

TRAVEL WEEKLY

BY NORTHSTAR

DISPATCH

Dispatch, Vienna: Tauck's surprise excursion

By Brinley Hineman | Mar 20, 2025

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At Palais Pallavicini, guests enjoyed performances from classical musicians, opera singers and ballet dancers. Photo Credit: Brinley Hineman

VIENNA -- Dressed up and stepping onto a coach bus in the dark along the shores of the Danube, I wondered where the night -- and bus -- would take me. For those of who dined with Tauck at the [ASTA River Cruise Expo](#), mum was the word about the experience awaiting us.

We boarded the buses to learn we were being "kidnapped" for a surprise dinner experience at [Palais Pallavicini](#), a privately owned palace that Tauck has had an exclusive contract with for 15 years. There, we would get a taste of royalty and what Tauck river cruise guests experience when they pass through Austria's capital. Although the magical evening was a surprise for us, that's not the case for Tauck river cruise passengers, who know they're getting a glimpse into Vienna's noble past.

We shuffled into the palace, which sits between the Imperial Hofburg and the Spanish Riding School, and climbed up the stairs to the Marble Hall, where we were greeted by live classical music and a glass of champagne. The room, which earned its name from the marble walls, shows off the palace's Baroque architecture, transporting us back in time.

"The state rooms have always been a place of festive and cultural activities," the palace's website reads, and our Tauck night out was no exception. Most of us were smiling as we surveyed the 18th century palace to the backdrop of classical music.

Time for a quick history lesson: the palace was constructed between 1782 and 1784, built upon a 1581 convent called "Queen's Monastery" or "Convent of Poor Clares Mary, Queen of Angels." The Pallavicini family acquired the palace in 1842, and it has remained under the Italian noble family's ownership since. In tune with Vienna's reputation as the capital of classical music, the likes of Ludwig van Beethoven and Franz Schubert were frequent guests.

After sipping our bubbly, we stepped into the palace's ballroom to dine. The architecture is stunning, and the opulent gold details draw you in. As the classical musicians continued to play, I didn't know where to look: the talented performers or the extravagant designs on display in every corner of the room.

Typically, Tauck gives its passengers the option of veal, salmon trout or vegetable strudel as a main course, but since this evening was planned and executed under the veil of secrecy, our main course was selected for us based upon the dietary information we provided to ASTA for the conference. Since I have no food allergies or dietary restrictions, I was served veal as part of my four-course meal.



The Baroque design of the Palais Pallavicini transports visitors back to the days of Viennese nobility. Photo Credit: Brinley Hineman

The music that played while we sipped champagne was just the start of performances.

The entertainment lasted throughout our meal, first with the chamber music ensemble, then, to our delight, two ballet dancers and opera singers from the Wiener Residence Orchestra. The orchestra was founded in 1990 by the pianist and conductor Paul Moser and his wife, singer Sylvia Moser. Paul Moser, who died in 2004, implemented uncompromising standards: only musicians able to authentically interpret Viennese classical music could join his esteemed ensemble.

Finally, after having my red wine refilled after seemingly almost every sip and indulging in four courses, including fat slices of ice cream served cake-style with melted chocolate and raspberry sauce, it was time for our magical evening and taste of royalty to end. As Beethoven said, "Es muss sein."

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