



Tour of Günzburg

The “Little Vienna” in Bavarian Swabia



Audio Point 1: Schlossplatz

To begin our audiotour, we'd like to introduce you to the woman whom the Günzburgers have a great deal to thank for - that is, a lot of what we'll be showing you on this tour. On the coin pictured now on the screen of your smartphone, you can see her: the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa. She triggered a veritable construction boom here in the 18th century.

And this silver taler, the so-called Maria Theresa Taler, has made Günzburg famous among coin collectors the world over! It was minted right here in the rooms of today's Tourist Information Office in the Town Hall - that is, inside the big building with the grey façade. There, above the right entrance portal, you can also see the famous Austrian double-headed eagle, which reminds us of that time. From 1764 onwards, one of the most important coin-minting locations in the Habsburg Empire was in operation here. This taler always had the same silver content. Since it kept its value so well it was the official means of payment in Ethiopia right up to 1945, for instance, and even today it's still being minted as a collector's item in Vienna!

The square in which we're standing here was once the courtyard of the Habsburg Castle, which was built at the end of the 16th century. And there was a court here with over 100 employees. The only thing that still reminds us of the castle's original Renaissance style is the Hofkirche you can see here on the square! The rest of the castle changed dramatically over the centuries - it suffered a disastrous fire, and also a bombing raid during World War II.

On the right, beside the Hofkirche, you can see a building with a magnificent Rococo portal. Today, it houses the Municipal Museum. Originally it was a monastery school that Maria Theresa had built for the boys of Günzburg. This so-called Piarist College meant that they could attend school for the first time - and what's more, it was free of charge. That was quite a sensation at the time!

The audiotour now leads past the former Piarist College in the direction of the Marktplatz, or market square. To get your bearings you can also take a look at the map here in the app - the route's marked there.

Audio Point 2: "s'Fidla" & Lower Gate

We're now approaching the Marktplatz, at the heart of Günzburg's Upper Town and this is exactly where someone chose to play a little trick on the local population.

Look at the ground a bit farther ahead and you'll see a long, light-coloured stone set into the pavement. And here comes the quiz question: What is the stone supposed to represent?

A tip: From the marketplace, it's easier to recognise.

The Günzburgers call this stone "s'Fidla", which is the Swabian word for "bum". And this "Fidla" is being pointed very cheekily, as it were, by the Lower Town at the Upper Town. Two men from the Lower Town secretly relocated this stone here in the 1980s to commemorate the rivalry between the two districts. It's because the Habsburgs only ever put their magnificent buildings in the Upper Town, so its inhabitants gained a longstanding reputation for thinking they were superior to the rest of Günzburg. Today, luckily, that's all a thing of the past though!

And now let's look up - at the big tower here in the market square. This is the landmark of the city: the Lower Gate, or "Unteres Tor". In the old days, the towers here in Günzburg used to have several important functions. For instance, anyone who wanted to enter the town had to pay the town's "pavement toll" right here. And up in the tower lived the tower-watchman. His job was to ring the bells once an hour during the day and at night - so that the Günzburgers knew he was awake, and was keeping a watchful eye on the town and its inhabitants.

Now you realise why this tower has so many windows. They point in all directions so that the watchman had a good view of everywhere - and could warn everyone about fires, for example, or approaching enemies.

Carry on walking to the right now, across the marketplace, and we'll be back in touch again in a few moments.

Audio Point 3: Marketplace & former Gasthaus zur Krone

horse-drawn carriages, clip-clopping

In the 18th century, the route we're taking right now was what you could call the Habsburgs' highway. You see, Günzburg was an important station on the postal route between Vienna and Paris - so the place was correspondingly busy.

horse-drawn carriages, clip-clopping

Let's take a look around. On many buildings you can see small signs attached to the facades. The pictures on them are reminders of the names of the inns located here at this marketplace during the 18th century - and the signs with green borders mean that the landlords there also had the right to brew. There were 19 inns here on the market square alone - and 14 of them had their own brewery!

happy sounds, people saying cheers

The best address in town was on the left - in the light-coloured house with the golden crowns above its windows! And so that everyone could see which top celebrities used to stay here, the hotelier had a gold medallion fixed above the middle window. It shows the Austrian emperor, Joseph II, and in Latin script, the year in which he stayed here: 1781.

