

## 2005 EASTERN EUROPE Budapest, Prague, Elbe River

Sunday and Monday, August 8-9, 2005. I met Mary at Hartsfield. Never have we had such a hard time getting to our destination!

The plane had been late coming in from Frankfurt and then it had to be cleaned. When it became time to board, there was water on the skyway from the thunderstorm raging outside. I was not considered handicapped with my cane. I had to wait while they boarded the wheelchairs. At last we were all on board and left an hour late. After a pasta entrée, I curled up in my blanket and slept all the way to Paris. It was one of the smoothest crossings I have ever experienced.

We were 45 minutes late arriving in Paris. We were also at a remote bus gate. I had decided not to ask for a wheelchair since when Mary and I came back from the Riviera three years ago, we had waited almost an hour for a handicap bus that never came. I had ended up walking on my own power to the other terminal and figured I could do it again. It seemed to take forever to get into the terminal. Air France directed us to Gate B2 where there was a long line to get through security. Fortunately our flight to Budapest was marked *retarde* (late), so we felt we had lots of time. Wrong! We finally got into the waiting room only to find that the rest rooms were out in the terminal and we would have to go out and come back through security. There was no plane at the gate. The waiting room was crowded and we finally found seats with our backs to the check in. There was an unintelligible announcement. Mary didn't understand it either. After a while I spied a plane at the gate. It was going to London! It was hard to believe but we had missed our flight!

So we went back out to find Air France. There was another long line. When Mary finally got to the head of it, she was told we could not get on the plane that was leaving within the hour. It takes two hours for bags to be transferred and our bags had to go with us! No wonder so many people lose their luggage in Paris. The guaranteed connection time for people is less than the time for baggage! The agent booked on us a later flight.

Next we got in another slow line to get our boarding passes. They couldn't find our baggage. I sat on my cane seat in another slow line going through yet another security. When we finally got to the waiting room, I took a seat where I could see the check-in for the Malev flight to Budapest. I was on my feet as soon as the boarding started. I cleared another checkpoint half way down the skyway and at last was on the plane.

However, I was still not out of the woods. I had left my cane in the waiting room. No one seemed to understand what a cane was. I barged my way back up the ramp, grabbed the cane and reboarded. No one dared to challenge me as I waved my cane like a cudgel! I don't like Charles de Gaulle Airport!

Malev turned out to have a nice business class with big leather seats. The box lunch was cheese, chips and other snacks. The best part was the candy bar made with Cheerios and chocolate. I was glad I had bought a salmon sandwich in the airport. Needless to say, our bags did not arrive in Budapest with us!

We checked into the Marriott where we had a lovely room with a view of the Danube. Mary asked at the desk to have non-feather pillows. To our amazement, the maid beat us to the room with the replacements. What service! She then had to get non-feather duvets as well.

Our bags arrived about midnight. They had torn off my lock (I had given them the combination) and even the place where the lock was secured was gone. Mary's bag arrived wet. We had to send everything out to the laundry. Mary said that if she had known she would not have bothered washing things before she came, just packed them dirty. The laundry bill was \$150!

All the stress and the fact I had been fighting a cold made us grab dinner in the bar and turn in early.

<http://www.paris-cdg.com/>

[http://www.travelfirst.com/pays/hungo\\_e.html](http://www.travelfirst.com/pays/hungo_e.html)

<http://marriott.com/property/propertypage/BUDHU>

<http://www.us-mattress.com/comforters.html>

Tuesday, August 9. My cold has almost gone. I had booked a "Danube Bend Tour" which turned out to be just what the doctor ordered. Our guide Adam had a mini bus for the 11 tourists. It included a Vietnamese family of seven including two children, an Italian couple and Mary and me. Adam was very good and spoke in three languages (the Vietnamese had lived in Germany at one

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time and understood German. I am always impressed with people who can go from one language to another without a break.

On the way out of Budapest we passed Aquincum, the ruins of the old Roman city. The Danube River marked the northern boundary of the Roman Empire.

Our tour advertised a jewelry museum. This turned out to be an Israeli jewelry concern called Caprice. After a short film on how diamonds are cut, we were ushered into the salesroom. I dislike this sort of thing and was not going to buy a thing. However, instead of wearing my usual amethyst travel ring, I had made the mistake of wearing my white opal. They had an absolute matching earring set. I knew I was doomed when the salesman took it out of the case and carried it around with us and in the end I settled for his best price which was probably too much. I'm also sure Adam got a rake-off. However, I will enjoy them very much.

