

Blue Danube Cruise Related History

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Introduction

While I have not been to all of the sites to be visited on this tour, I have seen most of them on another Danube cruise. To that end, I would like to share some of the related history to make a trip along the Danube more interesting.

The “Blue” Danube River

The Blue Danube is not blue. The Blue Danube Waltz was written by Johan Straus in 1866.

It is the second longest river in Europe, being 1,775 miles long.

The river is scenic and pastoral, flowing through 10 countries and 4 European capitals. Little chapels can be seen along the way. They are used by farmers who want to worship, but do not travel to churches nearby.

As your ship goes through the locks, beware of the headroom! If you are standing up, you may get hit on the head by the lock's supporting beams!

Salzburg, Austria

Originally, it was the site of a Celtic settlement.

Salzburg was founded in 696. It got its name for the adjacent salt mines.

In the 17th Century, it was the center of the Counter Reformation, with Baroque churches and monasteries being built.

The Reformation was a 16th Century religious movement that challenged the authority of the Catholic Church and led to the rise of Protestantism. Many felt that the Catholic Church was corrupt, and its practices were not in line with the teachings of the Bible. It was led by Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others.

The Prince Archbishop brought the Italian Renaissance style to Salzburg between 1587 and 1612. It became known as the “German Rome.”

In 1996, the Salzburg Old Town “Altstadt” became a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Following are Salzburg Sound of Music Movie Sites - 1965

The Opening Scene

When Maria came running across the pastoral mountain field singing “The Hills are Alive with the Sound of Music,” what you don’t see were the road and power lines just over the hill that were taken down for filming of the movie.

Hohensalzburg Fortress

Construction began on the Hohensalzburg Fortress in 1077.

It is one of the largest medieval castles in Europe.

A Roman originally existed on this site.

In 1515, the first funicular was built to bring freight to the Fortress. Using the current funicular, it is a fast way to get to the top of the Fortress for a spectacular view!

The external bastions were begun in the 16th Century, and completed in 1619, for fear of a Turkish invasion.

The Fortress expanded gradually over the years.

In the 19th Century, it was used as a barracks, storage, and a dungeon.

Note, if you go inside the Fortress, you can see examples of the tools of torture.

In the 20th Century, it was used as a prison holding WWI Italian prisoners of war and Nazi supporters, before Germany annexed Austria in March 1938.

The Nazi annexation of Austria was known as the Anschluss. Hitler's idea was to incorporate as many Germans outside of Germany as possible to create a Greater Germany. There was to be a referendum in Austria to see if the Austrian people wanted to unite with Germany, however, the day before the referendum, Germany invaded Austria.

The Anschluss was the backstory of the Sound of Music, and was the reason why Captain Von Trapp and his family fled Austria.

Salzburg suffered minor damage during WWII and was handed over to the Allied military forces in Austria between 1945-1956.

Schloss Leopoldskron

Salzburg's Prince-Archbishop built the Schloss Leopoldskron in 1736, as the family residence. This was after he expelled 22,000 Protestants from Salzburg.

The Schloss was constructed in the Rococo Baroque style.

It was purchased in 1918 by Max Reinhardt, the noted theater director, and founder of the Salzburg Festival. He escaped to the United States as persecution of the Jews increased.

In 1939, the German government confiscated the palace as a national treasure during the taking of Jewish property. It is now recognized as a national historic monument.

Three of the rooms were used in the filming of the Sound of Music, however, it was not the original living house of the Von Trapp family. Ten outdoor scenes were filmed here.

Mirabell Palace and Gardens

This is where Maria and the Von Trapp children were skipping through the gardens, running up and down the stairs singing Do-Re-Mi.

Note, the Mirabell gardens have WI-FI so you can listen to Do-Re-Mi while visiting the Gardens.

The Gazebo/Music Pavilion

In the movie, this was where Liesl and Rolff sang “16 going on 17” and where Maria and Captain Von Trapp sang “Something Good.”

The gazebo was originally at the Schloss Leopoldskron, but with pressure from sightseers, it was relocated to Hellbrunn Castle.