In front of the market fountain, continue left in a few moments to the Kuhturm, or "Cow Tower". And anyone who wants to see the person the town of Günzburg was named after should take a closer look at the fountain straight ahead. In the summer, on the other side of the fountain, you can see her spouting water. She's the Celtic river goddess of the Günz, known as Guntia. When the Romans founded a military base down on the Günz during the first century AD, they named it Guntia - and that's how Günzburg got its name.

We'll pass to the left of the fountain and go down the narrow street.

Audio Point 4: Kuhturm

Before we turn right at the next intersection in the direction of the Frauenkirche, straight in front of us you'll see the ...

cow mooing

... Cow Tower. The name comes from the fact that the innkeepers on the market square kept cows in order to provide their guests with fresh milk and butter. Of course, there were no pastures here in the middle of the city, so every morning a shepherd gathered all the cows and led them through this gate to the pasture outside the city.

The Habsburgs built a total of nine towers all around the Upper Town, and covered them all with green roof tiles - the Cow Tower is a fine example. There was a reason for this. From a distance, the roofs looked like they were made of expensive copper - a trick that made the city look more affluent than it was, to impress travellers!

So we'll continue on to the right, and be back in touch again at the Frauenkirche.

Audio Point 5: Frauenkirche

We passed the former boys' school, the Piarist College, at the beginning of our tour. On the left of the Frauenkirche we can now see the girls' equivalent: the white building with the colourfully painted portal. Today, it houses the Maria Ward Gymnasium, a school for girls that went co-educational a couple of years ago, and it, too, dates back to the time of Maria Theresa.

And now we'd like to show you the top sight of Günzburg: the Frauenkirche. So, let's go inside!

We ask you to keep the speaker on your smartphone turned down and held close to your ear, so that nobody inside the church is disturbed.

And when we enter this interior, we experience the full splendour of the Baroque and the Rococo! After a bad fire in 1735, the Günzburgers rebuilt the church above its old foundations - under the direction of one of the best German church builders of the time, Dominikus Zimmermann. He also built what is probably the most famous Rococo church in Bavaria - the Wieskirche in Steingaden.

Zimmermann had very individual tastes. He was considered an opponent of the rectangle. Since the existing ground-plan of the church left over after the fire showed a square structure, he resorted to a few tricks to make the room still seem oval. As you can see, the corners of the church are rounded, and the long sides of the nave are arched slightly outwards. The vaulted ceiling completes the overall effect.

Actually, Zimmermann had wanted the church to be painted by a famous artist, but since the Günzburgers eventually ran out of money they decided to take someone from the region who was cheaper. The ceiling fresco, for example, was the work of a Baroque painter from Günzburg: his name was Anton Enderle. So, let's take a look up at the big painting on the ceiling with which he immortalized himself here.

In the middle, we can see the Coronation of Mary, who is being cheered by countless saints, sitting on their clouds. And in the four corners of the painting the population of the earth is shown. On the bottom left we see Europe. You already know the woman with the golden crown: the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa.

The lower right shows Asia. On the top left, Africa with the elephant and to the right of that, the newly-discovered continent of America. The artist had probably never seen a crocodile in his life. That could explain why the mouth of the crocodile has hardly any teeth and is more reminiscent of a duck's bill.

It's also interesting that one continent is entirely missing here! The reason is quite simple. Back in 1741 when the painting was done, the continent of Australia had not yet been discovered.

When you leave the Frauenkirche in a few moments, the route takes us diagonally to the left across the church square, and we'll be back in touch again at the beginning of the alley called the Frauengässchen.

Audio Point 6: Town Wall & Frauengässchen

Here we leave the Frauenplatz - and then we keep right, and that will take us to the Frauengässchen or "women's alley".

guards patrolling town wall

And as you can already hear, we've arrived at the town wall, which was once patrolled by guards. Above the narrow passage, part of the guards' wooden walkway has been rebuilt. It used to encircle the entire Upper Town. And if we now turn right and continue along the Frauengässchen, we'll realise how clever the Günzburgers were when it came to building houses!