We drove further east into the country and passed fields of wildflowers. Apple trees lined the road. At last we came to a view spot, Doboko, and were about 2000 meters high which gave a commanding view of the Danube.

Our next stop was Esztergom, where there is a lovely 19<sup>th</sup> century neo-classical Cathedral. Adam promises us an even more magnificent cathedral tomorrow. A huge marble sculpture was impressive. It was of St Stephen receiving his crown.

At Nagyvillam restaurant we were greeted with cherry brandy and then served a three-course lunch. The first course was a soup, perhaps mushroom. A venison dish, drowned in a blackberry sauce, followed this. The restaurant is known for its venison dishes. Desert was a baked apple with a custard sauce. The local wine was okay, but we were disappointed we didn't eat in the room with the music.

After lunch the group walked up hill to see another view of the Danube. I poked around in the shop and saw some lovely table runners and some of the Russian matryoska dolls that open up for more inside dolls. One had 16 inside dolls! Didn't buy anything.

Then we drove on to Szentendre, a town the Serbs built. The whole town is devoted to tourism and there were many shops to browse before the five o'clock boat back to Budapest. It was lovely and peaceful coming down the river. We docked right next to the hotel.

Our next problem was Internet access, which was supposed to be available at the room. We ended up at the business center and there several things in our e-mails that had to be dealt with. Sister Mary Frances was worried about us and sent an email via Evans. I'm sure our ordeal yesterday triggered her concern for us but we do not know why she is worried about Evans. She is always sensitive to Mary's troubles. We ended up eating at the hotel restaurant overlooking the river.

<http://www.x3m.ro/danube/>

<http://www.fsz.bme.hu/hungary/budapest/bptour/bpduna03.htm>

<http://programs.ohb.hu/caprice/index.en.html>

<http://russian-crafts.com/nest/history.html>

<http://www.budapesthotelstart.com/budapest-hungary-info/esztergom.en.php>

<http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/saints11.htm>

<http://www.budapesthotelstart.com/budapest-hungary-info/szentendre.en.php>

Wednesday, August 10. We checked out of the hotel and Adam took us on a city tour.

He started by taking us up Gellert Hill, in Buda. Budapest was two cities, Buda and Pest. The Buda side rises high above the river, Pest lies on flat land on the other side of the river. The two cities finally merged in 1873 when the second bridge was built connecting them. There are now 10 bridges, two built in the last few years. One of the most impressive is the Chain Bridge. At the top of Gellert Hill there are magnificent views of the city and a huge victory monument sculpture erected by the Russians. Once it was adorned with a bronze Russian soldier, now removed. There are thermal springs on the Buda side of the river.

Budapest is very beautiful with neo-classical, neo gothic, neo everything architecture. This is because much of the city was built about 200 years ago after a flood heavily damaged the city. Many of the tiled roofs have designs. I was most impressed being the Museum of Industrial Arts with its green and gold design. He pointed out so many lovely buildings we could not remember them all. One was the old synagogue, the largest on the continent. It was built 1854-1859 in Byzantine-Moorish style.

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There are three subway lines; one is the oldest in Europe. We stopped at Heroes Square where they have a tomb of the Unknown Soldier decorated with a wreath. I loved the sculptures here. There were horsemen representing the seven Hungarian tribes, which came from Asia in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Then they also had one of St. Stephen, the king in 1000 AD, who converted the country to Christianity. Other rulers were also represented.

A picture of King Stephen's ornate crown had been shown to us in the film at the jewelry store yesterday. It is presently in the Parliament Building. We don't have the 45 minutes required to stand in line to view it, but we did see the Parliament from the outside.

We stopped at St. Stephens's cathedral, a wonderful neo gothic building of marble and gold. It was built between 1853 and 1903. As Adam promised it was even more impressive than the one we saw at Esztergom.

He then drove us up to the palace area, where there were many tourists milling around. I was told to stand in a queue for tickets but the automatic ticket machine was very slow or perhaps not working. Adam ran off to get tickets from the ticket office. I was in pain from standing in line but rallied to climb up on the Fisherman's bastion for yet another wonderful view of the city.

We really love Budapest and only wish we had more time to spend here.

Adam took us to the airport and we had a quick lunch before catching our Czech Air flight to Prague. I sat watching the gate until we were told to board.

In Prague we caught a cab to the Radisson. They told us we would have to pay \$44 dollars for two breakfasts each day, or, for \$45 we could upgrade to a better room where we could have complimentary breakfasts. It is a holdup but what could we do. It is a lovely room although the view leaves something to be desired. One of the "perks" is a complimentary box of chocolate wafers. Each wafer is about 8 inches in diameter! We find everything very expensive thanks to Bush spending all of America's wealth in Iraq.

