

TRANSDANUBE TRAVEL STORIES

“Cultural harvest” along the Danube: Art, music and architecture – a look at formative eras and their influences, wealth, splendour and landmarks

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Contents

Introduction: What experiences might a culture-focused tour of the Danube region have to offer?	2
“KultUrsprünge” – Wellsprings of human culture (Ulm/Ach- and Lonetal valleys, Germany)	3
The medieval cultural heritage of the Holy Roman (Danubian) Empire (Regensburg, Germany)	4
Reinventing a Danubian city through art, culture and technology (Linz, Austria).....	4
River-inspired: The “Danube School” of Renaissance landscape painting (St. Florian Monastery and Krems, Austria)	5
Music, modernism and coffeehouse literature in the melting pot of a Danubian monarchy (Vienna, Austria).....	6
The cultural legacy of Baroque-era generals, emperors and art collectors (Marchfeld Palaces, Austria).....	7
Houses of God overlooking the Danube: Religious architecture, culture and identity (Pannonhalma-Esztergom Region, Hungary)	8
An architecture of constant change: The monuments of fallen Danubian empires (Budapest, Hungary).....	8
Fin-de-Siècle, Art Nouveau and Jewish heritage in Danubian Europe (Oradea, Romania / Szeged, Hungary / Subotica, Serbia)	9
A “Gibraltar on the Danube”, an “Athens” of national liberal culture, a Serbian “Rome” (Novi Sad, Petrovaradin and Sremski Karlovci, Serbia).....	10
Orient meets Occident: Cultural encounters between Grand Viziers, a Paris-style bohème and “Titoslavia” (Belgrade, Serbia)	11
Back to where it all started: Folk culture and life with the river (Lonjsko Polje Nature Park, Croatia)	12
The journey back: Reflecting on aspects of Danubian culture(s) (Murska Sobota/ Lendava, Slovenia).....	13
APPENDIX: Trail destinations & points of interest	14

Introduction: What experiences might a culture-focused tour of the Danube region have to offer?

Cambridge Dictionary lists three main definitions of the word “culture”:

1. *“the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time”*
2. *“music, art, theatre, literature, etc.”*
3. *“cells, tissues, organs, or organisms grown for [...] purposes, or the activity of breeding and keeping particular living things in order to get the substances they produce”*

It is easy to see how the first two definitions apply to what culture-focused travellers might experience along the Danube: first because the region has historically been home to an abundance of different ethnic groups, all of which have lived in close proximity to and interacted with one another (and the rest of the world) for centuries; and second, because those same, multi-ethnic crosswinds created a social, cultural and economic environment that favoured innovation and contributed significantly to the world’s great music, art, theatre, literature and architecture. This cross-fertilization of cultures – most famously epitomised by the city of Vienna – can be felt across the Danube region. The area boasts an undeniably rich culture with regard to the first two definitions, a wealth that explains the “gold” colour we’ve chosen for the Cultural Danube Trail in the context of our project.

But what of the third definition, the one referring to culture in the sense of an organism “grown for a purpose” that enables a harvest of what it “produces”? Did culture in the Danube region not have certain, sometimes lasting effects on places and people, on societies and the course of history? Could there not be what we might call a “cultural harvest”, that is something that could be experienced as a product of those processes?

Indeed, not only has life on the banks of the Danube and its many river-facilitated encounters had a profound effect on the culture of this region; those same cultural manifestations have in turn shaped the identities, ideas and world views of the people living here. Part of this “cultural harvest” is a certain outlook on life, a shared history (for better or worse), a commonly-held sense of things being “in constant flow” – but also an enduring cultural and ethnic plurality that has at least partially defied and survived some of history’s most brutal efforts to impose the forced homogeneity of “nation states” on a multinational region.

The cultural experience of a distinct **Danubian Europe** – a region demonstrably more resilient than any of the empires that have risen and collapsed here, at once different from and connected to Atlantic Europe and Mediterranean Europe – is something all of Europe and every traveller can benefit from.

Where else could visitors find the world's oldest flute, or listen to medieval choirs next to a 17th-century parliament building; where else could they find themselves entranced by a blend of modern technology and art – all part of an effort to revitalize a city that has changed identities at least once every century? In what other region could they discover Chinese influences in Renaissance paintings; discuss literature, philosophy and psychology in a historic coffeehouse; marvel at the art and lifestyle of Baroque country life; explore enmeshed notions of culture, religion and nation; stroll among the monuments of at least three fallen Danubian empires; discover the diversity of Art Nouveau art and architecture; travel from “Gibraltar” to “Athens” on foot; cross bridges between East and West before returning to the culture of everyday life with the river in a wooden house raised on stilts?

Join us on a trail that offers all of that and more. Let the river guide you through a veritable Aladdin's cave of cultural wealth – a treasure trove at the crossroads between Orient and Occident.

“KultUrsprünge” – Wellsprings of human culture (Ulm/Ach- and Lonetal valleys, Germany)

Before delving into cultural harvests, we must first look at the origins of culture itself. How and when did humans in the Danube area develop early cultural concepts, and how did cultural identities and ideas travel and spread along the Danube?

An area not too far from the source of the river Danube has produced some of the earliest evidence of human creativity anywhere in the world. Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2017, a system of caves in the beautiful Ach River Valley came to scientific and public attention after ice age art, musical instruments, and anthropomorphic sculptures were discovered between their walls. The artefacts are between 33,000 and 43,000 years old. Some, including the celebrated “Lion Man” sculpture may be among the world's oldest visual expressions of mysticism and perhaps animist religion. Considered evidence of early humans developing the ability to conceive abstract concepts and complex ideas of an afterlife, god(s) and/or demons, these early religions may well have motivated and provided context for the first music and art creations – the genesis of “culture” as we know it.