The actual filming was done on a Hollywood soundstage.

Hellbrunn Palace

This was an early Baroque palace built between 1612-1616. It was named for the clear spring that supplied it.

This is where you will find the actual gazebo.

The Mondesee Abbey

It was constructed between 788-831, built on the ruins of a Roman settlement.

The first monks came from St. Peter’s Abbey of Salzburg.

The Abbey’s condition declined during the Reformation, but a new period of prosperity occurred with its connection to the celebration of the thousandth anniversary of its foundation.

It reverted to Bavaria during the Napoleonic Period. France declared war on Austria and Prussia in 1792.

The Abbey was then re-built in the Gothic style, and modernized again in the 17th Century in the Baroque style.

This was the location of the wedding in the Sound of Music.

The Felsenreitschule (The Summer Riding School)

The Summer Riding School was built into the side of a hill in 1633.

It is the stage for the Salzburg Music Festival.

This is where the Von Trapp Family and Captain Von Trapp sang Do-Re-MI, Edelweiss and So Long, Farewell, Auf Wiedersehen, Goodbye.

Residenzplatz Square

This was part of a scene when the Nazi army was parading through the town, with a giant Nazi flag hanging from a building in the background.

St. Peter’s Abbey

The church was founded in the 7th Century and began in 696.

It was re-built as a convent church in the 12th Century.

It is the oldest remaining monastery in existence in the German speaking world.

Following the Austrian Anschluss by Nazi Germany, the premises was seized and most of the monks were expelled. The monks returned after the war.

Cemetery at St. Peter's Abbey

This is where the Von Trapp family hid after they were done singing at the Felsenreitschule, the Summer Riding School.
The actual site was filmed at Fox Studios.

Final Scene

In the movie, you see the Von Trapp family escaping to Switzerland by climbing in the Alps singing "Climb Every Mountain." In reality, they escaped by taking a train to Italy. The Nazis closed the roads the next day.

Passau, Germany

Passau is at the confluence of 3 rivers: the Danube, Inn and the Ilz.
The Roman era walls date back to 2 BC, when the town of Bolodurum was founded.
Passau was originally a Celtic settlement.
In the Roman times it was called Batava.
In 739 AD, the English Archbishop founded the Diocese of Passau.
During the Middle Ages, it was a major trade and shipping center.
The city specialized in salt deposits from the Inn River.
After fires in 1662 and 1680, the bishops re-built much of the city in the Baroque Style.
The city was bombed during WWII but never took a direct hit.
Between 1892-1894, Hitler's family lived in Passau.

St. Stephens Cathedral

The site was founded in the 2nd Century BC by the Bolls, who were driven here by the Romans.
The Cathedral was constructed between 1668-1693 in the Baroque style; and is one of the largest Italian Baroque buildings north of the Alps.
It is the home of the largest organ in the world, with 17,974 organ pipes, 233 stops, and 4 carillons.
It is the seat of the Catholic Bishop of Passau.

Melk, Austria

The town of Melk was first known as Medilica in 831.
It was the site of a Roman garrison, and was the castle-residence of the Babenberg Rulers from 976-1101.
The area is well known for its wines.

The Benedictine Abbey in Melk

Monks have been living there since 1089.
The Benedictine Abbey in Melk is one of the largest and most beautiful European Baroque religious complexes.
It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

It was enlarged in the 14th Century, but was enlarged and fortified again between 1702-1736 in the Baroque Style.

The library contains 1,088 manuscripts, with 750 works before 1500 AD.

Note: You can't take pictures inside. It might be worth your while to find a "gift shop" in the property to get photos.

Wachau Valley, Austria

This is a section of the Danube River listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

It is a beautiful section of the river featuring little scenic villages, castles, churches. and vineyards rolling up the hillsides.

Settlements have been identified here dating back to prehistoric times.

It is known for its Gruner Veltliner and Reisling wines.

Vienna, Austria

Vienna was first occupied during the Paleolithic Period, dating back to the Old Stone Age.