The concierge recommended Celnice Restaurant for dinner. It was a much longer walk than she had said, but it was worth it. The food was all native Czech. I had a delicious goulash with potato pancakes. Mary had the filet of beef. When I say the bill was merely \$30 you will realize we are paying outrageous prices for everything. The dollar seems almost worthless. I thought it was bad in February but it is noticeably worse now. I will be glad when we get on the boat and no longer have to pay for meals. We caught an expensive cab back to the hotel in time for two massages in our room. Then I slept like a baby.

<http://www.fsz.bme.hu/hungary/budapest/budapest.html>

<http://www.fsz.bme.hu/hungary/budapest/kepek/nagyok/gellert2.htm>

<http://www.virtourist.com/europe/budapest/33.htm>

<http://www.jonbales.com/Budapest/Parliament/StStephens.htm>

[http://www.talkingcities.co.uk/budapest\\_pages/sights\\_alpha3.htm](http://www.talkingcities.co.uk/budapest_pages/sights_alpha3.htm)

<http://www.answers.com/topic/csa-czech-airlines>

<http://www.radissonsas.com/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=RadissonSAS/integration/hotelInfo&hotelCode=prgzh&language=en&backURI=/reservation/rateSearch.do&origin=Rates%20And%20Availability>

<http://www.expat.cz/prague/czech/fine-dining/celnice/>

Thursday, August 11. Grey Line picked us up at the hotel for the "Grande City Tour". Petr our guide spoke English and Russian for the group of about 15 in our mini bus.

Celts originally moved into the area and named it Bohemia. Later Slavic tribes conquered the area and named it Czech Land. Thus Bohemia is now the largest province of the Czech Republic.

We drove around the old and new city. Charles V founded "New Town" in 1348. We drove through Wenceslas Square, the huge square near our hotel and he explained that the junky sculptures are only a temporary exhibit, hardly in keeping with Prague's atmosphere. One is a pile of car carcasses, another a concrete blob with worn Adidas shoes embedded in it. A bit of humor is found with Superman making a crash landing headfirst.

The imposing art nouveau building at one end is the National Museum built in 1911.

In 2002 there was a 15-foot flood that covered the low-lying parts of the city. We drove through Old Town Square with the Baroque St. Nicolas Church. Amadeus was filmed here.

Prague was built on seven hills, the most imposing housing the palace and grounds. We left the bus at the Royal garden created in 1536 by Ferdinand 1 for his bride Anne. An ornate bronze

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“singing” fountain was pointed out. I leaned under it to hear the famed noise, but could not hear anything. T. Jaros designed the fountain in bronze. Then we passed a stairway designed for the horses to climb in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. We passed the Ball Game Hall with its unusual facade. The Deer Moat is natural and named for the deer killed by the Prussians in 1711.

Nearby is a unique greenhouse, sort of inter-connected geodesic domes, which in 1996 was given an award for its uniqueness.

There was a large monument to the plague victims of 1713. We waited there for the changing of the guard, which happens each day at noon. There was no way to see the actual ceremony since other tourists must have been there for hours to occupy all the best viewing places. We did see the guards come marching down the street.

The first religious chapel on the hill was built in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Now the magnificent St. Vitus Cathedral dominates the spot. The Calvinists destroyed the original stain-glass windows in 1421. The present ones are 16<sup>th</sup> century copies. The rose window is especially beautiful.

We were told that Peter Parler designed the Wenceslas Chapel and I thought Petr planned to show it to us. We were wrong and consequently missed it. Seven keys are needed to open the treasure room above it, which is not open to the public. This is where the crown jewels are kept. On the outside of the cathedral is a beautiful gold mosaic of the last judgment made from a million pieces of glass. Prague has been known as the “golden” city because of the yellow coloring of its buildings. Time and pollution has dulled much of the color but in this magnificent facade you got a glimpse of how it must have been. There was a long walk down off the hill to our waiting bus.

We then drove through the Jewish quarter. The Synagogue is the oldest in Europe and there is a cemetery, so crowded, that in one place there are seven layers of graves.

The tour ended at Old Town Square, a huge square with interesting old buildings around it. We were told we had to get back to our hotel by ourselves. I wish we had picked a hotel closer to this square and saved ourselves a lot of walking.

We found a pub for lunch but the food was not memorable.

