Innsbruck Maximilian I's Legacy

A MAJESTIC COMBINATION OF CULTURE AND HERITAGE IN THE HEART OF THE ALPS

By Mohammed Reza Amirinia

CATEGORY: TRAVEL DESTINATIONS



WILTEN ABBEY	BERGISEL SKI JUMP	GOLDENES DACHL	AMBRAS CASTLE
The Baroque Basilica	*A Modern Landmark*	*The Golden Roof Terrace*	*Early Music Festival*

BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER INN

Innsbruck: Maximilian I's legacy

As the capital of Tyrol region, Innsbruck has a majestic combination of culture and heritage ranging from the medieval to the renaissance, mixed with winter sports, hiking and summer adventure

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a view of Innsbruck from the Bergiesel Ski Jump

Innsbruck, as the name implies, is "a bridge over the River Inn," and has flourished as an important crossing point since the twelfth century. The town was grown around the bridge because, being nestled in the Inn valley, it provided the easiest and fastest transit route across the Alps.

Being such an obvious crossing point, many guesthouses, bars and restaurants were established to serve visitors. It brought large revenues and prosperity to the city and, today, Innsbruck has kept that importance but attuned itself to demands in the modern time in different ways.

II



inside the ornate Hofkirche

As the capital of Tyrol region, Innsbruck has a majestic combination of culture, heritage ranging from the medieval to the renaissance all of which is mixed with winter sports, hiking and many adventure activities during the summer.

Innsbruck emerged as a European political hub of cultural importance in the fifteenth century when Emperor Maximilian I chose the city as his imperial residence. Its rich architectural masterpieces, such as Hofkirche, Imperial Holfburg and the Goldenes Dachl, (Golden Roof Terrace), are his legacy and that of his successors.

III



the Witten Abbey basilica

I began our tour at the edge of the city to visit the Wilten Abbey Basilica. The Basilica's foundation goes back to early Christianity (around the fifth century) but it has been rebuilt several times since then. The baroque façade of the church, with its twin towers painted in white and yellow, has an interior with soft colours adorned by a rococo architectural style.

Next to the basilica is Wilten Collegiate Church, the oldest monastery in Innsbruck and the Tyrol region. Built in the twelfth century it still is home to several monks and is closed to public. Opposite these two churches is the nineteenth century Westfriedhof cemetery.

IV



just part of the painting – the largest painting I have seen!

In the south of the city you will find the Tyrol Panorama Museum which houses the biggest painting I have ever seen. The Innsbruck Giant Panoramic Painting has been painted on a thousand square metre canvas and depicts the Tyrolean rebellion of 1809 against Napoleon. The museum is located on Bergisel Hill, the exact spot where the battle took place. The 360 degree painting shows the landscapes, people and extraordinary scenes of the fight for freedom. The painting is a permanent educational tool exploring the culture, religion, anthropology and politics of the region at that time.

V



the Kaiserjäger Museum from where there is a great view of the city below



the famed Bergiesel Ski Jump

The museum is connected to the Kaiserjäger Museum (the Imperial Tyrolean Infantry Museum) through an underground passage. This museum exhibits the different aspects of the history of the Tyrol and displays Austrian military development from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Standing on Bergisel Hill in a terrace in the grounds of the museum, you should get an amazing panoramic view of Innsbruck and its mountainous surroundings.

Nearby is the Bergiesel Ski Jump, a modern landmark of Innsbruck, with a panoramic restaurant. It stands high above the city on the top of the forested Bergisel Hill and, for those who consider they've climbed enough, there is a lift to take you to the restaurant. At 250 metres high, you can get widespread views of the city framed against a backdrop of mountains.

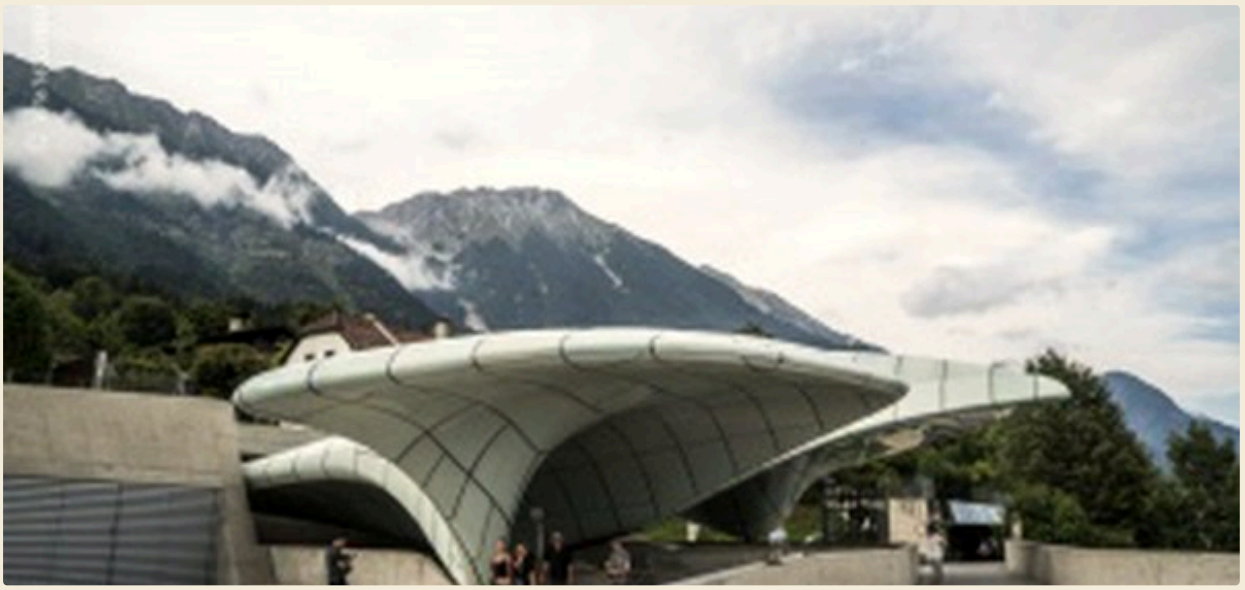
VI



a lynx at the Alpine Zoo

Clouds hung over the mountain the following morning so my plan was to visit the old town. But they lifted quickly so I took the funicular from the old town to reach Hungerburg which is 860 metres high. This is the nearest stop for the Alpine Zoo, reportedly the highest zoo in Europe. It specialises in just those animals that live in alpine conditions so you will see, lynxes, eagles, bears and other creatures that make up the 2,000 from 150 species that live here in conditions claimed to be as close to those in which they live in the wild.

VII



the very modern looking Hungerburg Funicular station – used by those visiting the Alpine Zoo who don't want to walk

From Hungerburg you catch the cable car that eventually takes you to Hafelekar. Before that however, I got off at Seegrube to stand on a viewing terrace and look over the Inn Valley to enjoy the breath-taking, panoramic view of Innsbruck and the Zillertal Alps.

Hafelekar is a popular destination for skiers as they will face some of the steepest ski slopes in Europe. Despite, a strong wind, I walked along the rocky mountain to climb to even higher points. I was standing at the very top of the Nordkette, looking at the regions around Innsbruck and seeing as far as the Italian border on far horizon.

VIII



the Golden Roof Terrace

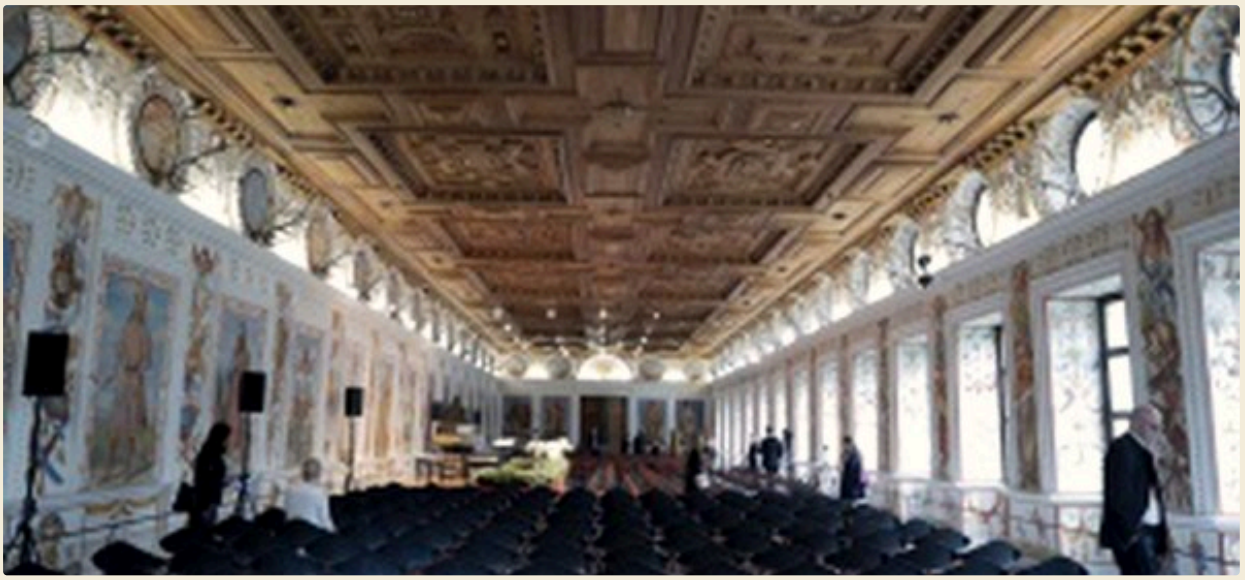


the musicians who gamely stuck to their task even as the rain pelted down on them

Returning to the old town, it was too late for a proper tour of the city's landmarks so I settled for walking along some of the narrow alleys which make up so much of the city. Herzog-Friedrich-Straße is at the heart of the old town. It is where tourists gather at the town square to marvel at the Golden Roof Terrace surrounded by medieval buildings. As a major tourist attraction it is always crowded.

