



VIP Vienna

by Leah Walker





The Habsburg Dynasty may no longer rule, but one of Europe's most important families left an indelible mark on Vienna, most notably in the architecture and treasures the city holds. Austria's capital is one of my favorite cities, and with each visit, I discover more to love.

Much of the Habsburg legacy is seen within the Ringstraße, a 5.3-kilometer road that encircles the cultural heart of Vienna. Lined with palaces built at the urging of Emperor Franz Joseph I, the Ringstraße celebrates its 150th anniversary in 2015. Once the location of the city's walls, the grand boulevard is now a smattering of architectural styles—New Baroque, Neo-Renaissance, Art Nouveau, Flemish Gothic—which are all exquisite in their own right.

Vienna is a regal and distinguished city, where a simple city stroll takes you back to the time when Franz Joseph ruled. Fortunately, today you don't have to be from the Habsburg Dynasty in order to get royal treatment. There are plenty of opportunities in Vienna that will leave you feeling like Empress Sisi.

Step outside of the Ringstraße and you'll find one of Vienna's most popular attractions. Once the summer

residence of the Imperial family, Schönbrunn Palace is a mammoth baroque complex, filled with a palace, carriage museum, stunning gardens, a hedge maze, zoo and a few restaurants. Exploring the Palace Museum gives visitors insight into what life must have been like for the Imperial family, but it's certainly no substitute for actually living in the palace. That opportunity is now available, thanks to the Schloß Schönbrunn Suite.

Located in the eastern wing of the Schönbrunn Palace, the Schloß Schönbrunn Suite is the first of its kind in Europe. At nearly 1,800 square feet, the suite features two bedrooms, a living room, two bathrooms, a kitchenette and a salon--because what self-respecting royal doesn't need a salon? Views of the Gloriette,

Schlosspark, Neptune Fountain and Crown Prince Garden round out this regal experience. Packages range from \$1,100-\$6,700 per night.

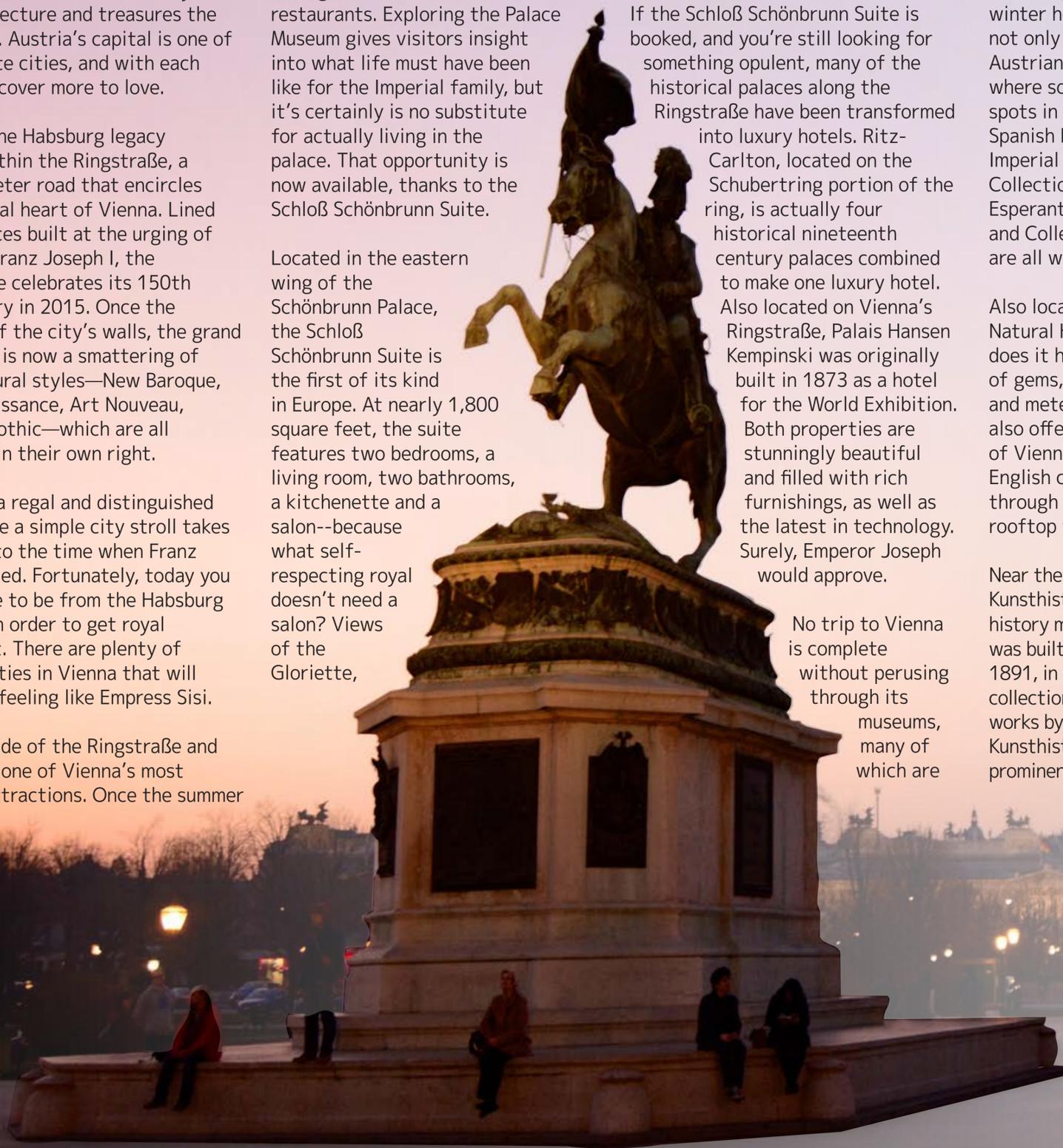
If the Schloß Schönbrunn Suite is booked, and you're still looking for something opulent, many of the historical palaces along the Ringstraße have been transformed into luxury hotels. Ritz-Carlton, located on the Schuberting portion of the ring, is actually four historical nineteenth century palaces combined to make one luxury hotel. Also located on Vienna's Ringstraße, Palais Hansen Kempinski was originally built in 1873 as a hotel for the World Exhibition. Both properties are stunningly beautiful and filled with rich furnishings, as well as the latest in technology. Surely, Emperor Joseph would approve.

