

The pleasure of having visitors

Sabine Granger

In the month of January we had two waves of visitors - friends from Switzerland. This was a welcome change in the first month of the year, which can often be a bit dull and grey, especially after the busy Christmas period and associated festivities.

When guests come to Vienna, I send them in advance an overview of the sights, exhibitions in the museums in that month, practical advice on tickets and their prices, as well as an overview of the various combinable tickets for public transport and of course, my insider recommendations off the beaten track. All this is always much appreciated as it cuts down on the time-consuming 'googling' of websites and planning their visits to a city they are often visiting for the first time.

Well, our first visiting couple had their own idea of their programme in Vienna. Two full days were planned - would that be enough for their programme? The nice thing about a programme, however, is that it is adaptable and often a fixed point is no longer so important if you simply let yourself drift and find the true soul of the city.

For us - almost Viennese, as we live in Baden - these visits are also an opportunity to discover new or familiar things and to share the enthusiasm of the visitors. Yes, we love to show our visitors the city of Vienna!

The second pair of visitors, who were staying in Vienna for ten days, planned an intensive sightseeing and cultural programme, which made us doubt whether they would be able to do it all in this time. But no sooner said than done, and we took part in some of our friends' visits.

Among these programme items was also a guided tour of the Vienna State Opera, which was a novelty for us and, as it turned out, a particularly wonderful experience.

Here are some insights that we gained from the tour, which we can recommend to anyone visiting Vienna. I cannot go into historical and architectural details in this article, but I do recommend that you visit the Vienna State Opera website. It is also available in English

<https://www.wiener-staatsoper.at/en/>

The Vienna State Opera was designed by two architects, August von Sicardsburg and Edward von der Nüll, and was officially opened in 1869 with Mozart's opera, *Don Giovanni*, in the presence of Emperor Franz Joseph I and Empress Elisabeth. Unfortunately, the two architects, Edward von der Nüll and August von Sicardsburg, did not live to see the opening. Van der Nüll took his own life and von Sicardsburg died of a heart attack. Not such a good omen for this magnificent building. Now to the modern facts: 60 productions are staged each season - 10 ballet productions, 1 operetta and 49 opera productions. The season runs from September to June with the opera closing in the summer months of July and August. Mention should be made of the famous Opera Ball, which took place in 2024 on 8 February. Imagine the transformation of the opera house and its auditorium into a ballroom. Within two days, the audience seats in the stalls will be removed, the orchestra pit will be covered and the stalls floor will be raised to the height of the stage to provide a larger dance area. Temporary boxes are erected along the sides of the stage to accommodate even more ball-goers. On the night of the Opera Ball, 5,000 visitors bustle around on the dance floor, in the boxes and in the many other side rooms. This night - according to our guide - is the only one when the State Opera

makes a profit and is therefore an important source of income. The State Opera is subsidised to the tune of 60 million a year by the Austrian state and has to earn the other 60 million from ticket sales, guided tours, event rentals and private sponsors. A big task - don't you think? Yes, and for the Opera Ball and its preparations and the restoration of the auditorium after the ball, the opera is only closed for two days - a real achievement by the 350 skilled workers and 150 assistants who tirelessly organise this ball event every year. To understand this transformation, have a look at this timelapse video <https://www.wiener-staatsoper.at/opernball/>

And here's a tip from our guide about standing room for a visit to the opera. The best standing places can be found in the standing parterre centre for the affordable price of 18 euros and the acoustics are excellent everywhere, as we were able to ascertain for ourselves from the central box.

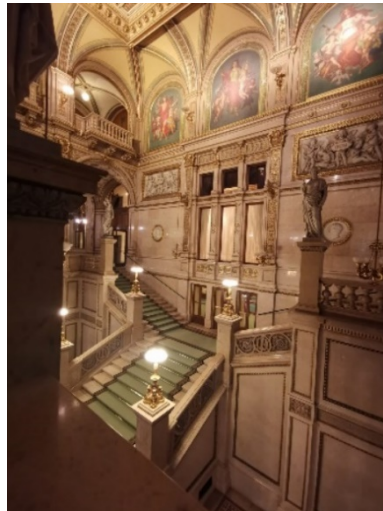
Here is another detail from the tour: the initials of Emperor Franz Joseph on the silk wallpaper in the tea room - the H for the House of Habsburg, on the left the F for Franz, and on the right the J for Joseph. The picture on the right shows the staircase with the usual green carpet, which is replaced by a red carpet at the Opera Ball.

And as far as the concerned - I can "ALLES WALZER!"

Sabine Granger



only



Opera Ball is say one thing: