



Welcome to Taufers Castle! Before we start the tour, we ask you not to touch any historical furniture or sit anywhere during the tour. Filming and photography are only permitted up to and including the torture chamber. Please be aware of the small steps and thresholds and the low doors as you proceed. If you have any further questions, our staff will be happy to assist you.

Historical overview

Taufers Castle was built in the 13th century by the Lords of Taufers. They gave their name to the castle and the village below the castle. The Lords of Taufers built three important parts of the castle: the high tower (the so-called keep), the residential tower (palas) and the granary, where grain used to be stored. However, the noble lords of Taufers died out as early as 1336 as there were no male descendants. The castle fell to the next of kin, the Counts of Tyrol, for a few years and later to the House of Habsburg. However, the Habsburgs never lived at Taufers Castle, they gave the castle and lands as a fief to various noble families in the area, who maintained and expanded the castle.

These noble families lived at Taufers Castle until around 1720, when the castle lost its essential importance. The castle was then only inhabited irregularly for around 200 years and unfortunately many parts fell into disrepair during this time. It snowed and rained through the roofs and the high tower collapsed due to a lightning strike or an earthquake.

From 1900 onwards, various private owners became involved in the restoration of the castle. The first was a glass manufacturer from Vienna, who also had the stained glass windows installed for the first time around 1904 - before that, only pig bladders mounted on wooden frames were used, through which light fell into the rooms but which did not provide any thermal insulation. The second owner in the 20th century was a Viennese pharmacist and his widow. This was followed by the Benedictine titular abbot Hieronymus Gassner, who lived in the castle from the 1950s until 1977. Since then, the castle has been owned by the South Tyrolean Castle Institute, a private association of aristocrats and art lovers in South Tyrol, which is still trying to preserve the castle and open it to the public.

Courtroom

In this room you will become familiar with two themes that you will find in most rooms.

On the one hand, it is about heating the rooms; originally, only braziers were used for this, in which hot charcoal was placed. This at least allowed people to warm their hands and feet. You can imagine that this was not enough for such large rooms. That's why people started installing tiled stoves around 400 years ago, as you can see in the corner of the room. This is one of 20 tiled stoves that we have here at the castle, of which we will see even more beautiful and older models later.



A second special feature is the wooden paneling, which was originally installed to insulate the rooms, as a space was left between the wood and the wall to allow air to circulate. Swiss stone pine, a very typical tree in our area, was used for the paneling. Swiss stone pine is known for its strong scent, which in turn keeps woodworm away. The wood has been preserved for several centuries; in this case it dates back to the 17th century, so it is already over 400 years old. When this

wood paneling was built, small cupboards were also installed in the walls. However, these were intended more for documents and everyday objects, as clothes were mainly stored in large wooden chests.

There used to be a high court at Taufers Castle: the right to sentence someone to death. These trials were held in this room, with the accused first being brought in through the door in chains and then tied to the wooden pillar in the middle of the room. It can be said that there were only three ways these trials could end. Either you were innocent and the judge believed you, in which case you could go home a free man. If, on the other hand, you immediately confessed to being guilty, you were sentenced accordingly. However, if you didn't want to confess, but the judge assumed that you were guilty, then you were taken to the torture chamber, where torture was used to force a confession.

Judges' chambers

Here we are in the living quarters of the lord of the castle, the most important person in the castle. The lord of the castle was also always the castle's judge, who held court proceedings in the previous room.

In the center of the room, we first see a wooden table with various inlays. In the corners we see the date of the table "16" and "20", so the table dates from 1620. In the opposite corners we see the eagle of the Counts of Tyrol, on the sides the soaring lions of the Counts of Gorizia (who were related to the Tyrolean Counts by marriage) and in the center we see another eagle, but this time with two heads, the eagle of the Habsburgs.

Above the table we see a chandelier from the 18th century. It is made of colored, melted glass, which probably comes from Murano near Venice. The special feature is the crown of mirrors at the top



center, as these were not only decorative but also had a function. They reflected the light of the candles and thus additionally illuminated the room, which was also necessary as the wood paneling had continued to darken over the years.

