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## Fuggerei: The World's Oldest Social Settlement

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After enjoying the museums, architecture and beer gardens of Munich, head to Augsburg to explore some of its fascinating sites, including Fuggerei.

The people of Augsburg often refer to Fuggerei as a "town within a town". Built by the Fugger family in the early sixteenth century, Fuggerei is a walled community that has served the poor for centuries. It occupies several blocks within the historic district of Augsburg and features a collection of charming vine-covered houses that line peaceful narrow streets.



The Fuggerei is the world's oldest social housing complex still in use. - via Wikipedia

It is impossible to separate the historical importance of Fuggerei from the family that founded it. For centuries, the Fuggers were one of the wealthiest families in Europe. They owned castles throughout Germany and operated trading businesses that imported and exported goods from around the globe.

While Fuggerei is the crown jewel in Augsburg's collection of cultural and historical attractions, the city also has a number of famous homes, cathedrals and gardens waiting for you to explore.

### Augsburg

Augsburg lies in the heart of Bavaria, where the Wertach and Lech Rivers converge. The Romans founded the city in 15 B.C. and it played an important role in the German Renaissance and Industrial ages. It was also home to some of Germany's most famous historical figures, including author Bertolt Brecht and Leopold Mozart.

Augsburg has the third-largest population in Bavaria, with around 264,000 residents. It is the third oldest city in Germany and home to the University of Augsburg and Hochschule Augsburg, an applied science college.

The city was particularly valuable to Rome, because of its location and robust army. Despite many enemy invasions, Augsburg expanded to become a major hub for European trade. By 120 A.D. the city was the capital of the Raetia province.

The Roman Empire came to an end in 1806 and the Kingdom of Bavaria took control of Augsburg. By the end of the century, the city played a vital role in the Industrial Revolution, particularly because of its textile manufacturing.

During World War II, the Nazis constructed the Dachau concentration camp near Augsburg. Rudolf Hess, Adolf Hitler's deputy, flew from Augsburg to Scotland in 1941 to meet with the Duke of Hamilton, hoping to negotiate an end to the war. However, his plane crashed before reaching his intended destination and he became a prisoner of the Allies until his death in 1987.

Since the end of World War II, Augsburg has thrived as an industrial center and tourist destination. Today, the city produces high tech products, including industrial robots, diesel engines and components for Airbus aircraft.

In addition to Fuggerei, Augsburg has a number of other popular attractions, including a ninth century cathedral, a seventeenth century town hall and one of the country's most beautiful botanical gardens.

### Fugger Family

The Fugger family rose to prominence in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Their business empire was legendary throughout Europe, because they traded directly with emperors and popes, as well as countries in Europe, Africa, South America and Asia.

Jakob Fugger, also known as Jakob Fugger von der Lilie and Jakob Fugger the Rich, was born in 1459. In his youth, he attended school in Venice, maintaining his primary residence there until the late fifteenth century.

While living in Venice, Jakob was a cleric, as well as an honorary canon of the church. In 1487, he returned to Augsburg and took up the role of head of the Fugger family and commander of its business empire.

The majority of the Fugger money came from trading textiles with Italy. Along with his brothers, Georg and Ulrich, Jakob continued to expand the family's business operations throughout the continent.

They entered the banking market and conducted business with the Roman Curia and the House of Habsburg. They also moved into the mining, extracting copper and silver from mines in Slovakia and what is today the Czech Republic.

Jakob Fugger died in 1525. At the time of his death, he was one of the wealthiest people in history. Anton Fugger, Jakob's nephew, succeeded him as head of the family and leader of the business empire.

The family persisted in developing even more business ventures. Anton expanded mining operations into Norway and Sweden and established new trade with Chile and Peru. The family also imported cattle from Hungary and opened a spice import business.

Jakob and other members of the Fugger family are buried in Fugger chapel in Augsburg's St. Anne's Church, which he and his brother Ulrich endowed in 1509. It was the first Renaissance architectural structure built in Germany and features marble floors and Albrecht Dürer sculptures.

### Fuggerei

In 1511, toward the end of his life, Jakob Fugger began funding the construction of Fuggerei. The original purpose of the settlement was to provide jobs and housing for needy day laborers and craftsmen. His initial investment was 15,000 florins, but he expanded the project throughout the remainder of his life.

In 1514, Jakob bought more land surrounding the new community and made an official agreement with the city of Augsburg to provide housing for the poor. By 1523, the community had more than 50 houses. Fuggerei received its name in 1531, six years after Jakob's death.

The Fugger family managed Fuggerei and made all decisions about who could live in the community. During the early days of Fuggerei, its residents had to be members of the church to qualify for a house and paid only one guilder for their annual rent, which amounted to a laborer's wages for one week. The Fuggers also requested tenants offer three prayers daily for their family.

Decades after Jakob's death, Fuggerei continued to welcome the poor with a home in which to live. Franz Mozart, a Master Mason and the great-grandfather of composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, was Fuggerei's most famous resident and his home still stands today.

The Fugger Foundation now funds and operates Fuggerei. Counts and dukes within the Fugger family continue to make all decisions related to the community's tenancy. Little has changed at Fuggerei since Jakob built its first house. Today, tenants pay less than one euro annually for rent and the Fugger family still requests three prayers per day.

Fuggerei has more than 60 houses, divided into 140 apartments, housing approximately 150 people. The community is open to the public, but charges 4 euros for admission, more than the annual rent of its tenants. The complex features a model apartment, which visitors can tour to see the lifestyle of Fuggerei residents, along with a museum, cafe and gift shop.

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