Also of interest is the nearby city of Ulm, which contributed significantly to the history of multi-ethnic settlement along the Danube river: between the 17th and 19th centuries, German-speaking, but also Italian, French and even some Spanish settlers collectively referred to as “Danube Swabians” (*Donauschwaben*) travelled east along the Danube in distinctive wooden river ferries known as *Ulmer Schachteln* or “box boats”, eventually re-settling the sparsely populated areas of the Pannonian basin previously devastated by the Ottoman-Habsburg wars. These unique communities maintained their languages, traditions and dialects over many generations and further enriched the already culturally diverse patchwork of cultures in the Danube region – that is, until they were nearly eviscerated by the radical nationalism and war, ideological conflict, genocides and displacements that ravaged East-Central Europe in the 20th

century. A visit to Ulm offers visitors a chance to experience the history and heritage of those settlers, providing insight into the spread of cultural identities and ideas throughout the multicultural Danube area.

The medieval cultural heritage of the Holy Roman (Danubian) Empire (Regensburg, Germany)

Having explored the emergence of early forms of cultural expression and the spread and intermingling of cultural identities throughout the Danube region, it is worth taking a look at how cultures evolved and grew with multi-cultural Danube empires throughout history, how multicultural influences shaped these empires and were shaped by them in turn. The city of Regensburg offers great opportunities to do just that.

First developed during the Early Middle Ages, the Holy Roman Empire has occasionally, if unofficially, been dubbed “the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation” and – in the tradition of 19th-century historians projecting “national” identities onto times long before modern nations were conceived as such – even identified as the “First German Reich”. At the time of its creation, the Holy Roman Empire was conceived as a universal secular power echoing the sacral universalism of the medieval (Catholic) Church. In practice, it was a multi-ethnic, culturally very diverse network of cities, rural communities, monasteries, bishoprics and land-owning dynasties that connected large parts of continental Europe – a hotchpotch that used the Danube as its most important channel to Eastern Europe and the “Oriental” Mediterranean. Kings and emperors, traders, pilgrims and warriors, Jews fleeing persecution, settlers and enterprising merchants, missionaries, saints and less-than-saintly conquerors travelled back and forth along the Danube, importing and exporting ideas and cultural innovations to and from the Holy Roman Empire.

It is hardly a coincidence that Regensburg, with its strategic Danube location, became one of the Empire’s crucial economic, religious and political centres and – eventually – seat of the Perpetual Imperial Diet (*Immerwährender Reichstag*). Visitors to today’s Regensburg can still envision and experience the Danube’s significance and contributions to the Holy Roman Empire’s medieval cultural heritage. Famed for its curiously “Mediterranean” atmosphere and attitude to life, the city boasts its legacy as a former hub of a multi-cultural empire through architecture (UNESCO World Heritage Site: Old Town of Regensburg with Stadtamthof), music (medieval choral traditions and the Regensburg Early Music Festival), as well as its multi-religious heritage (part of the Jewish Heritage Route).

Reinventing a Danubian city through art, culture and technology (Linz, Austria)

Culture and identity have never been static in the Danube region. Life along one of Europe’s most important waterways, a vital channel for travellers of all kinds throughout history, has meant that

people had to adapt to constantly changing economic and political circumstances – a factor that naturally influenced cultural expression as well.

The old Danube city of Linz has seen many changes and assumed many different roles through its long history. At various times it has served, alternately, as an important trade hub (Celtic iron and salt routes, medieval trade fairs), a glamorous residence for provincial noble families (Renaissance and Baroque old town), as a hub for religious Counter-Reformation activity (churches and former monasteries), as a military fortress protecting the Danube route to Vienna (maximilianic fortifications), as an industrial powerhouse (VÖEST, “Steel City”) and – most recently – as a city of culture and technology (European Cultural Capital 2009, Culture Mile along the Danube and Ars Electronica Center). Each of these “reinventions” left their architectural footprint, making Linz the perfect place to get a sense of both the various roles a Danube city can hold and the cultural legacy of those roles.

Linz is also a great place to explore the ways in which culture is not just created in reaction to or as an expression of change, but can itself act as a catalyst and driving force for it. After all, the city’s latest incarnation as a capital of culture and technology – a stark contrast to its old image of a grimy industrial town – is the result of conscious decisions by policymakers and support from dedicated artists and innovators, who can be encountered here in person alongside the art and innovations they helped create.

River-inspired: The “Danube School” of Renaissance landscape painting (St. Florian Monastery and Krems, Austria)

As both an impressive natural phenomenon and an important waterway, the river Danube itself has featured prominently in art and culture, inspiring artists with its striking landscapes and the contacts it facilitated. One of the most obvious examples of this influence is the Danube School.

A circle of artists not just named after, but directly inspired by the Danube, the Danube School of Renaissance painting found its muse in both its beautiful riverside landscapes and the East-West flow of ideas – indeed, art historians have found influences from such faraway lands as China in the compositions of Albrecht Altdorfer and Wolf Huber. Travellers to St. Florian and Krems can immerse themselves in the work of this unique painting tradition, discover its close ties to both the river and the many cultures it connected, but also explore the social and historical context behind this unique and influential group of artists.

The ancient St. Florian Monastery is one of the oldest existing church structures in the entire Danube region. It is also a magnificent place to reflect on art, music and architecture. Its current, Baroque form dates from the early 18th century, when the massive complex was rebuilt to commemorate the integration of the Ottoman Danubian provinces into the Habsburg Empire. The transformation of the ancient monastery into a monumental architectural showpiece of new Baroque aesthetics gave significant impetus to similar projects along the monastic landscape of the Danube. The monastery also houses a prestigious art collection, including some of Europe’s

most impressive extant illuminated manuscripts and works by the so-called “St. Florian School” of early 14th-century painters. The latter artists brought a number of exquisite pictorial innovations from the French and English courts to the East. St. Florian’s vast trove of early 16th-century Danube School Renaissance paintings culminates in a luminous painting cycle by Albrecht Altdorfer, a commission for the former Altar of Saint Sebastian.

Having encountered Altdorfer, often considered the father of modern European landscape painting, it seems more than appropriate to bask in the picturesque scenery of the nearby Wachau valley, which is also listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A trip to the old Danube trading city of Krems offers yet another opportunity to engage with the works of the cosmopolitan painters of medieval St. Florian: a visit to their only surviving murals, 14th-century paintings adorning the walls and ceilings of the ancient *Göttweigerhofkapelle* chapel. The once dominant, medieval Gozzoburg Castle contains even older frescos from the 13th century, many of them documenting the local “zigzag” style. The line between art and landscape does indeed seem to blur in the Wachau. Other must-sees include the State Gallery of Lower Austria and Kunstmeile Krems, an “art mile” of local galleries and museums. Both broaden our experience of specific innovations in art and iconography: creations fuelled and inspired by the Danube river, its landscape and the many influences it facilitated.

Music, modernism and coffeehouse literature in the melting pot of a Danubian monarchy (Vienna, Austria)

If we are to appreciate the tremendous cultural richness of the Danube region, particularly its current and historical diversity and multi-culturalism, we first have to look at how this pluralism impacted artistic creativity and cultural expression. Though the impact of this multi-ethnic melting pot can be felt throughout the Danube Region, it is most apparent in Vienna.

For several hundred years, Vienna served as the capital of an empire that – even in decline and in the face of destructive national conflicts – acknowledged eleven different national languages in its army regiments. Long before the Habsburgs, medieval Vienna was home to not only a Jewish quarter, but also a Greek quarter, as well as a number of merchants and people of various ethnic backgrounds along the Danube, with some hailing from as far away as the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. It is hardly surprising that this multi-ethnic metropolis developed a unique dynamic all of its own, one that not only fascinated celebrities like Mark Twain, who visited the city in 1897, but also inspired and shaped the many different ways in which people in Vienna expressed themselves through culture, art, literature and music.

Novelists, journalists and exiled revolutionaries famously debated ideas and world views in the city’s many coffeehouses, which – particularly around the turn of the century – fuelled a rich literary tradition that also absorbed and processed psychoanalysis pioneer Sigmund Freud’s ground-breaking new insights into the human mind. Fields of study including depth psychology, analytic philosophy, and phenomenology all have their roots in the vibrant intellectual, multicultural climate of fin-de-siècle Vienna.

Artists of the Vienna Secession and the Wiener Werkstätte developed their own distinctive variations of Art Nouveau style, drawing inspiration not only from all over Europe, but also from the Far East.

Finally, the famous composers that gave the “world capital of classical music” its reputation were also influenced by encounters with the multi-ethnic musical tradition(s) of the Danube region: Ottoman influences resound in the Turkish marches of Mozart and Beethoven and even in Strauss’s celebrated “Radetzky March”, just as Slavic, Hungarian and Jewish musical idioms found their way into the opuses of Brahms and Mahler.

Vienna is still unrivalled when it comes to experiencing the cultural fruits of the Danube region’s multi-ethnic heritage.

The cultural legacy of Baroque-era generals, emperors and art collectors (Marchfeld Palaces, Austria)

The word “culture” applies to more than just what is expressed through music, art and literature. The term also encompasses distinct ways of life, customs and traditions that groups of people have developed to fit their circumstances in time, space and society. Indeed, the powerful Danube has affected more than just the fortunes of simple fishermen, boatmen, and others earning their livelihoods from the river landscape. The Baroque era also saw it used as the backdrop and centrepiece of a particular lifestyle of the era’s rich and famous.

Shaped by the rivers Danube and Morava (*March*), the Morava Field or *Marchfeld* region boasts a uniquely mixed landscape composed of heath, steppe and floodplain forests, which for centuries was considered a particularly attractive spot for the great hunts organised by Austrian and Hungarian nobility. The *Marchfeldschlösser* or Marchfeld Palaces are a bevy of castles that some of the region’s wealthiest noblemen and generals used as elaborate hunting lodges; some were purchased and extended by emperors and empresses.

One palace, Schloss Hof, was purchased by Prince Eugene of Savoy, the Habsburg Empire’s most important general and politician in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The prince conceived it as a model estate that both reflected contemporary ideas and techniques for cultivating the land and also showcased his enormous wealth and sophistication, as it housed parts of his legendary art collection. Another palace, Schloss Eckartsau, shows how the lifestyle associated with these grand, Baroque hunting estates evolved and continued into the early 20th century. Charles I, the last Austrian Emperor, took refuge here at the end of the First World War, retreating one last time into this secluded, feudal world for several months until he and his family were forced into exile in 1919. Schloss Marchegg exemplifies both the decay and ruin some of these beautiful palaces saw in the later decades of the 20th century, but also the possibility of rebirth through culture: the palace – thoroughly renovated and revitalized since 2020 – will host the Lower Austrian State Exhibition in 2022.

The Marchfeld Palaces are a unique, memorable destination. They are also one of the best possible places to experience the Baroque splendour of an aristocratic lifestyle directly shaped by the Danube.

Houses of God overlooking the Danube: Religious architecture, culture and identity (Pannonhalma-Esztergom Region, Hungary)

Culture and art along the Danube have often been closely tied to religion and questions of ethnic or national identity. It is important to look at these sometimes inspiring, sometimes problematic interdependencies, as they have integrally shaped the character and culture of Southeast Europe.

The northwestern Hungarian cities of Pannonhalma and Esztergom boast two magnificent religious structures. Both “houses of God” have dramatic locations overlooking the Danube; both have histories and architectures inextricably linked with the river. Pannonhalma Archabbey and Esztergom Basilica are deeply rooted in the medieval genesis of the Kingdom of Hungary and the history of Hungary’s conversion to Catholic Christianity around that same time – events that defined Hungarian culture and identity and were impacted in turn by Hungary’s Eastern and Western connections through the river Danube. The two sites are charged with both religious significance and Hungarian national meaning.

