

VIENNA: MOZART AND MORE

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Happy Birthday, Wolfgang!

2006 was the 250th birthday of noted composer Wolfgang Mozart. We decided to celebrate his birthday by making a pilgrimage to Vienna. We were anxious to hear his music and visit Musikverein, the site of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra's New Year's Day concert that is televised each year on public television that always includes pieces by Mozart.

We journeyed to Vienna on British Airways from Boston through London. The additional legroom and wider seats in BA's World Traveller Plus service made the trip so much more relaxing.

Situated in the heart of Europe, Vienna has been shaped by a wide variety of cultural elements and has played a major role in world history. It is evident in the city's architecture and outstanding achievements. No matter where we traveled it seemed we were touched by its past. It is with New York and Geneva now the third home of the United Nations.



A former palace, the Residenz Palais Coburg is Vienna's most distinctive hotel. (Courtesy photo)

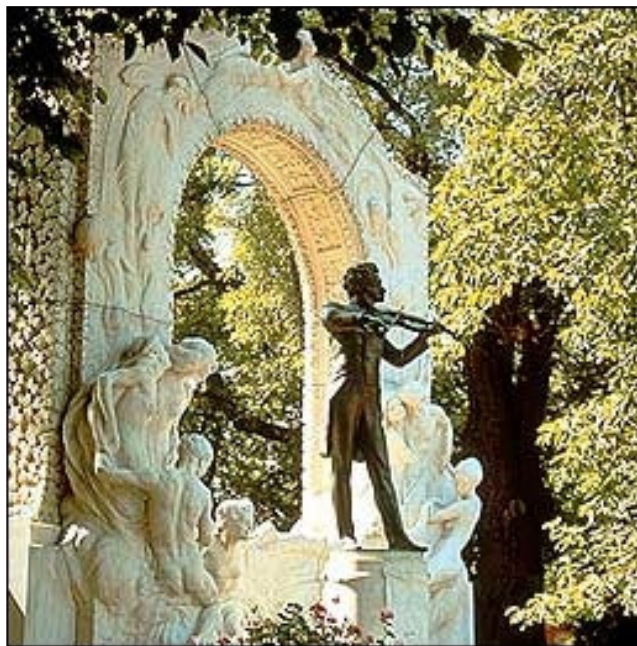
Stella, my interior designer spouse, had decided that we should stay in a building that had its own history. She selected the Palais Coburg, a hotel residence that had been built as a palace in 1845. It stands atop the Braunbastei, a former fortification dating back to the 16th century. More than 120 million dollars has been spent in converting the palace to this outstanding hotel with 35 suites, restaurant, wine bar and wine cellar, spa, and conference and function rooms.

Stella would describe our suite as “classically elegant.” She was impressed at how well the past was preserved with reproductions of classical furniture, artwork, and lighting fixtures while accommodating the future through wireless access to the Internet and the state-of-the-art video and audio systems.

There was an ethos of personal, informal, yet respectful friendliness throughout the Palais. Sarah, Rolf, Julia, and Stefan responded attentively to our every need from the desk or in our room. Our demands were minor compared to a story we heard about a vice-president of an international corporation who ordered more than \$4000 in red roses so that a 16th century room in which he was to be married would be covered with rose petals. I did order a dozen roses for Stella after hearing that story.

We took advantage of the Palais Coburg’s Spa. I enjoyed doing my laps in its rooftop indoor pool. Stella worked out with the cardio-vascular equipment before having a great massage.

Dining was a special pleasure. Beginning the day with breakfast on the outdoor terrace was a real treat. Chef Christian Petz’s classical Austrian cooking and international specialties at the Restaurant Coburg were superb as was being able to select wines to complement them from its 40,000 bottle wine cellar, truly one of the largest in the world. We did pass on the Madeira dating back to 1795.



Music has played a large role in Vienna’s history. Johann Strauss, whose statue is shown here in a downtown park, played a large role in it. (Courtesy photo)

We combined Mozart and Strauss and the music of other Viennese composers with several Viennese dishes at Cafe Restaurant Johann in the Kursalon Wien. Marina Kirova played these classics on the grand piano in the Johann dining room. This 20-year old incredibly talented pianist/composer

performed classical as well as contemporary tunes. Both Johann and Wolfgang would have been most impressed as would Louie Armstrong.

We also enjoyed dinner at Restaurant Vestibul, across from City Hall in the neoclassical wing of the Burgtheater. We savored the foie gras melon with jellied gewürztraminer and brioche as a starter and fresh salmon trout with gnocchi and argula entrée. Reminded us of the brasseries we visited in Paris last summer.

Stella was delighted to find Bohemian crystal Christmas trees at Lobmeyer Crystal along with a variety of interior textiles and other design discoveries. The city is filled with talented and artistic craftspeople.

Three experiences really stood out during our visit to Vienna. Listening to one of Mozart's 600 compositions performed by the Vienna Philharmonic at the Musikverein was incredible. The acoustics made the music even more profound. The ceiling is not joined to the walls but hangs freely and there is a full room beneath the hall to allow for better vibrations. Wolfgang would be pleased.

Stella particularly enjoyed a visit to the Schonbrunn Palace. The building dates back to the Hapsburg dynasty beginning in the 15th century. Now included in the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List, the complex not only includes the palace itself but its related buildings, fountains, gardens, statues, and the oldest zoo in the world. From Franz Joseph's Study to Empress Elizabeth's Study, as well as the galleries, billiards room, and audience chambers, all with the original art work and furnishings, the Palace provides insight into the lives of this noble dynasty.

The magnificent Stephansdom, St. Stephen's Cathedral, dominates Vienna's skyline. Hard to believe that the original Romanesque structure was consecrated in 1147. The Gothic reconstruction began 157 years later and added three naves with high vaulting and tower. It is the third tallest church tower in the world. The high altar is a masterpiece composed of many impressive religious icons.

* A former teacher, curriculum specialist, and superintendent of schools, **Dr. Charles L. Mitsakos** is professor of education and chair of the education division at Rivier College. He is the author or co-author of more than twenty history, geography, and social studies textbooks, workbooks, and multimedia programs for elementary and secondary schools. He has served as educational consultant to schools and school districts in fifteen states, U. S. Virgin Islands, U. S. Department of Defense Dependents Schools, and Ministries/Departments of Education in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, and Jamaica. He is a past president and now serves as treasurer of the Social Science Education Consortium, an affiliate of the National Council for the Social Studies. A freelance travel writer, Dr. Mitsakos has had articles published in periodicals throughout New England.