Willkommen in Innsbruck!!

Welcome to Innsbruck, Austria! Once the seat of the imperial court of Maximilian I, throughout history the city of Innsbruck was sought by empires throughout the world. Today, visitors can easily explore this fabulous city via the trams that make their way around Innsbruck. Just a few of the sights you will see along the way are the Tyrolean Folk Art Museum, Schloss Ambras, the 10th-century castle constructed by Archduke Ferdinand II, Maximilian I’s Golden Roof, and the 15th-century Imperial Palace. One of the most idyllic cities in Europe, Innsbruck is nestled right in the heart of the Alps and offers visitors an experience that will not be soon forgotten.

As the provincial capital of Tyrol, Innsbruck is home to some 120,000 residents and is the 5th largest city in Austria. Given the fact that Innsbruck has hosted the Winter Olympics twice, it is also the largest ski resort in the region and offers a host of outdoor activities. Whether you enjoy skiing, shopping, or touring historical landmarks, there is truly something for everyone in this charming city. Spend some time strolling along Innsbruck’s most famous pedestrian street and you will find a host of exciting historical landmarks, inviting sidewalk cafes, and world-class boutiques. The city’s close proximity to Munich as well as northern Italy make it a top alpine destination.

Willkommen! We are glad you are here.

- Innsbruck Visitors Guide

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A Very Short History of Innsbruck

The historic city of Innsbruck is nestled in between two Alpine mountain ranges. The Brenner Pass, an easily crossed path through the Alps, made the position of the town a strategic location. The importance of the valley eventually gave rise to the ultimate evolution of Innsbruck into a cultural and commercial hub.

The history of the town began very early. Archeological evidence shows that Innsbruck was first populated in the early Stone Age. The area was prized for the geographic location in a valley that offered protection from the cold winters. The area remained in relative peace until around 15 BC when the Roman’s began a rapid European expansion. Because of the importance of protecting the Alpine pass, the Roman soldiers set up a military town.

Roman control ceded to a Bavarian invasion in the 6th century. The Bavarians continued to rule for several hundred years until 1027 when control of Innsbruck was bestowed on the Counts of Andechs. Under the rule of the counts the town flourished into the cultural and social center of Tyrol. A thriving market and the inn bridge were constructed in 1187. This gave the town a new economic status and the present day name of Innsbruck, meaning bridge to the inn.

The reign of the Hapsburgs, which began in 1363, ushered in a new age of glory for Innsbruck. Under the rule of the Hapsburgs the city flourished. The era saw an increase in trade and mining. Emperor Maximilian I named Innsbruck as the capitol of Tyrol, and took the already flourishing city and increased the prestige and power of the region. As a legacy, he left the golden roof. A shining architectural feature composed of thousands of copper tiles. He also began construction on an elaborate tomb that would only be completed after his lifetime. The Hapsburg successors continued to add to the glorious reputation of Innsbruck by building architectural marvels such as Hofgarten, Ambras Gardens, the Arts and Wonder
Chamber, the Arms Halls, the Jesuit church and Tyrol’s first opera house. Most of these structures remain as a monument to the reign of the Hapsburgs.

The Tyrol region went through a period of strife during the Napoleonic wars when Bavarian occupation placed strict rules on social conduct and religious behavior. Tyrol was restored to Austria in 1814. The citizens of Innsbruck showed great courage during the relentless bombings of World War II. Several historic treasures and buildings were protected from damage through their efforts. The golden roof built by Maximilian was saved from the shells by encasing it in a bunker and today serves as a museum dedicated to the history of Innsbruck.

Modern Innsbruck has seen a focus on games and winter sports. The beginning of Austrian chess was born in Innsbruck at the 1929 chess championship. In 1964, the winter Olympic games rejuvenated the economy of Innsbruck. The games drew international attention to the area as a prime winter sports haven. Several luxury resorts and winter sports arenas were built to accommodate the influx of visitors from around the world. The town hosted the winter Olympics a second time in 1976.

1. Golden Roof

One of the most interesting landmarks in Innsbruck, Austria is the Golden Roof. Known in German as the Goldenes Dachl, this historical site was constructed in 1500 and set with no less than 2,657 copper tiles. The intricate reliefs featured on the balcony reflect a number of figures, symbols, and the coats of arms of Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor.