Mary called the Peter Deilmann people and found we do not have to go back to the airport for a transfer. The boat is at a pier in Prague not far from the Charles Bridge. I don't understand why Susan arranged the pickup at the airport. At any rate the Peter Deilman people arranged a tour for us on Saturday before we get on the boat.

The hotel wants \$20 an hour for Internet. Mary found out from Danielle, the concierge, that there is a restaurant with free Internet just around the corner so that is where we went for dinner, the Jama Restaurant. The place caters to young people with pop posters as decorations and modern music loudly playing. The food was adequate, mostly Mexican, but not exciting. The big draw was the free Internet. We were in an almost private room and spent an hour catching up on the world. Tomorrow we are going to take both our computers there for dinner!

<http://www.prague.cz/>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohemia>

[http://www.myczechrepublic.com/basics/king\\_charles.html](http://www.myczechrepublic.com/basics/king_charles.html)

<http://www.pragueexperience.com/places.asp?PlaceID=605>

[http://www.myczechrepublic.com/basics/king\\_charles.html](http://www.myczechrepublic.com/basics/king_charles.html)

<http://www.pragueexperience.com/places.asp?PlaceID=843&Source=Goback>

<http://www.pragueexperience.com/places.asp?PlaceID=594>

[http://www.myczechrepublic.com/prague/sightseeing/prague\\_castle.html](http://www.myczechrepublic.com/prague/sightseeing/prague_castle.html)

<http://www.prague-spot.com/royal-garden>

[http://lava.ds.arch.tue.nl/gallery/praha/thrad\\_sv.html](http://lava.ds.arch.tue.nl/gallery/praha/thrad_sv.html)

[http://old.hrad.cz/castle/svvit\\_uk.html](http://old.hrad.cz/castle/svvit_uk.html)

<http://www.pragueexperience.com/places.asp?PlaceID=597>

[http://cruises.about.com/od/cruisealbum/a/deilmann\\_index.htm](http://cruises.about.com/od/cruisealbum/a/deilmann_index.htm)

<http://www.prague.dk/english/american-restaurants.htm>

Friday, August 12. Overcast with spitting rain. I decided to get my hair done and what an adventure that was. Danielle had given me directions to one of the mazes of shops that lurk behind the facades of the old buildings. The first time through the maze, I missed the shop completely, but on a second approach found a sign that indicated it was on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. They spoke no English so the hairdo is questionable, but at least I am clean. Since they didn't take

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Visa or Euros, she had to accompany me downstairs to a change bureau so I could pay her. It cost about \$20, comparable to what I pay at home.

Gray Line picked us up for the tour to Kutna Hora. Kutna Hora is a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site. Cistercian monks started mining silver in 1260 in nearby Sedlec. This was the first monastery of the order on Czech lands. German miners soon came to settle and one town was named Kutna Antiqua (Old Monk's Habit) from which the name Kutna Hora derived. The miners wore white robes when they worked.

More and more miners came and by the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, Kutna Hora was producing about one-third of the European production of silver. The Prague "groschen" coin was used all over Europe since it was such a stable currency. The town became a royal city and the Kings of Bohemia were powerful.

In 1300, the Hapsburg Emperor laid siege to the city but was unsuccessful. The city continued to grow building churches and homes. At the time of the Hussite Revolution, the battle between the Catholics and Protestants, many people died and were thrown down into the mine holes. The Hussites even burned the Cistercian Monastery. After the war, Kutna Hora was a battered shell of its former self with flooded and caved-in mines. However, mining resumed but the mines had to be deeper and deeper and mining methods of the time were inadequate for the task. The last striking of the Groschen was in 1547 and was replaced with the tollar (from which we derived the name of our dollar). The mint at Kutna Hora was terminated and the mines fell into disuse. Silver mining in Germany and from America ended the market for Kutna Hora silver and the town is now small and of little importance.

Our tour was most interesting. We started at the Cistercian All Saints Cemetery church. A handful of earth was brought from the grave of Jesus in Jerusalem and scattered over the cemetery. Thus the cemetery became part of the Holy Land and burials were held here, not only of people from Bohemia but also from all over Europe. Masses of burials occurred after the Hussite Wars and also from the plague. About 40000 people are buried here.

Just like in the Cistercian Cemetery that I saw in Rome many years ago, the bones were collected, bleached with lime, and formed into designs. A huge pyramid of bones and skulls are in each corner, placed there by half blind monks. Decorative designs of bones line the rafters. There is even a chandelier of bones. On one wall is a coat of arms of the Schwarzenbergs of Orlik (who purchased the Sedlec Monastery property after the reforms of Josef 1). It is made from bones, even with a bird pecking at the eye of the man depicted. It is all a bit macabre, but there is something poignant in the mingling of the bones, where people lose all class distinctions.