You see, they built their houses here right next to the city wall so they only had to pay for three walls - the fourth had been financed by the House of Habsburg.

Another nice feature is that many houses have their upper floors projecting forward. That saved space – and it also meant that the owners had to pay less tax.

We'll be back in touch at the end of the Frauengässchen.

Audio Point 7: Brentano House

We'll cross the market square in a moment and continue straight ahead into the narrow alley opposite. But first, we want to show you the imposing Brentano House on the right, here in the market square - with its magnificent Rococo façade.

It was built in around 1750 by one of the richest merchant families in Northern Italy, the Brentano family. The Brentanos had moved here from Lake Como in northern Italy to trade in the high-quality linen fabrics that were produced around Günzburg. The round archway on the ground floor still gives us an idea of how large the wagons were that arrived here. And above the archway we see the head of Mercury - the Roman god of trade.

The audiotour now leads into the narrow alley opposite the Brentano House.

Audio Point 8: "Habsburg chessboard"

You may already have noticed that the streets and alleys here in the Upper Town are arranged in a certain pattern. In fact, it's a square, almost like a chessboard. The streets within the town wall intersect at right angles. And in the middle, the long market square divides the town in half. This is how people of the Late Middle Ages imagined the perfect town. In the old days the rectangular, or chequerboard layout of the town caused amusement in the surrounding villages, who accused the Günzburgers of being over-organised and a bit petty.

Let's continue walking in a nice straight line, then, till we reach the next audio point: the Dossenberger Hof.

Audio Point 9: Dossenberger Hof

army marches

Now we've arrived at the former parade ground of the Habsburgs!

army stops

In 1781, Günzburg became a garrison town and the Austrian emperor personally commissioned the construction of the large barracks building in front of us. It looks almost like a castle, and that's thanks to the master builder who worked on it, Joseph Dossenberger. He was a Swabian who was considered a master of the Rococo style, and here, later on, he tried his hand at neo-classicism. Anyone who kept their ears open in art classes at school may recognize the neoclassicist features of this barracks building here. Note the columns on the right and left of the entrance.

Unlike the Rococo style, which we saw just now at the Brentano House, this architecture has far more straight lines and is somewhat reminiscent of the forms of a Greek temple – and that was the new trend at the end of the 18th century.

Now let's take a look at the left-hand side of the courtyard. There's a memorial on the wall that reminds us of a dark chapter in Günzburg's history.

It's dedicated to the victims of Nazi war criminal Josef Mengele. Josef Mengele did his school-leaving examinations here in the Dossenberger Hof in the 1930s – the school was housed inside the former barracks at that time. Later he was to go down in history with his cruel methods as a camp doctor in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

This memorial was designed by Günzburger school classes. It contains 174 eyes – some of them individual, some of them in pairs. The eyes are a reminder of Mengele's optical research. For example, he killed defenceless Sinti and Roma children in order to experiment with their eyes.

Our audiotour now leads back through the courtyard gateway and on the other side, the tour continues directly to the left, into the Eisenhausgasse. We'll be back in touch again at the Wätteplatz.

Audio Point 10: Wätteplatz

Here we are, at our last audio point, the Wätteplatz. The word “Wätte” comes from the German word for “to wade”! That's because here, in the 18th century, we'd probably be standing ankle-deep in water. The town's main stream used to run across the square here. It was the place where the post ponies were washed.

Horse neighing

And what happened here later is shown by the fountain with the figures. Until the 1960s, every week, this was where the piglet market took place.

Pigs grunting, piglets squeaking

Well, that brings us to the end of today's audiotour! Just carry straight on along the Münzgasse, and at the end of it you'll be back behind the Tourist Information Office in the Schlosshof, where we started earlier.

Thanks for listening – and hope to see you again soon. Have a great time in Günzburg!

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or google-Play-Store

