

Henry Morris Report
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I visited Vienna from the 4th to 6th of September 2024 with a grant from the Henry Morris Trust to watch an opera at The Wiener Staatsoper. I have separately made a video report to accompany this written report. I am very grateful to Mr Peter Hains and the Henry Morris Memorial Trust for supporting me in this venture.

Opera house tour

We started with a tour of the opera house, which gave me an insight into the history. They showed how they reworked the auditorium into a ballroom for ball season.

The building was destroyed in WWII, so only part of the original building remains.

I went for a guided walking tour of Vienna. Wine was used to fortify the cathedral building.

The ring road being the old town wall now has marvellous buildings on it.

I saw the cathedral. The tower is the highest point in the city by law.

Sisi museum

I learnt the story of a young woman, Empress Elisabeth of Austria, who married the emperor and did not like the constraints of her imperial life.

When she died at the knife of an assassin a whole industry of figurines and commemorative paraphernalia sprang up. The similarity to what would happen with princess Diana are remarkable.

The opulent dresses and jewellery she wore were on display (though replicas as the originals were long gone).

She spent a long time on her hair, she even washed her hair with egg yolk and cognac.

Carmen at Vienna State Opera

I arrived to see well dressed people ascend the stage.

The boxes were really tightly laced in with some seats barely able to see the stage but I had a good view.

Also we could see the musicians tuning up in the pit. At first a few gentle melodies built up to cacophony as more musicians arrived. It was a dissonant mess.

The show was very impressive. I was amazed by how the singers could fill up the entire room without microphones. I was also quite surprised by the end scene, which ended with Carmen's dead body!

Schonbrunn Palace

I went to Schönbrunn Palace, one of the royal residences. Napoleon stayed in the palace when he conquered Austria during the wars.

There were lovely gardens surrounding the palace with a marvellous waterfall/fountain.

Karlskirche

Onto Karlskirche with unusual triumphal columns. Alas, one column was covered as they renovated the soft limestone. The softness allowed for detail when carving but erodes easily.

Belvedere Palace

Then I went to Belvedere palace and walked through the sumptuous gardens, part of which is the botanic gardens with plants from around the world.

Donauinsel

On to the artificial island of Donauinsel which creates an anti-flood mechanism for Vienna but also a place where people go to picnic and sail out onto the flood channel or just have a cocktail.