We went from the Ossuary to St. Barbara Church. Built by the same architects who built St Vitus Cathedral, this late gothic church is smaller but very beautiful. Even the organ is decorated in gold. The old frescos in the church are unique. Since miners built the church, that made the frescos depict themselves as they went about the hard work of mining.

From there we walked across an artificial bridge (there is no river in Kutna Hora) that simulates the Charles Bridge in Prague on a smaller scale. Nearby we could see a "cat ladder", a sort of small ramp so the cat could come up and enter the kitchen window of a house. Alas we did not see the cat.

We passed the entrance to the mine and entered the old mint where we had a tour. They had exhibits of old coins and showed how the old coins were struck.

We were then given a half hour to poke around on our own, but since there were no shops to visit in the sleepy town, we settled for ice cream cones!

The tour dropped us at Wenceslas Square. After our free glass of champagne (part of our upgraded room award) we took our computers back to the Jama and had a lovely hour of catching up on the world. Walked home by a circuitous route through one of the arcades near the hotel. In one place we spied a sculpture of an upside down horse hanging from the ceiling. There is certainly some quirky art in this city.

<http://guide.travel.cz/127>

[http://www.slackertravel.com/fpe/pictures/Czech\\_Republic/Sedlec/sedlecthumbs.html](http://www.slackertravel.com/fpe/pictures/Czech_Republic/Sedlec/sedlecthumbs.html)

<http://someoldcoins.org/saur/d/d203.htm>

<http://www.geocities.com/historyofaustria/habsburgs.html>

<http://www.bartleby.com/65/hu/Hussites.html>

<http://www.worldheritagesite.org/sites/kutnahora.html>



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[http://www.myczechrepublic.com/prague/sightseeing/charles\\_bridge.html](http://www.myczechrepublic.com/prague/sightseeing/charles_bridge.html)

Saturday, August 13. My travel clock is getting old and I cannot change the setting. Thus it reads six hours earlier than the local time. I woke up when sunlight came streaming into the room and thought the clock read 1:20 or 7:20 in the morning. We had overslept! I woke Mary and we scurried around getting dressed and packed. For a time we could not find the vouchers for our tour, or even the time we were to be picked up. It was all very frantic. Then I looked again at the clock and saw it was reading 12:50. We had gotten up an hour early! I need to buy a new clock.

Mary was justifiably put out at me, so I went off to breakfast alone while she went back to bed. We checked out of the hotel and were picked up promptly at 9:30 for our tour to Karlstejn Castle. The Deilmann Cruise people booked this tour. The tour company was Martin Tours. It was such a change from the Gray Line Tours. Martin Tours seemed very disorganized. We were taken to a central meeting spot and told to leave the bus and go to a nearby van. Then they decided to take us back to the first bus and leave the van for the Italian group. People kept coming and finally our small bus was filled to the brim, including the arm seats that let down in the aisle. It takes about an hour to drive to the castle. Here again it seemed disorganized as our guide was taking care of both busloads. We found seats in a horse drawn carriage for the drive up to the castle.

Charles IV built this castle stronghold for his treasury. It was way back in the hills making it hard to find. You cannot even see it until you are almost upon it. It is a magnificent fortress with two tall towers. Although the castle was besieged on several occasions it was never captured.

I had been warned there was much climbing but fortunately the English speaking tour moved at a slow pace so I was able to keep up. We were shown a number of rooms: the audience chamber, Charles' bedroom and so forth. In one room we were treated to a string concert. Very little original furniture remains for the Hapsburgs carried it off to Austria. What little was left is in a Prague museum. However they had a few interesting pieces for us to see. The treasury was in the final room with a copy of Charles IV crown.

Then the tour had lunch at the Bohemia Restaurant, near the entrance to the castle. For a tour lunch it was pretty good. We started with the mushroom soup, very like the one we had in Hungary. It is called Houbova Polevka. Then I had a goulash, washed down with Pilsner beer. We were entertained during lunch by one of our fellow passengers, who is a contractor working in Iraq working on training security personnel. He had some interesting comments to make, about the war.

I walked a short way down the hill. Stopped at one place to have my picture taken with an owl on my arm. Then the guide came along in one of the carriages and I hopped in for a ride back to the parking lot. Mary walked the whole way down!