During the 1st Century BCE, the Romans established a military camp on the site of Vienna's Center City.

In the 11th Century, Vienna became an important trading center and capital of the Babenberg Dynasty.

1529: First Ottoman siege of Vienna.

1558: Became the seat of the Holy Roman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, until 1806.

1683: The Second Ottoman Siege.

After the end of WWI, in 1918, Vienna became the capital of the Republic of Austria.

1938: When Germany annexed Austria, Vienna became the center of Nazi power.

1945: Austria was divided into zones, when it was occupied by Allied forces.

1955: Austria regained its independence.

St. Stephens Cathedral

It was originally built on the site of an ancient Roman cemetery.

Constructed between 1137-1578, it is a combination of Romanesque and Gothic Architecture.

It was saved from destruction in WWII when the German Wehrmacht captain disobeyed an order to fire 100 shells at it and reduce it to rubble.

Notice the unique pattern in the roof tiles.

Vienna Secessionist Art Movement

The Vienna Secessionist Movement was founded in 1897 by artist Gustav Klimt.

It was an architectural movement that rejected historicism (such as the Renaissance and the Classical styles) and embraced geometry and abstraction. It moved away from ornate decorative styles.

The Secessionists believed in the integration of all art forms, including architecture. It was influenced by the contemporary Arts and Crafts Movement and was considered the Germanic answer to Art Nouveau.

Vienna Secessionist Museum

This was designed as an exhibition space for the Secessionist Movement, a movement closely related to the Art Nouveau.

It was designed by Joseph Maria Olbrich and constructed between 1897-1898.

Karlsplatz Stadtbahn Station

Constructed in 1889, it is a well-known example of the Jugendstil style of architecture, designed by Otto Wagner.

This was an arm of the Secessionist Movement.

.Vienna Opera House

It was constructed in 1869 in the Renaissance style.

It seats 2,284 and is the home of the Vienna State Opera.

The chandelier in the main house is comprised of 3,000 crystals and 1,100 lights.

Note: If you have time and decide to go to the opera, verify if they still have a dress code. When I went, they gave me a tie to wear, which I had to return when the opera was over.

Schonbrun Palace

“Schonbrun” means beautiful spring.

It was opened in 1700, when it was copied from the Palace of Versailles in Paris.

The palace was the summer residence of the Hapsburg rulers.

The Hapsburg lineage began in 1276. The name goes back to 1020.

If you are touring the palace on your own, be careful of your timing. Decide ahead of time what you want to see. The palace and the grounds are huge. When we visited, we ran out of time. At least view the gardens and the structures behind the palace, even if you don't have time to get back to them.

Marie Antoinette, Napoleon, and the Empress Elizabeth all lived there at some time.

Empress Elizabeth was well-loved by the Austrians. They called her “Lizzie.”

The palace was said to have been painted yellow ochre to provide financial support for the Bohemian ochre mines owned by the Hapsburg family.

Bratislava, Slovenia

The Castle Hill was populated as early as the Stone Age.

The first written evidence of the City appears in the Annals of Salzburg in 907.

The first known inhabitants were the Celts.

There were also Roman and Slavic settlements.

The City was destroyed by the Turks during the 16th Century.

From 1536 to 1783, Bratislava was the capital of Hungary.

In WWI, Bratislava was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, until 1918.
After WWI, it became part of Czechoslovakia.
It was a part of Yugoslavia for most of the 20th Century.
In 1991 Slovenia declared independence from Yugoslavia,
In 1993, it became the capital of the Independent Slovak Republic.

Bratislava Palace

The palace construction goes back to the 11th Century.
In the 16th Century, King Ferdinand ordered rebuilding of the Castle in the Renaissance style.
In the 17th Century, it was rebuilt again in the Baroque style, under the reign of Maria Theresa.
Since independence, it has served as a representative venue of the Slovak Parliament.

Ketek

When in Bratislava, go into a souvenir shop. In there, you will see a little stuffed animal.
It is named "Ketek," meaning "Little Mouse." In 1956, during the Cold War, the Communists created the character as the Soviet's answer to Mickey Mouse.

