



SALZBURG CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF

# *the Sound of Music*

By Amy Laughinghouse

**If *The Sound of Music* is one of your favorite things, it's time to head for the hills of Salzburg, Austria. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the iconic musical, which was filmed in this beautifully preserved baroque city.**

Admittedly, on the day I arrive, Salzburg looks more like the set of Waterworld than a sunny ode to Austria's Alps. The sky is an ominous gray, and rain lashes against the windows. It's not quite the welcome I'd hoped for, but somehow, it seems appropriate.

This is exactly the sort of inclement greeting Julie Andrews, as Maria, received on her first night with the Von Trapp family in the film. As thunder crashes and lightening flashes, she comforts the kiddies by singing about raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens.

Well, big glasses of wheat beer and plates full of schnitzel are all it takes to put a song in my heart. So, after my husband and I deposit our suitcases at the newly refurbished Hotel Goldgasse, chosen for its superb location in Old Town and its contemporary, music-themed décor, we seek solace in Salzburg's equivalent of a pub.

Soon, we're bellied up to the bar at Zwettler's, a friendly local hangout where all manner of detritus adorns the walls: skis, ice skates, deer antlers, and plaques bearing the names of loyal boozers, including "Wolfgang." (Maybe Mozart, Salzburg's other famous musical export, drank here? I choose to believe.)

Speakers broadcast an eclectic selection of tunes as we sip our brews, but there's not a whisper from Julie Andrews. It's a shame, as I'd love to hear a roomful of beer-swigging Salzburgers belting out "Edelweiss."

With year-round Sound of Music tours and a SOM gala on October 17, you'd think the film's soundtrack would be on everyone's lips. Yet many Austrians aren't that hip to the Hollywood hype, says local guide Michaela Muhr, who takes us on a walking tour the next day. They tend to prefer an earlier German-language film. And "Edelweiss?" It's not even a real Austrian folksong. Rodgers and

Hammerstein, who wrote the original Broadway musical, made it up.

That's the first of many epiphanies revealed by Muhr, who tells us the real—as well as the "reel"—story of the Von Trapps. There was indeed a young woman named Maria who became a governess, married the dashing Captain Von Trapp, and fled Austria with the family to avoid the Nazis.

They didn't hike to freedom, though. They took a train. "The scene where they walk over the mountains to escape into Switzerland? Not possible," Muhr says. "They would have ended up at Hitler's second headquarters! So the filmmakers changed the map of Europe."

Up a hill lies Nonnberg Abbey, where Maria and her cinematic alter ego studied to become a nun, and where the actual Maria and Captain married. It hunkers beneath the Hohensalzburg Fortress, occasionally glimpsed in the film. Today, this mountaintop fort is filled with exhibits of military weapons, instruments of torture and some spooky looking puppets, including a few from SOM productions at the Marionette Theatre across the river.

In Residenzplatz, beside the cathedral where Mozart was baptised, Muhr points out the Italianate fountain where Julie Andrews splashes while singing "I Have Confidence." She shows us a photo of Maria Von Trapp, clad in a traditional dirndl, chatting with Andrews here between takes. Apparently, when Maria first met Christopher Plummer, who played the Captain, she nearly swooned, saying "I wish my husband could've been so handsome."

We stroll through St. Peter's Cemetery, which inspired the set where the Von Trapps hide from Nazi soldiers, towards the Rock Riding School, the outdoor theater where they sang at the Salzburg



Leopoldskron Palace  
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Villa Trapp  
© Amy Laughinghouse



Residenzplatz  
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Getreidegasse  
© Amy Laughinghouse

Festival before escaping in the film. The family really did perform at the festival, which is still staged over six weeks in July and August, drawing up to 250,000 visitors every year. Just like in the movie, they won.

We make a detour through the University Square market, filled with the scent of cheese, fresh bread and sausages, and down Getreidegasse, where Mozart was born in a big yellow house that now serves as a museum. It's been Salzburg's busiest commercial street since the 12th century, and old wrought iron signs bear symbols of the shops. Even the tiny M of McDonald's is encircled by a wreath clutched in a bird's beak, in lieu of golden arches.

Afterwards, we head to the river, where the Von Trapp children run along the banks in the picnic scene. Traipsing over a bridge into New Town, our tour culminates at Mirabell Gardens, where Maria and her charges dance around the Pegasus fountain singing "Do-Re-Mi."

For fitter fans, Muhr also offers a bike tour that includes Hellbrunn, a 17th century palace that is now home to the romantic gazebo from the movie, and Leopoldskron Castle, which served as the lakeside exterior of the Von Trapp home.

To see the real Villa Trapp, take a taxi or a train about 15 minutes outside the heart of the city. The mansion where they lived from 1923 until 1938 is filled with touching mementos, including family photos and the boatswain whistle that the Captain used to call his children. But he wasn't the control-freak portrayed in the film, insists Christopher Unterkofler, who runs the house as a bed and breakfast with his wife, Marianne Dorfer.

"He was such a nice and gentle character, like a mother hen," says Unterkofler, who heard stories from a Von Trapp daughter. In fact, it was Maria who was the taskmaster, perhaps even more zealous about music than Julie Andrews. "It's a language everyone can understand, and she wanted to spread peace," Unterkofler explains.

But there are two inspiring messages that hold true in both film and life. "If you stick together, you can manage almost anything—and if God closes a door, he opens a window," Unterkofler smiles. That's why the movie remains a legend even today.

Well, that, and the soundtrack. "The melodies go in your ear," Unterkofler says, "and they never go out again." **stb**

Nonnberg Abbey  
© Tourismus Salzburg



Hotel Goldgasse Jedermann  
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## IF YOU GO

**STAY:** The recently remodeled Hotel Goldgasse offers contemporary accommodation in a 13th century building, with photographic murals of opera scenes in each of the 16 rooms and suites and a cosy pine-paneled restaurant serving Austrian cuisine. It's located in Old Town near key attractions and can arrange private Sound of Music tours. Doubles from 122 Euro. [www.hotelgoldgasse.at](http://www.hotelgoldgasse.at)

**GUIDED TOUR WITH MICHAELA MUHR:**  
[www.salzburg-experience.at](http://www.salzburg-experience.at)

**VILLA TRAPP:** Book ahead for daily tour,  
[www.villa-trapp.com](http://www.villa-trapp.com)

**TOURISM INFO:**  
[www.salzburg.info](http://www.salzburg.info), [www.austria.info](http://www.austria.info)

**SALZBURG FESTIVAL:**  
[www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/whitsun](http://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/whitsun)

**SPECIAL SOM EVENTS:** 50th Anniversary Gala, [www.salzburger-landestheater.at](http://www.salzburger-landestheater.at)