Known for its magnificent Baroque architecture, Pannonhalma Archabbey, a Benedictine monastery, also features the Millennium Monument, one of seven monuments erected in 1896 to celebrate the millennium of the Magyars’ settlement in 896. The church in Esztergom was conceived as a national basilica for the “revived” Hungarian nation of the 1830s and 1840s; its neoclassical architecture and awe-inspiring dome project national pride and confidence. All of these make Pannonhalma and Esztergom exceptional places for travellers interested in the cultural significance of religious and national identity, which are so often intermingled in the Danube region.

An architecture of constant change: The monuments of fallen Danubian empires (Budapest, Hungary)

Power struggles and other historical winds along the Danube contributed to the rise and fall of several empires, most of them multinational. Like the general shift in social and economic circumstances along the river, these political transformations have also had an impact on art, everyday customs and the cultural heritage of people in the region. This is particularly evident when it comes to architecture, where the monuments of fallen empires stand as testament not only to the ideologies and self-conception of these states, but also to the fact that the shared cultural experiences of Danubian Europe have proven far more robust and enduring than any political or military regime.

The city of Budapest is a wonderful place to engage with this phenomenon. First developed from not one, but two important trade centres connected by Danube ferries at the time of medieval Transdanube Travel Stories, co-funded by the EU (ERDF, IPA, ENI), the State of Upper Austria and Tourismusverband Linz

Hungary (“Buda” and “Pest”), Budapest became first the seat of an Ottoman Pasha and provincial capital for 150 years of Ottoman Turkish rule, then a major administrative hub and royal seat at the heart of the multinational Habsburg Empire. It eventually was made capital of a multinational, later national Hungary, which for several decades fell under the Soviet sphere of influence (also called the Soviet Empire) until 1989.

Each of these changing empires has its architectural and cultural marks, legacies, and monuments in Budapest. From the northernmost holy site for Sunni Islam and the “oriental” architecture of its famous public baths (a legacy of Ottoman bathing culture), to the Belle Époque, historicist and Art Nouveau monuments of the Habsburg Empire, to the oppressive atmosphere of the Stalinváros (“Stalintown”) tenement buildings – Budapest is a call to ponder how the mighty rise and fall.

At the same time, the multicultural dynamics of the Habsburg Empire infused Budapest with a creative, intellectually fertile atmosphere similar to that of Vienna: ethnic elements in the music of composers Liszt, Bartók and Kodály not only heralded the Hungarian national awakening, they also epitomised the musical emancipation of contemporary composers across the entire Danube region. Likewise, the unique social and cultural dynamics of the late Habsburg Empire fed into the development of unique schools of philosophy and – especially – mathematics, giving rise to a rich cultural and intellectual legacy worth exploring.

Fin-de-Siècle, Art Nouveau and Jewish heritage in Danubian Europe (Oradea, Romania / Szeged, Hungary / Subotica, Serbia)

One important clue for understanding art and culture in Danubian Europe is the question as to how cultural inspirations and trends not only spread, but were interpreted and adapted to prevailing geographic, social and economical circumstances in different areas of the Danube region. A look at the Danube’s vast and varied cultural output suggests that communication about innovations was never one-way from “centre” to “periphery”; it was rather a complex series of interactions and exchange within a creative network wherein all participants influenced one other without becoming completely alike. This is particularly evident if we consider the way Art Nouveau architecture spread throughout the Danube region, resulting in different, regional styles that suited the social and economic circumstances at hand. A closer look at the cities of Oradea (Romania), Szeged (Hungary) and Subotica (Serbia) offers valuable insights into these different variations.

Art Nouveau and fin-de-siècle architecture entered the provinces of Transylvania, Pannonia and Vojvodina in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The architectural styles were regarded as an expression of cultural connections to global trends and technical innovations from the glittering metropolises of a multicultural Danube Empire and beyond, but they also showcased the wealth and taste of confident local elites who saw no reason why their prosperous cities should not both adopt these innovations and contribute to their evolution with distinct local styles.

Modern Oradea has its genesis in the 18th century, when the fortress town's military legislature created exemptions to the anti-Jewish settlement laws found in most Habsburg towns and cities at that time. Persecution of Jews in Poland attracted (mostly poor) Jewish migrants to Oradea, where they filled a structural need for skilled traders and merchants, eventually forming a prosperous new economic elite. This new elite – still perceived as ethnically and religiously different from the old, established, Hungarian elite – embraced different, modern architectural trends for their family residences, often as an expression of their own wealth and cultural refinement. The trend led to the construction of a number of fine buildings in the classic and late Art Nouveau, Hungarian Secession and Jewish Modernist styles. As the city's more traditional, non-Jewish elites maintained their influence and more conservative tastes, the public buildings erected in Oradea around the turn of the century favoured Historicism over Art Nouveau, creating structures more akin to the Imperial-era buildings along the Ringstrasse in Vienna.

Szeged began the 19th century as a typical, prosperous trade city with a largely Hungarian population and few ethnic minorities. When old Szeged was almost completely destroyed by the catastrophic Tisza river flood of 1878, wealthy Hungarian investors contributed heavily to a massive rebuilding programme. The investors harboured something of a liberal, progressive spirit and – once they had established themselves – brought Art Nouveau architecture to Szeged, but without feeling the need to distance themselves from the older Historicist style. This ethnically homogenous elite created public buildings and representative squares boasting magnificent examples of both Art Nouveau and Historicist structures, with some featuring a mix of the two known as “fin-de-siècle” architecture.

Nineteenth-century Subotica was ethnically more diverse than either Oradea or Szeged, featuring no clear majority but a mix of ethnic groups including Hungarians, Serbs, Croats, Bunjevaci and Roma. Consequently, the *Gründerzeit* – or economic boom period in 19th-century Germany and Austria before the great stock market crash of 1873 – saw an ethnically-mixed Subotican elite commission buildings in the modern Art Nouveau style, many of which show ethnically-influenced forms and even colours.

A visit to the cities of Oradea, Szeged and Subotica allows travellers to understand not only why, when and how Art Nouveau reached this part of Danubian Europe, it also gives insight into three completely different circumstances, exposing them to various manifestations of this cultural style and often distinctly regional interpretations of it.