During the day, bay windows were mainly used to illuminate the rooms, bringing additional light into the rooms. Even in the evening at dusk, you can still read and work here, while it is already very dark inside.

Before the tour continues, you can also take a look at the lord of the castle's old bedroom. You will find a tiled stove from 1808, which was built in the French Empire style. The chimneys for discharging the smoke are concealed between the walls and lead up to the roofs.

Torture chamber

We are now in the torture chamber, where only one instrument of torture has survived: a leg span from the 16th century. However, there were many more instruments of torture in those days, and you can see some of the methods of torture in the illustrations on the walls.



This leg span was built for 3 people. The defendants had to sit on the floor with their legs through the holes. The hands were also once bound, so it was not a particularly comfortable place to sit. There were many ways to torture someone, either by putting fire under their feet, whipping their feet or pulling out their toenails one by one with pliers. Salt was also applied to the bare insides of the feet and then goats were let in. The goats then licked the salt off the feet, using their rough tongues to

slowly remove the skin from the feet until they reached the bones. You can imagine that under these circumstances everyone confessed, regardless of whether they were guilty or not. Depending on which crime was confessed to, people were punished differently. If it was something very serious, such as murder, then the accused were taken to Sand in Taufers, where they were executed in public.

However, no one was ever murdered in the torture chamber itself, nor was that the aim of the torture. That's why the indentation you see in the middle of the room on the floor is not for the blood, but for the rain to drain away. There was no roof here in the past, everything was open, so you can say that rain, snow and cold also tortured the accused.

The tour continues. We will now take a look at the oldest part of the castle, the old residential tower from the 13th century.

Important: Filming and photography is no longer permitted from here!

Castle chapel

The frescoes in the chapel date back to 1480 by the workshop of Michael Pacher, a well-known artist from Bruneck. In the upper register we see Christ sweating blood on the Mount of Olives on the left,



in the middle is an angel with the cup of suffering in his hands and on the right the apostles who have fallen asleep, although they should be keeping watch. In the main scene, Christ is in the center with a white beard and a sword in his mouth, which becomes a lily as a sign of justice and mercy. The fresco thus speaks of the Last Day, when Christ will descend and judge mankind. On his right we see his mother Mary and on his left John the Baptist. Below this, on the right, we see St. Sigismund, the torture of St. Erasmus and, further to the side of the window, St. Paul shortly before his beheading. At the bottom left we see St. Andrew and then St. Peter three times: once in the dungeon, once during his crucifixion and then again on the right, next to the window, Peter with the key to paradise in his hands.

The wooden cross on the altar dates from the 13th century, from the Romanesque period, which can usually be recognized by two features: firstly, the position of the legs, as the feet are shown parallel. In addition, Christ is shown as the victor over death, not the suffering Jesus as we still use it today, as later in the Gothic period.

The castle chapel is still dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul. Every year on June 29, a private mass is held here for the owners of the castle.

We then move on to the next room, which is opposite us.

Hospital room/classroom

We are now in the old infirmary. Around 60-120 people lived at Taufers Castle and as basic medical care was not very advanced at the time, attempts were made to isolate the sick from the healthy. Contact with the outside world was mainly through the small window in the room. This meant that the sick could also attend mass and it is fair to say that faith was often the only hope for healing back then.



However, many years later, this room became something completely different. In 1564, Beatrix von Fieger had the idea of founding a school for aristocratic children from the surrounding area at Taufers Castle. The sickroom later became a classroom. The pictures below are, so to speak, the first antique school photo. Each child had its own portrait, above which you can also see the child's name and age and next to it the family coat of arms. What was special about this school was that not only children of different ages were taught here, but girls were also accepted at the school.

Unlike today, the children had to bring their own chairs and benches to the castle. Fortunately for us, one chair has survived to this day, which you can see below the window. It is the chair of the pupil Caspar Praitenberger, who attended the school in 1684. Here you can also see how small the children were back then; today a schoolchild aged 5 would certainly have difficulty fitting in.

Knights' Hall

Imagine the next hall full of chairs and tables. Because when the knights celebrated in times of peace, it was here that they danced, laughed, sang, ate and drank. In the alcove to the left of the pendulum clock you can still see an old outhouse, which even then had no door or curtain. The drainage block has since been closed, so the toilet is no longer functional.