Czech Republic

It is comprised of the historical provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, and the southern tip of Silesia.
Created in 1918, it was, at one time, the western part of Czechoslovakia.
During WWII, the Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia. As they retreated, they blew up all of the bridges to slow the progress of the Communist Red Army.
The City saw significant damage by both the Nazis and the Communist Red Army.
The residents staged a march against the Soviets during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.
In 1989, as part of the "Velvet Revolution", Czechoslovakia threw out the Communist regime, which had been in power since 1948. The Velvet Revolution was a non-violent transition of power against the Communist Party.
In 1993, the Czech Republic came into existence.
In 2016, the country adopted the name Czechia as a shortened informal name.

Budapest

The city of Budapest spans both sides of the river, Historic Buda is on the east bank and the more cosmopolitan Pest is on the west bank.
Its history goes back to the Celtic and Roman settlements.
The Celts occupied the Ungarian Plains in the 4th Century. The Romans conquered the area in 100.
They were expelled by the Huns in the 5th Century.
The city was officially created in 1873, with the merger of the cities of Pest, Buda and Obuda.

The Buda Castle, Quarter and Andrassy Avenue are a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Shoes on the Danube Promenade

On the banks of the Danube, near where the guide boats dock, you will find 30 pairs of rusted iron shoes cast into the sea wall. The shoes represent those shoes left behind by some of the victims killed along the riverbank.

They are a memorial and a monument to the Hungarian Jews who, in 1944 and 1945, were shot on the banks of the river by the Arrow Cross Party.

The Arrow Cross Party was a violent antisemitic group supported by the Nazis that introduced a reign of terror, killing thousands of Jews (men, women, and children) all over the city.

Often, they would shoot their victims and let them fall into the Danube, where the river would wash away their bodies. Before killing the Jews, they would take off the victims' shoes, because shoes were a valuable commodity during WWII.

During the war, the Danube was known as the "Jewish Cemetery."

A plaque was installed in 2005 which reads. "To the memory of the victims shot into the Danube by the Arrow Cross militiamen in 1944-1945."

See if you can find this memorial. Although small and understated, this is very powerful!

The Fisherman's Bastion

It was built in 1844, having a modern-day structure dating from 1895 in the Neo-Romanesque style.

The 7 high-pitched towers symbolize the 7 chieftains of the Hungarians who founded Hungary in 895.

It overlooks a small part of the city called "Watertown," where the fishermen of the city lived.

It is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Parliament

It was built between 1885-1902.

Make sure that you see this building, and the rest of the monumental riverfront structures at night. With the dramatic lighting, it is a site that you will never forget!!!

St. Matthias Church

It was originally built in the Romanesque style. Little of it remains.

The current church is in the Late Gothic style, constructed during the second half of the 14th Century.

The Ottomans attacked Budapest in 1686, when using St Matthias as a mosque. They plastered over the Christian artwork, but it was later removed. Evidence of the Ottomans remains.

Prague, Czech Republic

The town is divided into 2 parts, bisected by the Danube. The parts are divided as “The Little Quarter” and “The New Town.”

It was founded in the 9th Century.

By the 10th Century, Prague was a thriving town with a large market base.

It was said to be “The Crossroads of Europe.”

During the Middle Ages Prague was bigger than Rome or Paris.

Prague Castle

The Prague Castle was begun in 1230 in the Romanesque style.

It was set on a high ridge to protect the city.

After a fire in 1541, it was re-built in the Renaissance style.

Since 1918, it has been the seat of government.

Within the walls is the Golden Lane, artisan cottages were built for the guards. One of the cottages was where alchemists were said to have changed lead into gold.

There is also a display of tools of torture.

Royal Palace

It was first fortified in stone in the 11th Century.

It was the seat of power for the Bohemian princes.

In 1618 over 100 Protestant nobles protested the ascension to the throne of Habsburg Archbishop Ferdinand. Two Catholic governors were thrown out of the eastern window but lived when they landed on a pile of dung. They credited their survival to the intervention of angels. This event signaled the beginning of the 30 Years War.