A “Gibraltar on the Danube”, an “Athens” of national liberal culture, a Serbian “Rome” (Novi Sad, Petrovaradin and Sremski Karlovci, Serbia)

Throughout the 19th century, Danubian art and culture developed in a field of tension between the conservative, imperial multinationalism of Austria-Hungary and the reformist liberal nationalism embraced by the merging bourgeoisies of most nations within the Habsburg Empire. Anyone wishing to understand their impact on culture would do well to visit Novi Sad, Petrovaradin and Sremski Karlovci in modern-day northwest Serbia. For more than two centuries,

these three towns sat at the heart of “Austrian Serbia” between the Danube and Sava rivers; the area grew politically separate and culturally distinct from the first Ottoman-controlled, then semi-independent and eventually independent Principality and Kingdom of Serbia centred on Belgrade. Together, these three places represent three very different aspects of multinational imperialism, national liberalism and the conservative, national-religious power of the Orthodox Church, all of which shaped cultural developments in this part of Danubian Europe.

Conquered by Austrian forces under the command of Habsburg general Prince Eugene of Savoy in 1692 and 1716, Petrovaradin Fortress, nicknamed “Gibraltar on the Danube”, became the largest defensive structure along the military frontier. Controlled directly by the military rather than local civil authorities, its architecture is a testament to Imperial ambitions to dominance over the Danube, as it literally overshadows the civilian settlement on the other side of the river.

Historically situated opposite Petrovaradin on the other bank of Danube, Novi Sad was declared a “free royal city” and rapidly became the largest urban community of Serbs in the Habsburg Empire. Home to a civilian, liberal-national bourgeoisie, Novi Sad turned into a cultural and intellectual touchstone of the Serb nation – for a long time outshining anything Belgrade had to offer – earning it the moniker “Athens of the Serbs” in the 19th century. Indeed, the local Matica Srpska cultural club and library, which still exists today, played an important role in the codification of the written Serb / Serbo-Croat language under Austrian patronage.

The nearby town of Sremski Karlovci is where the “Treaty of Karlowitz” sealed the Habsburg conquest of previously Ottoman-controlled territories along the Danube in 1699, but its significance goes far beyond that: Besides building a chapel on the spot where the historic agreement was negotiated, the Habsburgs also established Sremski Karlovci as the seat of an orthodox archdiocese. Hints of the dual role this archbishop held as both spiritual and political head of the Austrian Serbs can still be felt in the Baroque style atmosphere of the town’s church and cathedral district, but also with a look at the richly endowed Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church, also called the Treasury, located in the summer residence of the Serbian Patriarch. Sremski Karlovci was regarded as the provincial “Rome” of Orthodox Serbs living in the Habsburg Monarchy.

Orient meets Occident: Cultural encounters between Grand Viziers, a Paris-style bohème and “Titoslavia” (Belgrade, Serbia)

Scholars and historians often point to the significance of the river Danube as a connecting link between cultures – its role as a “bridge” between Orient and Occident, East and West. Be it Latin-speaking Western Europe and the Greek-speaking East during the Middle Ages; the Catholic Habsburg Monarchy and a Muslim Ottoman Empire in the early modern period; or capitalist and communist spheres of influence in the second half of the last century. The river has always connected people and maintained everyday economic and cultural contact at some level, even in times of “Cold War” and “Iron Curtains”.

Located directly on the Danube, the easternmost stop on our cultural route is a place that served as precisely this kind of bridge for many centuries – a city that changed its primary affiliation so many times that it is impossible to call it either Western or Eastern per se: Belgrade.

While Ottoman *türbe* mausoleums in the city's fortified Kalemegdan district make it easy to imagine when Belgrade was an important stronghold for the Empire's Danube territories (the end of that reign is immortalised in the popular Austrian song "Prinz Eugen, der Edle Ritter"), the architecture of the city's elegant, late 19th-century boulevards and bohemian Skadarlija quarter reflect the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's strong cultural and political affinity to France and Western Europe in the 1920s, when Belgrade was known as the "Paris of the Balkans". Also remarkable are the post-1946 buildings, monuments and museums built during the second Yugoslavia (also locally referred to as "Titoslavia"), which show a communist aesthetic marked by a distinct regional flair – a reflection of the state's political and ideological attempt to find its place "between East and West" –, and the Temple of Saint Sava and the nearby Karađorđe Monument (both substantially renovated between 2001 and 2019), which show the growing importance of Orthodox, Eastern cultural aspects for post-communist Serb identity.

All of this makes Belgrade a perfect place for travellers to immerse themselves in the cultural East-West dualism of Danubian Europe, which can just as easily be interpreted as a boon to or a handicap for cultural self-expression.

Back to where it all started: Folk culture and life with the river (Lonjsko Polje Nature Park, Croatia)

Returning to the dictionary definition of culture as "the way of life [...] of a particular group of people at a particular time", it is worthwhile to imagine the immediate ways in which living with the Danube, a region once dominated by the river's many tributaries and dense floodplain forests, impacted the everyday lives of villagers, fishermen and farmers and – in some cases – continues to do so today. There are a number of places along the Danube where this close connection between nature and culture can still be felt.