We were late getting back into Prague but were met by Martin from Peter Deilmann Cruises and taken to our home for the next week, the MV Katharina von Bora.

Katharina Von Bora was the wife of Martin Luther and the vessel was built in 2000, the 300<sup>th</sup> year of her birth. She is 272 feet long and carries 79 passengers in 41 cabins. She was built especially for travel on the Vltava and Elbe Rivers. She is the maximum width that can get through the locks and the maximum height that can get under the bridges. Even then, we have a retractable bridge that can be lowered for the lowest bridges. She is first class in every way, with every comfort you could expect on the nicest cruise boats. Our cabin is ample with a huge picture window. If we don't want to leave our cabin, our TV set projects what the ship is doing (At the moment we are going through a lock, but it is raining so we don't need to go on deck to see it). The light fixtures and mirrors are golden, which compliments the crown molding.

We were called to an orientation meeting and barely had time to get unpacked before going to the champagne reception to meet the Captain and crew in the lounge. About a third of the 70 passengers are English speaking, the rest German.

We are seated at a table of seven. Roz Schwartz and Judith Clements, are sisters from Southern California. Roz teaches a class on Industrial relations. Lincoln and Loris Quelto are from Sao Paula, Brazil. He is a lawyer, but he has also been an engineer and tour conductor. She is Lebanese and speaks Arabic, Portuguese and Spanish. Her English is limited but she smiles and tries to speak to us. Completing the table is Forest Owen. He is a recent widower on his first trip alone. He is so polite and stands up whenever we arrive or leave the table. He is also from

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Southern California but has lived all over the US. He had been a TV producer and radio announcer before completing his career in advertising.

After dinner, Mary and I changed back into casual clothes and walked down to the Charles Bridge. This bridge is lined with statues and is a romantic spot to bring your girl on a nice summer night. There were loads of young people. There were also a few beggars. One enterprising beggar had trained a white mouse to sit on his dog's head! He was getting lots of coins from people wanting to take his picture. We crossed the bridge trying to take pictures with our digital cameras. Very few of mine turned out. Then we tried to follow the riverbank back on the far side. This was harder than we thought for it was mostly a residential area. We did find the Frans Kafka museum with its strange fountain of two men shown urinating. Finally got back to the ship about 11:30. I was so tired I slept the night through!

My regret about Prague is that we never found the time to go to one of the many concerts being offered and didn't even get to a museum. This just gives me an excuse to come back some day!

<http://www.partshelf.com/oregon-scientific-travel-clocks.html>

<http://www.4windstravel.com/shows/czech/karlst.html>

<http://martintour.cz/>

<http://www.citytours.cz/>

<http://chi.lcms.org/katie/>

[http://www.pbases.com/phathh888/prague\\_czech\\_republic](http://www.pbases.com/phathh888/prague_czech_republic)

Sunday, August 14, 2005. Twenty or so passengers got off for a sightseeing tour of Prague. However the ship was the place to be as we majestically moved down the Moldau River (called the Vltava in Czech). From the sundeck we watched while we navigated several locks, watching people fishing and picnicking. People bicycled along the shore and there were wildflowers and birds. They served bouillon at 11:00, which reminded me of the old ocean liner days.

The tour group came back aboard in time for lunch as we entered the Elbe-Moldau canal, which is ten kilometers long. The weather has turned cool and rainy and after lunch I retired to the cabin where I slept much of the afternoon. I am over my cold but there is no point in going out in this weather.

Right after dinner we docked at Litomerice, 60 miles northwest of Prague. The rain has stopped and Jacqueline DeVoe, the excursion manager led us into the town and up the zigzag steps of the old town wall into the main square of the town. The wall dates from the time of Charles IV. The huge square is paved in cobblestones that date from the middle ages. A tall Baroque bell tower is an integral part of the wall. The Renaissance City hall is the oldest Renaissance building in the Czech Republic. There is an old well with a wheel to pull up the bucket. Jacqueline tells us that the square is huge because merchants came for many days at a time to see their wares. Underneath is a network of tunnels where they could store their goods. The old hotel has raised bas-relief figures on its walls. It was fairly dark and I was breathless from the fast pace of Jacqueline's tour so we returned to the Katharina in time to enjoy an 8-piece brass band in the lounge playing Dixie land. It made me think of John who would have loved it.

<http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/E/EL/ELBE.htm>

<http://www.kulturklub.cz/Litomerice-e.htm>

Monday, August 15. Woke to rain and chilly weather. Even though they had an awning on the sundeck, it was still pretty miserable. I retired to the lounge with my book. Through the mist I could see the craggy mountainsides called little Switzerland. It is too bad that the most scenic part of the river has to be seen in rain with fog filling the valleys and hiding the peaks. Richard Wagner is said to have been inspired to write Lohengrin after seeing these mountains.

