

## **City of Graz — Historic Centre**

Graz is the second-largest city in Austria after Vienna and the capital of the federal state of Styria (Steiermark in German). Graz's "Old Town" is one of the best-preserved city centers in Central Europe. In 1999, it was added to the UNESCO list of World Cultural Heritage Sites. The city is situated on the Mur river, in the south east of Austria.

The oldest settlement on the ground of the modern city of Graz dates back to the Copper Age. However, there is no historical continuity of a settlement before the Middle Ages. In the 14th century Graz became the city of residence of the Inner Austrian line of the Habsburgs. The royalty lived in the Schloßberg castle and from there ruled Styria, Carinthia, and parts of today's Italy and Slovenia (Carniola, Gorizia and Gradisca). In the 16th century, the city's design and planning were primarily controlled by Italian Renaissance architects and artists.

Graz lies in Styria, or Steiermark in German. Mark is an old German word indicating a large area of land used as a defensive border, in which the peasantry are taught how to organize and fight in the case of an invasion. With a strategic location at the head of the open and fertile Mur valley, Graz was often assaulted (unsuccessfully), e.g. by the Hungarians under Matthias Corvinus in 1481, and by the Ottoman Turks in 1529 and 1532. Apart from the Riegersburg, the Schloßberg was the only fortification in the region that never fell to the Ottoman Turks. Graz is home to the region's provincial armory, which is the world's largest historical collection of Baroque weaponry. It has been preserved since 1551, and displays over 30,000 items.

From the earlier part of the 15th century Graz was the residence of the younger branch of the Habsburgs, which succeeded to the imperial throne in 1619 in the person of Emperor Ferdinand II, who moved the capital to Vienna. New fortifications were constructed on the Schlossberg at the end of the 16th century. Napoleon's army occupied Graz in 1797. In 1809 the city had to withstand another assault by the French army. During the course of this attack, the commanding officer in the fortress was ordered to defend it with his men against Napoleon's army, which numbered about 900 and 3,000 respectively. He successfully defended the Schloßberg against 8 attacks, but they were forced to give up since the Grande Armee conquered Vienna and the Emperor ordered to surrender. The fortress of Graz is seen as the strongest fortress ever built. Following the defeat of Austria by Napoleonic forces at the Battle of Wagram in 1809, the fortifications were demolished using explosives, as stipulated in the Peace of Schönbrunn of the same year. The belltower and the civic clock tower, often used as the symbol of Graz, were allowed to survive this fate after the people of Graz paid a ransom for their preservation.

The old town was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1999 due to the harmonious co-existence of typical buildings from different epochs and in different architectural styles. Being situated in a cultural borderland between Central Europe, Italy and the Balkan States, Graz absorbed various influences from the neighbouring regions and thus received its exceptional townscape. Today the old town consists of over 1000 buildings, their age ranging from Gothic to Contemporary.

Source:-Wikipedia [<http://www.wikipedia.org>]