



## THE GARDENS OF SCHÖNBRUNN PALACE, VIENNA AUSTRIA

Vienna Austria is a truly refined city. A bit like Washington DC with low building profiles, copious museums and beautifully manicured public parks. But the jewel in the crown is Schönbrunn Palace. For pure grandeur it has few equals in the world. The land was originally secured in 1569 by Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II. Initially used for breeding game birds and hunting, boar and deer were also cultivated on the property. Ducks mingled on stocked fish ponds as peafowl and

turkey wandered the grounds. Over nearly the next century hunting was the properties primary function.

Overtime one of the world's grandest Palaces would ultimately take shape on the property. By 1638 the Katterburg Palace had been built. It's name would change to Schönbrunn as expansions took place. The name Schönbrunn means "beautiful spring". The Palace we see today was constructed and remodeled between 1740 and 1758. Large scale redecoration was commissioned by Franz the 1<sup>st</sup> with a focus on neoclassical style.

Austria's longest reigning Emperor, Franz Joseph was born at Schönbrunn and lived most of his long life there. He died in November of 1916 at 86 years old. At that time the Palace was surrounded by some of Europe's grandest gardens and conservatories. Shortly thereafter it became a museum in the newly formed Austrian Republic. In 1996 the Palace and gardens received UNSECO designation on the World Heritage list.

The Palace itself is so huge and fascinating the grounds can be overlooked by the casual visitor. Yet the gardens and grounds make up a horticultural setting worthy of a visit on its own; really a vast arboretum and botanical garden inlaid with fountains, specimen

trees and splendid ornamental horticultural displays. On the east side of the palace one finds a rose tunnel. At Schönbrunn its not enough to have a rose garden, so you can stroll a one hundred foot long rose tunnel to the garden itself. Meticulously cultivated onto an arching metal frame, thousands of red roses bloom with abandon. Beyond the striking beauty one can't help wonder the level of labor required for such a display. Soon, you realize this applies to the entire property. Seemingly endless tulip beds form meandering rivers of color toward bold displays of tropical palms nearly exploding from pots the size of a compact car. Every Landscape detail is etched in living plant material.



The hardscaping is similarly amazing. At one point you're walking on fine river gravel toward a circular fountain. A few steps away, you arrive in a tall hedge of European basswood tightly trimmed and tended by perfectly interlock random slate. This in turn is hemmed in by moss that nips and tucks each irregularity on the stones margins. The

outdoor court yard might be 100 feet long by 100 feet wide containing thousands of flat moss-clad stones. Sweeping lawns host a remarkable collection of trees. Huge American white and red Oaks stand near European beech trees that may predate the palace. Nearby the exquisite Lebanese cedar appears as the perfect wind-swept conifer and massive dawn redwoods rise in a feathery cone toward the sun. And of course there are fruit trees. Pears, apples and cherries bloom in anticipation of fall fruits. Inside the giant Orangery citrus trees-oranges, limes, lemons, grapefruit and the globous pomelos are carefully tended. Add the vineyards, boxwood maze and zoo you'll need an entire day.

For the garden enthusiast the site never fails to inspire wonder at how one of Europe's greatest monarchies lived among the pure magic of nearly endless gardens. Perhaps no other aspect of the garden embodies this wonder more than the conservatories. Today we are accustomed to large conservatories being a public facility. But Schönbrunn had several just for the pleasure of the royals. The Palm House rivals many conservatories at the world best public gardens-think of Kew Gardens, Longwood or the New York Botanical Garden. For Schönbrunn this was just another amenity for royal strolls,

horseback adventures or a family picnic. The Palm house features plants from the wet tropics of the world. Indeed, many plants were sent back by European explorers in the new and old-world tropics. Trees ferns, fan palms and ficus trees mix in the humid air as numerous orchids decorate the entrance way.



But the humid tropic is just one aspect of conservatory horticulture. A short walk east and you can enjoy the dryland conservatory where a large collection of North American cacti mix with Euphorbias from Africa and various Mediterranean species. Detailed rock-scaping backed by beautifully painted sunset murals creates a remarkable pallet of color and texture that can nearly transport you to Namibia or

Arizona. Among the plants, several tortoises and lizards native to world deserts are kept in adjacent enclosures. Collectively the conservatories demonstrate a remarkable commitment to estate horticulture rarely equaled in any royal residence.

Surely the grandest vista at Schönbrunn is from the back of the Palace looking toward the hilltop and Gloriette. Today the Gloriette houses a restaurant and roof top viewing area. Once you climb the hill, views back across several large knot gardens is awe inspiring. The Palace spreads a giant span, perhaps five hundred feet across. The magnitude of this view embodies the absolute grandeur of this vast palatial complex in all its glory. Its worth touring the Palace and grounds- but a full day is recommended. The royal tenants, endorsed by Holy Roman Empire, lived a magnificent life among the gardens. Today we can enjoy them too and marvel at the diverse horticultural treasures of Schönbrunn.

From the BGT team-

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