At 11:00 we had a German feast of bratwurst, pretzels and beer all accompanied by German music. I was so full I did not go down to lunch!

We crossed the Czech-German border and tied up at Bad Schandau. This is a spa town but I could not find anything in English about it on the web. We are now in what is called Saxon Switzerland.

Our tour was to nearby Konigstein, a magnificent fortress built on top of one of the table mountains (mesas). Frederick Augustus II of Saxony completed the fortress in its present form although it has existed as a fortress since before 1241. On top of the mountain there was room to

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grow crops, a very deep well and cisterns for water. Below the fort there were underground casements to hold smoked meats and so forth. Thus it could easily withstand a siege. Only one person ever breached the place and he was a chimney sweep. About 150 years ago he managed to climb up the steep cliff face. He thought it would make him famous but he was arrested!

Our approach was with a huge elevator able to hold 50 people that had been cut through the sandstone. The elevator was also capable of carrying a car. The road leading up to the fortress is very narrow and has sharp turns. The people who live on top have to take their car down with them in the elevator. A new glass sided elevator is being built that will go up the outside of the sharp rock.

There was once a small town on top of the mountain, now only the maintenance workers live there for it is now a national park. A bakery, butcher and brewery were all there when there were soldiers stationed at the fort. Today a small restaurant and a souvenir shop are all that we found.

Our guide led us around the belvedere where we could admire the spectacular views of the Elbe and the other table mountains in the area. He entertained us with stories about the fort. At one place they had built a "pest" house, a casement down into the rock where people who got the plague could be placed. 300 years ago the plague killed many people and this pesthole was planned for future epidemics. Fortunately the "pest" hole has never been used. During the second World War, many of the treasures from Dresden were stored here to keep them safe.

There were some 300 year-old cannons and statues of prominent people. We stopped and had some ice cream and then it was time to return to the bus. We never got a chance to peek into the church.

After dinner there was a concert of semi-classical and classical music in the lounge. Our own Jacqueline was the flautist in the show. A talented and funny opera singer entertained us as well.

<http://www.germany-tourism.de/e/6372.html>

<http://germany.archiseek.com/saxony/dresden/frauenkirche.htm>

<http://members.cox.net/rjjacob/konigstein.html>

Tuesday, August 16, 2005. We arrived at Dresden, the capitol of Saxony. During the Second World War the city was heavily bombed, although the only reason we were given is that it was the fourth largest city in Germany. Most of the beautiful buildings were gutted. Fortunately the East German government maintained the ruins so that now a restoration is going on. Most of the facades have been repaired. Some of the buildings have been reconstructed; others are under way.

We were driven through the new town which was not badly damaged during the war and were shown the golden horseman which depicts Augustus the Great, who ruled Saxony and Poland. We passed through a residential area and then we crossed the river into the old city.

My first impression was that there were golden finials on every building. Bright glittering tops decorated every baroque tower in sight from the palace to the Frauenkirche. I couldn't help but wonder that someone would put a golden finial on the many cranes doing the reconstruction. Our guide discussed the reconstruction. They have restored the exterior of the opera House but have added three modern wings in back and made it a better building than before. The palace is a problem because there is a dispute over what parts of the building should be restored. They are trying to preserve the best part of each age, some Renaissance and some Baroque. The purists complain it will not look the same as it did before the War. The palace church has been restored and is now non-denominational with Catholics and Protestants all welcome. Since only the royalty had used it, there was no parish to dictate otherwise. Some buildings have been converted to new uses. One baroque building that had once housed the royal children has been converted into a five-star modern hotel.

Our walking tour started at the famous Zwinger Square, which was built by Augustus the great. It is a magnificent square, dominated by the baroque Zwinger, celebrated as Germany's best baroque building. It now houses the art gallery. To one side of the square is the magnificent crown gate. The buildings now house various museums.

We then walked past the palace. On one wall the 800-year genealogy of the House of Wettin is depicted with 35 margraves, dukes, princes and kings all shown on Meissen tiles. This painting



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by Wilhelm Walter was created in 1870-76 and transferred to tiles in 1905 when the original work began to weather badly.

In back of the palace we found unrestored parts being worked on. However the overall impression is that Dresden has risen from the ashes and is as beautiful as ever. Back on the bus we were driven through the better residential areas on our way back to the boat.