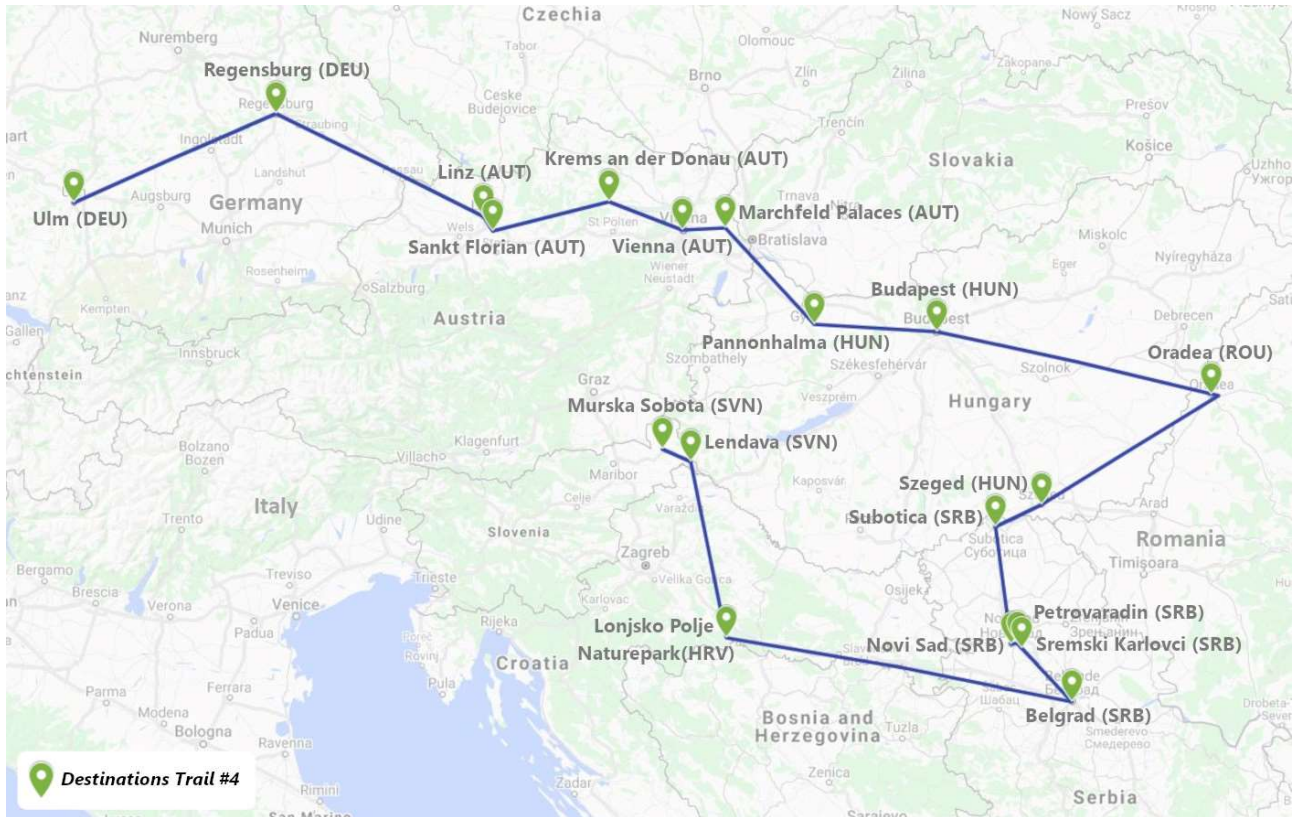
One of them is situated alongside one of the river Danube's most important tributaries. The floodplains of the Sava river – particularly the alluvial forests, wetlands and pastures protected by the Lonjsko Polje National Park – offer a rare glimpse of unspoilt nature and wildlife, but also of the sturdy and beautiful Posavac horses traditionally bred in this region. The area features traditional villages with centuries-old, wooden houses raised on stilts, offering insight into the region's lifestyle and traditional folk culture. What better end to our trail than a look at where it all started, with authentic forms of everyday culture and architecture shaped by people living immediately by and with the river. Experience the rich culture along the Danube and its tributaries!

The journey back: Reflecting on aspects of Danubian culture(s) (Murska Sobota/ Lendava, Slovenia)

A journey back towards the northwest offers a chance to stop at Murska Sobota (Slovenia) and Lendava (Slovenia) – both wonderful places to reflect on the aspects of Danubian culture(s) we encountered on our trail. A user-directed app developed by our partners at the Jewish Heritage Route can guide visitors to sites that form the legacy of local Jewish communities, including a synagogue and an old Jewish cemetery in Lendava. Murska Sobota boasts several examples of Art Nouveau architecture along with a number of other impressive secular and ecclesiastical structures (Evangelical Church, Murska Sobota Castle, Rakičan Castle).

Visitors completing our trail come away with countless new experiences and ideas – an inspirational treasure trove that echoes that of the many merchants, missionaries, conquerors, artists and artisans, kings and migrants who travelled Danubian Europe in times past. To visit this unique river connecting East and West is to immerse oneself in untold cultural richness, wealth and diversity. May that experience be our own “cultural harvest”.

APPENDIX: Trail destinations & points of interest



“KultUrsprünge” – Wellsprings of human culture (Ulm/Ach- and Lonetal valleys, Germany)

Exploring the “wellspring of culture”: ice-age caves and artefacts in the Ach- and Lonetal valleys
 Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2017, the prehistoric **caves of the Aichtal and Lonetal valleys** came to scientific and public attention after ice-age art, musical instruments, and anthropomorphic sculptures were discovered in their walls. The artefacts are between 33,000 and 43,000 years old. Some, including the celebrated “Lion Man” sculpture, may be among the world’s oldest visual expressions of mysticism and perhaps animist religion.
Ideas for experiences: **guided cave tours**, hikes, museum visits (**Urgeschichtliches Museum Blaubeuren / URMU** museum of prehistory), workshops

Multiculturalism and art: Danube-Swabian Central Museum (DZM), Ulm

The **Danube-Swabian Central Museum (DZM)** sheds valuable light on the history and nearly-lost culture of these communities. Exhibits include ethnographic artefacts and recorded interviews, but also paintings and other artworks by artists with a Danube-Swabian background. A veritable treasure trove of culture in all its manifestations.

Ideas for experiences: A chance to meet Danube-Swabians, artist-led workshop, culinary experience with an opportunity to sample Danube-Swabian specialities

Experience culture as an expression of civic pride and wealth: Theater Ulm, Germany's oldest existing municipal theatre

Guided tour of **Theater Ulm, Germany's oldest existing municipal theatre**.

See a performance (ideally a play that fits our theme).