A group of young musicians were busking just opposite the Golden Roof Terrace. By the time they started playing their symphony, the dark clouds over Innsbruck brought the rain. But the musicians seemed oblivious of the weather; they continued with their performance and partly protected from the elements by a number of spectators who helped umbrellas over their heads!

IX

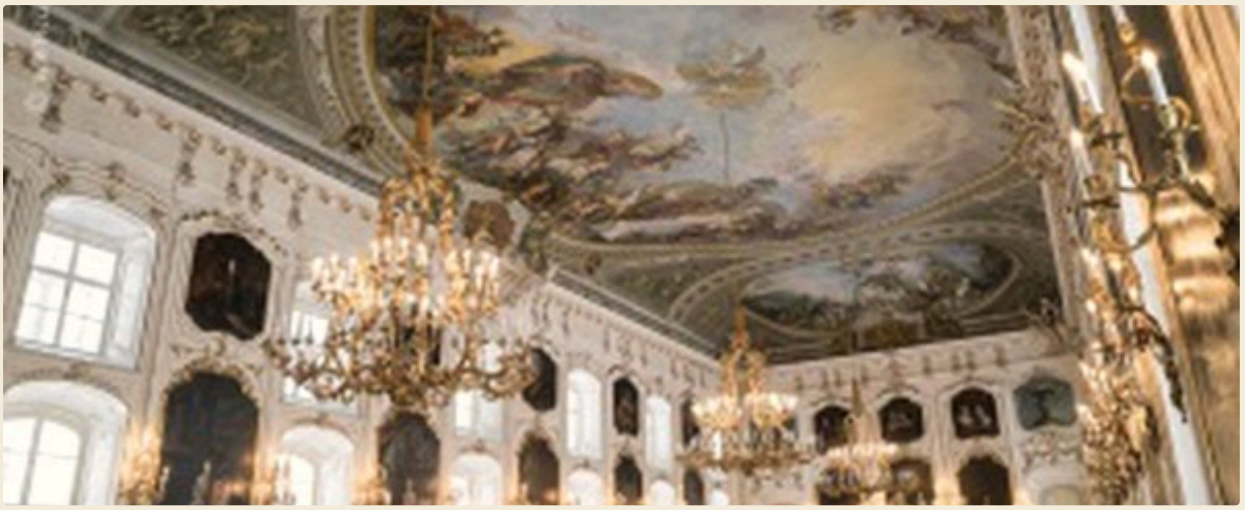


where the concert would take place in Ambras Castle

Next morning I started the day by visiting Ambras Castle which is about kilometres away from the old town. The eleventh century castle is surrounded by landscaped gardens and I chose a day to visit on the very same day that the president of Austria chose. I was diverted to a nearby car park and from there, walked to the castle. No security checks at all as presumably they were more concerned about the president.

I soon realised that he – and other guests – were attending a concert that was part of the Innsbruck Early Music Festival. I left them and strolled around the decorated gardens. Before the concert started I managed to enter the castle hall which was lavishly decorated with a tiled wooden ceiling featuring late-medieval paintings and the Saint George Altar of Emperor Maximilian I. This beautiful gallery of art located on the lower level of the castle is a perfect fit for the classical music performances. As the concert was about to begin I moved to the upper level of the castle to explore the museum.

x



Hofburg Imperial Palace ceiling



inside the Graasmayr bell foundry – un by my guide Monica's family

By the way, that evening I was lucky enough to the seventeenth century Jesuit Church (Jesuitenkirche) to listen to a concert.

There was still one more place I wanted to see before the day ended – the Graasmayr Bell Foundry. This is both a casting factory and museum.

I haven't mentioned that a guide – Monica – was helping me see the city and the foundry has been in her family's hands since 1599. Currently it is run by her father and brother!

XI

The museum has a variety of old and new bronze bells in different sizes and is actually an educational tour of the history of bell making. You can even ring several bells in a dedicated sound room so you can see what tones are produced by the different sized bells. Being education you will see metalworkers and casters at work together with carpenters and sculptors all of whom are involved with building bells of all shapes and sizes. It isn't just in Austria that their bells are sold. Orders from all over Europe are received each year.

◆

You cannot do justice to Innsbruck in a few days. There is the Hofburg Imperial Palace and the Hofkirche Court Church all of which should be on a visitor's itinerary.

It just means I have to return to do justice to a spectacular city.

◆

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