasures or reflect on the imperial era whilst sitting in a coffee house. And if you are interested in shopping you can visit one of the former purveyors to the imperial court. Then why not visit one of the purveyors to the Imperial and Royal Court!

Whether on foot, by tram or – in the traditional way – in a horse-drawn carriage, a tour of Vienna's Ringstrasse is a very special kind of sightseeing, as this magnificent boulevard is lined with numerous parks and monuments. If the Viennese say that they are going to the Burg then they mean the Burgtheater and not the adjacent Hofburg. For more than 600 years the Hofburg was the official residence of the Habsburg emperors. Today the impressive buildings contain notable museums and important state rooms. But Vienna wouldn't be Vienna if the horse-drawn carriages didn't park directly in front of the offices of the Austrian President, or the National Library wasn't home to one of the most impressive Baroque rooms anywhere in the world. On Sundays, the Boys Choir or Girls' Choir sing in the Hofburg Chapel, and at the Spanish Riding School, the Lipizzaner horses demonstrate their skills. The horsemanship of the Spanish Riding School is also on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Sisi Museum provides insights into the private life of perhaps the most famous monarch. Just a few tram stops away the Belvedere Palace – the summer residence of Prince Eugene of Savoy – sits on an elevated site. It is home to the world's largest collection of Klimt paintings including his most famous work, The Kiss.

Lovers of imperial art are also drawn to Vienna's best-known palace. At Schönbrunn the imperial family had 1,444 rooms to choose from, some of which are open to visitors. In the palace park, architectural treasures await you, such as the Palm House and the Zoo, which has been named the best zoo in Europe for the sixth time. It is hardly surprising when you consider that the visitors now stand in the old lion cages while the animals themselves live in their modern enclosures – the essence of the original Baroque design has been skillfully preserved with characteristic Viennese charm. The oldest zoo in the world, which is particularly successful at breeding elephants and pandas, was built in 1752 by Maria Theresa's husband, Emperor Franz I. Stephan of Lorraine. The two of them were so devoted to each other that they even chose to share their final resting place. Their impressive double sarcophagus can be seen at the Habsburg burial crypt in the Kapuzinergruft (Capuchins' Crypt).

St. Stephen's Cathedral is the religious heart of Vienna. When the big bell, the Pummerin, rings on New Year's Eve, it is even broadcast on television. There are also celebrations throughout the ball season – the words "Alles Walzer" signal to the assembled guests that it is time to join the dance at the Redoutensaal of the Hofburg or one of the countless palaces. The Viennese also uphold the

good old days in their daily lives, enjoying a breakfast fit for an Emperor complete with delicious Kaisersemmel bread rolls, or treating themselves to a Kaiserschmarrn dessert. www.vienna.info

Facts and figures “Imperial”

- 27 palaces. (Source: Book “Auf den Spuren von Prunk & Pomp” by Christina Rademacher)
- 2 former imperial palaces (Schönbrunn and Hofburg)
- 1,444 rooms in Schönbrunn Palace. (Source: www.schoenbrunn.at)
- 163 residences (Source: www.viennatouristguide.at)
- Schönbrunn Zoo: the oldest surviving zoo in the world (since 1752). (Source: www.zoovienna.at)
- The Vienna Ringstrasse is 5.3 km long. (Source: Freytag & Berndt)
- Imperial Crypt: Burial site for 150 Habsburgs (incl. 12 emperors, 19 empresses and queens). (Source: www.kapuzinergruft.com)
- 280 imperial parks and gardens. (Source: Book “Parks und Gärten in Wien” by Peter Autengruber)
- Spanish Riding School: the only institution in the world to nurture classical riding in the Renaissance tradition of the “High School” for more than 450 years. The horsemanship of the Spanish Riding School was placed on UNESCO’s list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in December 2015. (Source: www.srs.at)