The Golden Roof was constructed by Archduke Friedrich IV during the early 15th century to serve as the residence of Tirolean sovereigns. Nestled in the heart of the Old Town, this three-story balcony served as a royal seating area where Maximilian I was able to enjoy tournaments taking place in the square below. The Golden Roof was finally completed near the beginning of the 16th century and served as a commemoration of Maximilian’s marriage to Bianca Maria Sforza of Milan. An image of Maximilian between his first wife, Maria of Burgundy, and his second wife was depicted on the balcony to prevent any potential alienation of allies gained from his first marriage.

On February 25, 1536, Jacob Hutter, who founded the Hutterites, was burned at the stake here for his Anabaptist beliefs.

The Golden Roof has been home to the International Alpine Convention Office since 2003. The Convention serves as a coalition of eight Alpine nations that share a commitment to sustainable development in the European Alps. The Maximilianum, a museum, is also housed inside the building along with the Innsbruck City Archives.

2. Ambras Castle

Nestled in the hills overlooking Innsbruck is the Ambras Castle (German: Schloss Ambras). Known for its cultural and historical significance, this schloss is one of the most important sights in Innsbruck. From 1563 to 1595, the castle served as the residence of Archduke Ferdinand II.

The modern castle visitors will see today was constructed the Archduke when he ordered Italian architects to convert a medieval fortress into what would become a Renaissance-style residence for him and his wife. Following the death of Ferdinand, the castle was inherited by his son, Charles. With little interest in the castle, he later sold it and it was used on an infrequent basis, falling largely into disrepair. In 1855, the palace was finally remodeled to
serve as a summer residence for Archduke Karl Ludwig. Unfortunately, it quickly fell into disrepair once again and it was not until 1970 that restoration began on the castle and it was finally opened to the public in 1981.

Today, visitors are able to enjoy a wide array of treasures held inside the castle, including two rooms in the lower part of the castle that feature arms and armor. A valuable art collection is housed on the first floor, while the bathroom of Philippine Welser, the wife of Ferdinand, is still house in an upper part of the castle. The Spanish Hall, constructed between 1569 and 1572 and situated between the lower and upper part of the castle, is a splendid example of German Renaissance architecture. Numerous frescoes adorn the walls of the hallway. The Hallway is frequently home to a number of classical concerts throughout the year.

The oldest part of the castle is the Upper Castle and home to the Habsburg Portrait Gallery. The gallery contains approximately 300 portraits that date from the 15th century to the 19th century and includes portraits of such well-known individuals as Emperor Maximilian I, Ferdinand I, Charles V, and even Napoleon Bonaparte. One of the most important patrons of the Habsburg family, Ferdinand II founded the stunning collections housed in Ambras and even had a special museum constructed to hold the collection. Built inside the Lower Castle, the museum was constructed according to the most advanced ideas of the time. Perhaps one of the most fascinating aspects of the castle is that even today, centuries later, it is still possible to see the collection just as they were originally intended to be displayed.

3. Maria Theresa Street

One of the busiest streets in the city of Innsbruck and certainly worth a visit is Maria Theresa Street (German: Maria-Theresien-Strasse). Named for Empress Maria Theresa, this bustling street is home to a number of shops and stretches from the Triumphal Arch to the Old Town (Altstadt). During the summer of 2009, a section of the street was renovated completely and designed to reflect a pedestrian street concept. The north end of the street is today fully-pedestrianized.

While this street is today one of the most well known in the city, it holds great historical significance. It is along this very street that the resistance fighter Andreas Hofer marched during the first battle of Innsbruck as the Bavarian-French forces were defeated just before reaching the Golden Roof. In 1945, resistance fighters once again marched along the street following the defeat of the final Nazi troops. Innsbruck was actually the only major city that was part of the Third Reich that was locally opposed and surrendered to the Allied forces without a fight. More than 700 years ago, this street was comprised of only a few farmhouses. The Old Town remained enclosed by a circular wall that was well fortified and could only be entered through the St. Jörgen gateway. Before long, the aristocracy began to construct homes along this street in the New Town. Many such homes were remodeled during the Baroque period and became opulent palaces.

There are also many other impressive monuments that allude to the history of Innsbruck along this street, including St. Anne’s Column, the Triumphal Arch, and the Chapel of St. George. Combined with an array of outdoor restaurants, cafes, boutiques and shops, Maria-Theresien-Strasse is the ideal place to shop, stroll, sight see and soak up the history of Innsbruck.

4. Imperial Palace

The Imperial Palace (German: Kaiserliche Hofburg) is one of the major attractions in Innsbruck. Originally built by the Archduke Siegmund the Rich in 1460 in Gothic architectural style, this monumental structure was to