

## The Dome of St. Stephen's / PASSAU

### Baroque Splendor in the Wake of the Disaster

St. Stephen's Cathedral in Passau, as we know it today, owes its design to a devastating city fire in 1662. For the reconstruction, the Italian architect Carlo Lurago was brought to the Danube. He created a monumental structure that brought the splendor of Roman architecture to the north. The crossing dome, with its striking octagonal shape, forms the radiant center of the cathedral and towers over the city of three rivers as a landmark visible from afar.

### The Light of the South: The Magic of the Tambour

What makes the Passau dome unique is its use of light. Daylight floods unimpeded into the interior through the eight large windows in the so-called tambour (the dome's cylindrical base). Since the rest of the cathedral possesses a majestic grandeur due to its massive stucco work and enormous ceiling height, the dome area appears like a vertical shaft of light. Here, light becomes the actual building material, dematerializing the space – entirely in keeping with the title “As in Heaven” – and opening it upward.

### A feast for the senses

Beneath the dome's vaulted ceiling unfolds a Baroque masterpiece of the highest order. The Italian artist Giovanni Battista Carlone covered the entire interior with exuberant white stucco. Angels, garlands, and architectural ornamentation seem to float down from the dome. This sculptural splendor inevitably draws the viewer's gaze upward, creating an atmosphere in which the boundary between the stone church building and a heavenly vision seems to dissolve.

### The Acoustics of Infinity

The dome of St. Stephen's Cathedral is not only a visual but also an acoustic phenomenon. As the home of the world's largest cathedral organ, the space beneath the dome is regularly filled with powerful sound waves. The architecture acts as a resonating body: as the sounds from the more than 17,000 pipes rise into the dome, sight and sound merge into a spiritual experience that makes the majesty of the heavens physically palpable to visitors.