The pendulum clock dates from 1650 and was originally located in the inner courtyard, where it is also documented until the First World War. To the left of the clock you can see a photo from this period and one from the restoration with the clockmaker Hubbuch in 2015. The clock only has one hand, the hour hand. Minutes and seconds were not so important back then, only a bell indicates the exact time on the hour. In the past, this clock also had to be wound by hand, but today this is done by a small electric motor located in the wooden box.



The colorful fresco in the hall is not from the Middle Ages, but from the modern era. It was executed in 1967 by the Austrian artist Lydia Roppolt, a friend of Abbot Gassner, who wanted to immortalize himself here. In the center we see the Madonna and Child, on the left side the past is depicted with Adam and Eve whispering to each other or the angel Lucifer falling down. The right-hand side, on the other hand, shows the present with a car, an airplane and a clock showing a quarter to twelve. This means that we only have a quarter of an hour left until the last day on earth. In addition, 1967 was the year of the Cold War, which is why we can also see an exploding atomic bomb in the fresco.

Ghost room

This is probably the most famous room in Taufers Castle. This room was once the room of Princess Margarethe, who fell madly in love with a farmer from Sand in Taufers. Of course, a wedding between a princess and a farmer would not have been allowed in the Middle Ages and so the two of them wanted to get married secretly in the forest next to the castle. On the day of the wedding, the farmer climbed up from the village, but before he could take his Margarethe as his wife, he was fatally wounded with an arrow by one of the princess's bodyguards. The princess was very sad about the death of her lover, which is why she locked herself in this room for seven long years. To finally put an end to her suffering, she leaned out through a window. Legend has it, however, that Margarethe has not completely left this world to this day, as the princess's footsteps, cries and screams can still be heard here at midnight.



The bed dates back to 1641 and is also quite a bit shorter than a bed today. One reason for this is that people back then were no taller than 1.60 meters, but people also slept half-sitting up. It was believed that lying down was too close to death. The canopy above was not only decorative, but also had a function: in winter, heavy woollen blankets could be placed over it to insulate you from the cold, while in summer, lighter fabrics were used to protect you from insects such as mosquitoes and flies. The same system can also be found in the cradle with its removable rings. You can imagine how cold it was at Taufers Castle, especially in the winter months, so these blankets were certainly necessary. Later, a tiled stove was also installed in this room, which dates back to 1755 and is also the most valuable in the castle. It was hand-painted with the so-called Delft Blue. This color was very difficult to work with and therefore very expensive.

In this room we see two more curiosities: The first is a wooden figure with deer antlers. It dates back to the Renaissance, as does the coffered ceiling with rosettes. The second is a Turkish helmet above the cradle; the Islamic inscription is easily recognizable. The helmet was later converted into an oil lamp.

Library

The library still has over 4,000 books and what makes it special is the variety of subjects. We have books on history, art, literature, war strategies, medicine, encyclopedias, etc. The languages are also very varied: German, Italian, French, English, Hungarian, etc. The older copies are kept in the locked cupboards in order to preserve them better. The oldest book dates back to 1540 and deals with jurisprudence.



The furniture in this room is from the Mannerist period. However, it does not come from the castle, but from the old sacristy in the village. They were purchased and brought up by the first private owner around 1900. You can still see today that this furniture originally came from the clergy. The large cupboards were used to store the large priest's vestments, the old confession window can still be seen in the corner to the left and the old tabernacle can still be seen between the windows.

In this room we also see a beautiful coffered ceiling, in the center is the coat of arms of the Lords of Taufers, in the cross shape we see four prophets of the Old Testament.

The library also houses the castle's oldest tiled stove, dating back to 1680, which is also the most decorative stove in the castle. We see various colors, ornaments and figures. These show knights fighting the bearded Turks at the bottom corners. At the end of the 17th century, the great Turkish wars were a highly topical subject; the Ottomans were at the gates of Vienna and thus posed a threat to the whole of Europe. However, as they lost this war in the end, they now had to symbolically bear the weight of the stove at the corners. As a rule, these ovens were heated from the outside, for example in an adjacent corridor. This made it possible to avoid smoke, dirt and soot in the rooms themselves. In addition, the lord of the castle was not disturbed during his work in the library.

