

Viennese charm

Historic city offers more than just art and culture

MIND YOUR MONEY
by Chermaine Poo



ON MY visit to the Porsche headquarters for a tour of its assembly plant and museum in Stuttgart, Germany, I extended the trip to cover Vienna and Salzburg in Austria. The beautiful architecture of restored war-torn buildings there was telling of the nation's sad but rich history. What I saw left a deep and lasting impression.

For starters, I was fortunate enough to visit the Schonbrunn Palace, which means "beautiful spring" in the local language. It is one of the most important cultural monuments in the country and, since the 1960s, has been one of the major tourist attractions in Vienna.

It was the residence of the last emperor of Austria, Emperor Franz Joseph. I took a picture of his room, which clearly showed that he lived a frugal life, unusual for an emperor.

I was particularly fascinated by his strained marriage to the beautiful Empress Elizabeth, fondly known as Empress Sisi, an iconic fashion figure who wore corsets and never ate supper to keep her slender figure, never joining her family for dinner. Her long hair reached the floor and took hours to get ready every day with the help of her maids!

Although the Emperor loved his wife passionately, the empress never reciprocated his feelings and felt increasingly stifled by the court etiquette and blamed him for marrying her children off for political reasons.

To escape her loveless marriage, she left the palace to see the world, a fatal move for her.

Further reading about her life shows that while travelling in Geneva in 1898, she was stabbed to death by Italian anarchist Luigi Lucheni who had missed his chance to assassinate Prince

Philippe, the Duke of Orléans, and wanted to kill the next member of royalty that he saw. What a tragic tale!

A strong economy

Unknown to many, Austria has a small population of 8.8 million but it is the 12th richest country in the world with a GDP of US\$394,708 (RM1,278,853) and GDP per capita of US\$46,330 (RM150,109) in 2012.

Austria is a highly-developed industrialised country and has a strong service sector.

Its manufacturing, energy and mining sectors make up 31% of its GDP, services including banking and tourism contribute 61%.

The most important industry is tourism, which employs 220,000 people and contributes 10% of the GDP. The land-locked central European country, surrounded by six countries, registered 23 million visitors in 2011.

Austria makes more than 800,000 car engines each year for various car manufacturers as well as microprocessors and integrated circuits for airbags, ABS braking systems, components for Airbus airliners and high-speed trains.

A modern and progressive EU member state, its well-managed economy maintains a low unemployment rate of 4.3%.

Its capital and largest city, Vienna, or Wien in German, has a population of 1.757 million and is one of the most liveable cities in the world.

The city centre was designated a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2011 to preserve the early Celtic and Roman settlements of Medieval and Baroque architecture with grand buildings, gardens and monuments.

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Cosy: The spacious room in Viennese Hotel Der Wilhelmshof.

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