The medieval cultural heritage of the Holy Roman (Danubian) Empire (Regensburg, Germany)

Witness the architecture of a medieval Danubian metropolis – Regensburg's Old Town

Regensburg Cathedral, Stone Bridge, Old Town Hall and "Perpetual Diet", medieval towers and squares ...

Explore the Jewish heritage of a medieval Danubian metropolis

Document Neupfarrplatz, gothic synagogue, Mikveh, "City Map: Jewish Heritage uncovered" by Jewish Heritage Route

Hear the musical legacy of a medieval Danubian metropolis

Regensburger Domspatzen, Tage Alter Musik old music festival, **Cantabile Regensburg** choir ensemble, etc. – concerts in the cathedral

Reinventing a Danubian city through art, culture and technology (Linz, Austria)

Experience the many faces of a changing city

Architectural vestiges of Linz's various different "incarnations": its **Renaissance and Baroque Old Town, churches and former monasteries, maximilianic fortifications, VÖEST, Culture Mile along the Danube, Ars Electronica Center**

The rebirth of a "dirty industrial town" through art and culture: the legacy of "Linz '09"

Encounters with young artists and contemporary art ...

Culture and technology: experiencing innovation

Examples of the connection between cultural and technological innovation; **Lentos Art Museum, Ars Electronica, Brucknerhaus, Musiktheater**; meet with music students or the director of the Linz music university; concerts, etc...

The "dark side" of a cultural capital

"Hitler's Linz": Adolf Hitler's project and attempt to create a city of mausoleums and museums through a Europe-wide programme of purchasing and stealing art. The project led, among other things, to cruel exploitation at the granite quarries of Mauthausen concentration camp.

Special guided tour that includes visits to the **Brückenkopfgebäude** bridgehead buildings, **Nibelungen Bridge, "Hitlerbauten"** residential buildings, etc.

River-inspired: The “Danube School” of Renaissance landscape painting (St. Florian Monastery and Krems, Austria)

St. Florian Monastery – explore “Danube School” painting with a special guided tour that includes a non-public art collection

Baroque architecture and art celebrating Habsburg conquests along the Danube; patronage of composer Anton Bruckner at the Monastery of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine’s Order; a look at the **St. Florian Monastery art collection** including illuminated manuscripts, an enormous Bible from the end of the 11th century, early 14th-century works by the so-called “St. Florian School” of painters (a group of artists credited with bringing pictorial innovations from the French and English courts to the East), and a vast **collection of “Danube School” Renaissance paintings** from the early 16th century, culminating in Albrecht Altdorfer’s monumental masterpiece: a commissioned cycle of paintings for the former **Altar of Saint Sebastian**.

Krems and the Wachau – see the landscape that inspired the Danube School and other Danube-related innovations in art and iconography

Breathtaking views of the nearby Wachau valley, murals by the French-inspired St. Florian School of painters in the 14th century (**Göttweigerhofkapelle**), medieval **Gozzoburg** castle with its Italian-inspired 13th-century frescos, **State Gallery of Lower Austria** and **Kunstmeile Krems** “Art Mile”.

Music, Modernism and coffeehouse literature in the melting pot of a Danubian monarchy (Vienna, Austria)

Delve into the world of Viennese coffeehouse culture with readings from literature, philosophy and psychology

Special **readings from books and texts by Viennese novelists, poets, philosophers and psychologists**, organised and held in the **unique atmosphere of historic coffeehouses**.

The world at home – at home in the world: explore the multicultural influences and innovations of Viennese Modernism and Art Nouveau

Combining visits to Vienna’s grand ethnographic collections (**Weltmuseum, MAK**) with other experiences related to Viennese art (MAK, **Wiener Werkstätte, Secession, Belvedere**, artists Schiele, Klimt, Otto Wagner, etc.

A new, more personal experience of the “musical capital of the world”

Not just with classical concerts at the Vienna State Opera etc., but also in **private concerts, guided tours and personal talks with dramaturges and composers** with expertise, insights and – occasionally – a humorous, personal touch to share.

A presentation of Danube-related songs and compositions including “The Blue Danube” and “Danube Mermaid” by Johann Strauss II, “Drunt in der Lobau” by Heinrich Strecker, Danube references in operettas such as “Countess Maritza”, “Drei von der Donau”, etc.

Possible museums of interest: **Haydnhaus, Mozarthaus, Beethoven Museum, Johann Strauss Apartment, Schönberg-Haus Mödling, Haus der Musik**

The cultural legacy of Baroque-era generals, emperors and art collectors (Marchfeld Palaces, Austria)

Schloss Hof: Prince Eugene, Maria Theresia and the Splendour of a Danubian Baroque country manor

Schloss Hof: Explore various aspects of **Baroque architecture and life**, including the **palace** and its **gardens**, as well as a **working manor farm, authentic cuisine in the kitchens**, etc.

Waning days of a feudal world: Schloss Eckartsau as the hunting lodge of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and final refuge for Emperor Charles I ("The Last") of Austria-Hungary

Eckartsau Palace: Site visits offer a **vivid glimpse of everyday aristocratic life at that time**, as the **rooms have been kept exactly as they were left when the Imperial family departed for exile in 1918**, including decorations from their last Christmas, etc.

Marchegg Palace: the changeable fate of a Marchfeld palace

Marchegg was founded as a **medieval castle town** by Ottokar II, King of Bohemia when Austria was part of Bohemia. Later, a **Baroque residence of the aristocratic Salm and Pálffy families**, the castle saw complete decline and near ruin in the 20th century. It was only recently renovated as part of preparations for the Lower Austria State Exhibition, which it is set to host in 2022.

Houses of God overlooking the Danube: Religious architecture, culture and identity (Pannonhalma–Esztergom Region, Hungary)

Exploring monastic tradition, Baroque splendour and wine culture: Pannonhalma Archabbey

Pannonhalma Archabbey: Baroque architecture in **dramatic surroundings, library, wine cellar, St. Martin's Basilica**; the project partner Via Sancti Martini offers a special experience through wine tasting.

