

Away from home

In the first of a series of articles charting the experiences of a Wanstead-based travel writer, **Carole Edrich** takes us on a trip to Austria in search of something original to write about *The Sound of Music*

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a freelance journo looking for something original to write about *The Sound of Music* and Salzburg must be in need of a good drink.

It was the summer of 2015. I had been up packing through the early hours (a natural corollary of starting at 8pm) and was on the tube at OMG in the morning. I then spent my time in the airport trying not to fall asleep, and my time on the plane wishing I could. Journalists from all countries were gathering for the 50th anniversary celebrations of the *Sound of Music.*, so I had to stay awake for longer while they slowly filled the hotel bus.

Salzburgerland is beautiful. It begs for the taking of photos, the eating of strudel, the drinking-in of atmosphere and - naturally - beer. We all wanted to stop for different reasons; that beer, for the view, to visit a schloss... I didn't care, so long as there was coffee. Johann-the-driver's mission - to deliver us unto the hotel, and let us do no evil - prevented that. But what he said while driving inspired my first Salzburger-ish story.

"We go to the coffee house for everything. To read or to be alone, to concentrate or learn something, for the news or to watch people. A good coffee house is like a club. You can do everything there." I asked: "How do you know if people want to talk?" With a glint in his eye, Johann replied: "We are not stupid. That's why we have different sized tables! There are tables for one, two, or three, or more. Tables for every situation and every emotion. That's why every coffee house has at least two rooms. Also the ceilings are very high so you don't have to smell each other."

Johann's banter - pure schmah - is classic coffee-house culture. Interactions between



people with schmah are a charming, anarchic and friendly battle of wits. Salzburger coffee house habitués; Max Reinhardt; Marlene Dietrich; Thomas Mann, Arthur Miller, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his father would have all played with schmah. It grew from how below-stairs servants made fun of their masters and has been an aspect of coffee-house society for hundreds of years.

Mega press trips are once-in-a-lifetime experiences, so it was amazing that this mere freelancer had been invited. More amazing that I got a commission to write about the anniversary of a film I don't particularly like, and yet more amazing that another article idea popped into my head before I got to the hotel.

Could I write stories combining coffee-house culture with the film's 50th anniversary? Could I include accessibility and inclusion in it too? My answer - a mash-up of *Hitch Hikers Guide to the Galaxy* and *Jane Eyre* - was fantastically, wildly improbable. Like most fantastically, wildly improbable ideas, it was at least as worthy of consideration as a mundane one with the facts bent to fit. And reader, I've written it.

For more of Carole's attempts at humour, visit CaroleInnit.com