No trip to Vienna is complete without perusing through its museums, many of which are

filled with treasures collected throughout the Habsburg Dynasty. Located inside Vienna's Ringstraße, the Hofburg was the epicenter of the Habsburg Empire and served as their winter home. Today, the Hofburg is not only the official office of the Austrian president, but it's also where some of the most notable spots in the city are found. The Spanish Riding School, Sisi Museum, Imperial Apartments, Imperial Silver Collection, Albertina, Globe and Esperanto Museum, Papyrus Museum and Collection of Arms and Armor are all worthy of exploration.

Also located in the Hofburg is the Natural History Museum. Not only does it have a massive collection of gems, fossils, artifacts, dinosaurs and meteorites, but the museum also offers one of the best views of Vienna. Each Sunday, there is an English cultural-history walking tour through the museum, ending at the rooftop terrace.

Near the Imperial Palace is the Kunsthistorisches Museum. Meaning art history museum, the Kunsthistorisches was built near the Imperial Palace in 1891, in order to hold the immense art collection of the Imperial family. With works by the world's greatest artists, Kunsthistorisches is one of the most prominent museums, not only in Europe,





but the world. For something beyond a typical audio tour, the museum offers a host of unique experiences.

If you like your art with a bit of culinary, then you'll be interested in Thursday's gourmet buffet dinner and Sunday's brunch, both served in the museum's Cupola Hall. Between courses, diners are free to explore the galleries on their own or take guided tours.

For something even more exclusive, a personalized, hour-long tour is offered prior to the museum's opening. Once the museum is closed, a special tour of the Imperial Treasury is available. See items such as the Austrian Imperial Crown, the Holy Lance from the 8th century and jewelry worn by the Habsburgs, including the largest cut emerald in the world. For classical music lovers, Kunsthistorisches Museum hosts concerts, featuring instruments owned by Leopold Mozart, the Stein brothers and Emperor Franz Joseph.

Vienna has a long and varied history, dating to the Middle Ages, but it's the time the city was ruled by the Habsburgs that is still evident today. Through the city's preserved heritage and traditions, it's still possible for you to enjoy a bit of the pomp and circumstance that existed during the Habsburg Dynasty.