The spirit of 19th-century Hungarian Revivalism: Esztergom Basilica

Esztergom Basilica: a classicist **"national basilica" built 1838–1846** on the **site of an early capital of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary**. The city was destroyed by Mongols in 1246. Experience the acoustics of this massive building through **music**, perhaps an **organ concert?**

An architecture of constant change: The monuments of fallen Danubian empires (Budapest, Hungary)

Delve into the legacy of an "Oriental" Danubian empire: Ottoman Budapest

Tomb of Gül Baba and Rózsadomb (Rose Hill), legacy of Bektashi philosophy, Ottoman bath culture, a visit to one of Budapest's famed **"Turkish Baths"** ...

"Imperial" monuments and Hungarian cultural revival in Habsburg-ruled Budapest
Historicism and Art Nouveau architecture, **Hungarian State Opera House, Royal Palace, Széchenyi Chain Bridge**, the Gothic Revival architecture of the **Hungarian Parliament Building**, former **Imperial Navy river gunboat SMS Leitha** ...

Monumental architecture of the Communist Soviet Empire – “Stalintown”

Special guided tour of Stalinist architecture in the **Dunaújváros (former “Stalinváros”)** district

Experiencing a philosophy of change: Budapest schools of music, thought and mathematics

Meeting with university philosophers and mathematicians, visiting **concerts**, permanent exhibition at the **Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music** (lisztmuseum.hu), **the Zeneakadémia** (kodaly.hu) museum, **Bartók Emlékház ...**

Fin-de-siècle, Art Nouveau and Jewish heritage in Danubian Europe (Oradea, Romania / Szeged, Hungary / Subotica, Serbia)

Oradea – Explore a blend of Art Nouveau and Jewish Heritage

Classic and late Art Nouveau (**Apollo, Stern and Moskovits Mitza Palaces, Art Nouveau Museum**)

Hungarian Secession (**Black Eagle Palace**; distinctive Hungarian take on Art Nouveau with particular emphasis on Asian and Far-East inspiration)

Jewish Modernism (**Poynár House, Ullmann Palace**) versus traditional, non-Jewish elites' more conservative (“eclectic style”, not Art Nouveau) public buildings.

(project partner: Art Nouveau European Route, Oradea)

Szeged – cultural innovation through a natural disaster, the “phoenix” of Art Nouveau

Magnificent fin-de-siècle architecture and impressive public squares (**Széchenyi tér, Károlyi tér, Klauzál tér, Dóm tér**, magnificent buildings in Historicist and Art Nouveau styles)

Expansive and beautiful religious structures: **Votive Church, Church of St. Nicholas** or **Serbian Orthodox Church** (18th century) and **New Synagogue** (fourth largest synagogue in the world, combining aspects of Historicism and Art Nouveau – “fin-de-siècle” style)

(project partner: Art Nouveau European Route, Oradea)

Subotica – Art Nouveau in Serbia's most multi-ethnic city

Synagogue, Catholic and Orthodox churches, but also public buildings (**City Hall**, historic **theatre** demolished in 2007 despite protests and rebuilt ...

A “Gibraltar on the Danube”, an “Athens” of national liberal culture, a Serbian “Rome” (Novi Sad, Petrovaradin and Sremski Karlovci, Serbia)

Exploring architectural manifestations of a Danubian empire – Petrovaradin Fortress

Guided tour of Petrovaradin's underground tunnels and lunch / dinner at a **fantastic fish restaurant overlooking the Danube**.

A visit to the Danubian “Athens of Serbia” – Novi Sad

A look at **Matica Srpska** and a **special presentation / guided tour on the codification of the written Serbian / Serbo-Croat language** under Austrian patronage, along with the cultural importance of the Matica Srpska cultural club and library.

The cultural legacy of Austro-Serbian Orthodox archbishops – Sremski Karlovci

Special guided tours or other experiences at the **Cathedral of St. Nicholas / Patriarchate Court**.

Orient meets Occident: Cultural encounters between Grand Viziers, a Paris-style bohème and “Titoslavia” (Belgrade, Serbia)

A closer look at Belgrade’s Eastern architectural heritage

Ottoman **Kalemegdan Fortress, Türbe** of Ottoman provincial governors, references to siege and conquest by Prince Eugene, medieval Orthodox **Saint Petka Church**, modern Serbian Orthodox **Temple of Saint Sava** and other monuments reflecting a Soviet cultural and political orientation – best experienced with a special guided tour?

A closer look at Belgrade’s Western architectural heritage

Sculptures by Ivan Meštrović at the **Kalemegdan Fortress** and **19th-century boulevards and public buildings**, “Paris of the Balkans”, **Skadarlija**.

The “third way”: cultural echoes of the second Yugoslavia and its “bloc-free” ambitions between East and West

Museum of Yugoslavia and **Tito Mausoleum**

Belgrade musical heritage between “East” and “West”

Serbian National Theatre, Madlenianum Opera and Theatre with ballet ensemble, Balkan pop phenomenon / **Balkan disco** – best experienced by visiting performances, concerts, etc.

Belgrade cuisine between East and West

Special **lunch / dinner in Skadarlija**

Back to where it all started: Folk culture and life with the river (Lonjsko Polje Nature Park, Croatia)

Riverside life and folk culture – the traditional villages Krapje and Čigoč

200-year-old **wooden houses with beautiful carvings, raised on stilts** on account of flooding. Experience the **traditional music and food** of riverside communities. If possible, **meet with fishermen or boatmen** whose lives are closely entwined with the river and hear their stories.

The journey back: Reflecting on aspects of Danubian culture(s) (Murska Sobota, Slovenia / Lendava, Slovenia)

User-guided app developed by the Jewish Heritage Route exploring the legacy of local Jewish communities

Lendava Synagogue and old **Jewish cemetery**; **Art Nouveau architecture** in Subotica; **Evangelical Church, Murska Sobota Castle, Rakičan Castle**