Armory

When talking about weapons, one protagonist is particularly important: the knight. A medieval knight's armor weighed around 30-40 kilograms. It's easy to imagine how fit you had to be to wear such heavy armor, and of course you also fought with it! Knights mainly fought with swords, but lances were also used on horseback.



The farmer could not afford such weapons. So he made a club out of a piece of wood, which he then hollowed out. This not only made the club easier to transport, but it could also be filled with small stones. At the end, everything was sealed with beeswax so that nothing could fall out and so the farmer had a good weapon to defend himself against knights.

In the Middle Ages, however, there were not only melee weapons, but also weapons at a distance. At the back under the window you can see a small catapault on a scale of 1:10. These catapaults were very practical for attacking a castle from the outside because they could reach a distance of up to 500 meters. Large stone balls were used to damage the walls of a castle, but burning straw balls were also thrown to burn out the inside of a castle. Interestingly, corpses or excrement were also shot into castles to spread diseases such as the plague. Today, this method would be called biological warfare.

On the walls hang various weapons from knights and peasants, Turkish weapons that were taken as trophies after winning battles, an Italian helmet from the First World War and French bayonets underneath.

However, the sleighs in the gallery have nothing to do with the war; these are wedding sleighs. The horse and carriage were at the front and the bride and groom sat at the back. The sleighs were kept very small because children between the ages of 10 and 15 were married at that time. As a rule, they were not allowed to choose their own partners, as noblemen could maintain or even increase their status with marriages. At that time, ladies were already considered old virgins at the age of 17, and those who were not yet married at this age usually had to go to a convent as their only alternative.

Napoleon room

We now take a look at the last part of the castle, the guest wing. In the corridor there are various hunting rifles from the 18th and 19th centuries. The right to hunt was always reserved for the ruler of the area, but his guests could borrow these rifles to go hunting with him.



The first guest room is the so-called Napoleon Room. However, Napoleon never stayed here, only his general François-Joseph Lefebvre. The French soldiers once crossed the road below the castle to get to Austria. As the passes at the head of the valley became impassable in winter, the French army and Lefebvre spent the winter here at Taufers Castle. However, Napoleon was the better known of the two, which is why the room was named after him.

The map in this room dates back to 1842, when there were no airplanes or satellites, so the technological possibilities were very limited. Nevertheless, the map is very well made: the south is more precise than the north, but on the whole it is still accurate today.

Next to the bed we see an old bathroom, a washbasin. There was room for about two liters of water in this container, but these two liters had to be enough for two weeks. Back then, only hands, feet and the area around the eyes were washed. Back then, people bathed once a month, and only in summer as it was far too cold in winter. In fact, people didn't want to wash themselves back then because they thought they would ruin their skin if they washed it too often. That's why people resorted to fragrant perfumes or powders all the more often.

It was then easy for diseases to spread, which is why we also see an apothecary's cupboard from the 17th century here. The drawers inside could be used to store various dried herbs or medicines, some of which could be obtained from the castle's own garden.

From here, the corridor leads to the last of the guest rooms.

Cardinal's Room

This is the largest and most modern room in the castle, as guests regularly stayed here until the 1970s. The last regular guest was Cardinal Eugene Tisserant. He was a good friend of Abbot Gassner, the last



private owner of the castle, whom he often visited in the summer months. Tisserant had very good contacts with the Vatican and was probably the main sponsor for the restoration and maintenance of the castle during this time. In the photo you can still see the old collapsed keep in the background, which was rebuilt thanks to his help.

The tour of the interior ends here. You can now take a look at the outside area on your own by crossing the old granary, where you will find special exhibitions on changing themes from Easter to All Saints' Day. Then continue to the High Tower, where you climb up to the left (**only possible between Easter and the end of October!**) and descend into the inner courtyard on the right. You will pass a small children's labyrinth, the cistern and the old ice cellar.

Thank you for visiting Taufers Castle!



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