St. Vitus Cathedral

In 925, the rotunda was built by King Wenceslas.

In 1060, the triple-naved basilica was built.

In 1069, Calvinists overtook the Cathedral as a house of prayer.

The chancel was built in the Gothic style, dating from 1372.

The tower was built in 1496.

The Charles Bridge

Commissioned in 1387, it connects the Little Quarter with the New Town.

It is now a pedestrian bridge, but it originally supported 4 lanes of carriages.

Take time to go up into the towers at each end of the bridge for a great view of the city.

The Town Hall Clock

The clock was built in 1490.

It was designed to show movement of the sun and moon, as well as showing the 12 signs of the zodiac.

On the hour, the clock shows the procession of the 12 Apostles.

After the clock was completed, the clock master was blinded to keep him from ever building a clock like this again!

Petrin Observation Tower

The Petrin Observation Tower was constructed in 1891 to support the Jubilee Exhibition. It is $\frac{1}{4}$ the height of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. It was used as an observation tower and a transmission tower.

The following is “A Brief History of European Architecture” This may help to appreciate the range of styles designed over thousands of years, seeing what makes one style unique from the other. Think of the technology and materials available to create these spectacular, grand-sized buildings!

Additional Sound of Music Information

- Mozart Bridge** The bridge where Maria and the children crossed the river.
It is an Art Deco bridge, built in 1903.
- Von Trapp Villa** Built in 1863, the real Von Trapp villa is in Aigen.
The estate's gardens are among the largest privately owned in Salzburg.
From 1938-1945 the villa was occupied by the Nazis.
The primary resident was SS Chief Heinrich Himmler.
After WWII, the villa was returned to the Von Trapp family, who sold it to a Catholic missionary group.
- Nonberg Abbey** This is where the Von Trapps actually were married in 1929.
This is the abbey where Maria was trying to become a nun.
It is the oldest women's religious institution in the German speaking World.
In 14243, most of the original Romanesque church was destroyed by fire. It was re-built in the Gothic style between 1464-1506.
- St. Peter's Cemetery** The grounds date from 1627, making it the oldest Christian cemetery in Salzburg.
Salzburg's first monks settled here in 700 AD.
Above the cemetery, carved in the rocks of Monchsberg are Early Christian catacombs.
This was the inspiration for the Sound of Music scene when the Von Trapp family was escaping from the festival.
- Leofoldskron** The gate and the lake were where Maria and the children fell off the boat.
Schloss Leofoldskron was constructed in 1736.
The Venetian Room was copied for the Sound of Music.
- Residenzplatz** Residenzplatz Square was commissioned in 1587.
It is bordered by the Alta Residenz, the Neue Residenz and the Salzburg Cathedral.
The Renaissance style fountain with 4 horses was built between 1656-1661. It is seen when Maria is singing I have confidence.
This is where the Anschutz is seen, with Nazis marching through the square with a large Nazi flag in the background.

Mirabell Gardens Designed in the late 17th Century after building of the Mirabell Palace in 1606. It was re-built several times.
This is where Maria and the children danced on the steps singing Do-Re-Mi.
The 4 statues in the garden represent fire, water, earth, and air.

Rosefeld This is actually in Bavaria, not in Austria, It is where, in the movie, the Von Trapps escaped to Switzerland. Actually, Switzerland is 250 miles from Salzberg. In reality, they were waking toward Germany, only 6 miles away. They were walking toward Berchtesgaden (Hitler's Eagle's Nest) not far away!

Mondesee Cathedral
The wedding was filmed here.
It was established as a Roman church in 748 AD, on the site of an early Roman settlement.
Its history can be traced to the Neolithic Period, based upon artifacts found here.
The oldest German translation of the Bible was done in Mondesse.

Mellweg
In the opening scene, this is the meadow where Maria sings The Hills Are Alive with the Sound of Music.
The actual singing was recorded in a studio in Los Angeles.