After lunch we again went on tour. This time to the hunting lodge of Moritzburg. About a half hour drive from Dresden, the lodge sits on an island in a lake. We walked a long causeway to get to the palace.

One of the first rooms we came to was the "feather room". The wall hangings and bed coverings are all made from feathers. The effect was quite lovely although Mary, with her allergy to feathers was not too pleased.

There is an astonishing collection of antlers displayed on the leather-wallpapered rooms. The leather wallpaper has not held up all that well in 300 years but enough is still extant to see the designs that had been painted on it. The royal family retreated to the lodge after the First World War and so a lot of the palace furniture is to be found here. Wonderful wooden secretaries, Japanese porcelain, a banquet table set with the red dragon Meissen pattern that was created for the Saxon kings (Mother used to have a set of it), and portraits of members of the family, even a mistress or two.

Some paintings showed the method of hunting. After they found stalking was not too successful, they walled a field with canvas and game was brought into the enclosure and released for the hunters to kill. It seemed very cruel. However, they probably ate the meat and the leather wallpaper came from the hides.

One room called the "monster" room was filled with deformed antlers. Sometimes young deer were hurt and grew up with deformities. There were also moose antlers, which had to have been brought from other places. The largest set of horns was from a prehistoric animal that had been presented to the king.

After we left the lodge we were driven to another part of the park to the Little Pheasant Lodge a small lodge that was much easier to heat. This was used by one of the last members of the royal family. It too was on a lake. A lighthouse was built on the lakeshore so that people could go up and watch the mock sea battles.

On the way back into Dresden we stopped at a Molkerel Pfund, a very old dairy store that has been listed in the Guinness Book of records. Mary tried the milk but found it was buttermilk and could not drink it. There were many cheeses for sale as well as postcards and various souvenir items.

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWdresden.htm>

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/dres/dreschro.html>

<http://www.friendsofdresden.org/>

<http://www.galenfrysinger.com/dresden.htm>

[http://city-herberge.de/english/dresden\\_info/goldener\\_reiter.php](http://city-herberge.de/english/dresden_info/goldener_reiter.php)

[http://www.milton-ave.u-net.com/Dresden%20\(DE\).htm](http://www.milton-ave.u-net.com/Dresden%20(DE).htm)

<http://www.aviewoncities.com/gallery/showpicture.htm?key=kvege0187&dir=arches&tpe=cat>

<http://archives.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/europe/08/16/europe.floods/>

<http://germany.archiseek.com/saxony/dresden/frauenkirche.htm>

[http://www.dresden.de/eng/04/002/01/01/c\\_06.html?part=c&background=bq\\_inhalt\\_dwt\\_00.gif&dwt=1](http://www.dresden.de/eng/04/002/01/01/c_06.html?part=c&background=bq_inhalt_dwt_00.gif&dwt=1)

<http://www.globosapiens.net/travel-information/Moritzburg-1237.html>

<http://www.archinform.net/projekte/4260.htm?ID=Xe0q5h0rd8brquD2>

[http://www.europanostr.org/lang\\_en/awards\\_2003/ge\\_featherroom.html](http://www.europanostr.org/lang_en/awards_2003/ge_featherroom.html)

[http://travel.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-2778310-action-imgsearch-pfund\\_s\\_molkerei\\_dresden-i;\\_ylt=Anq02ExxSUvMXAzsvrhvDhGyFWoL](http://travel.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-2778310-action-imgsearch-pfund_s_molkerei_dresden-i;_ylt=Anq02ExxSUvMXAzsvrhvDhGyFWoL)

Wednesday, August 17. Gerold Jahn, our wonderful guide in Konigstein is the English guide today (yesterday in Dresden he escorted the Germans). He is so knowledgeable and enthusiastic. We walked into town along the wall. We entered the town through a break where there had once been a lagoon for gondolas. Here Gerold pointed out the small door to the secret laboratory where alchemists found the secret of porcelain 300 years ago. They were trying to

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create gold but created white gold instead. Then we climbed up on the wall itself, the balcony of Dresden, with its glorious views of the Elbe. Passing the Wettin dynasty wall we turned into the small court on its other side. This used to be a place where jousting contests were held. We went past the modern synagogue, where the interior is laid out like a tent in the desert, and then we came to the entrance to the Green Vault.

This was the stronghold of the Saxon Kings where they kept their treasures. The original Green Vault was too small for large groups so this new one has been created. Gerold's enthusiasm is contagious as he shows us the treasures. First we viewed a mechanical clock 300 years old. The mechanism discharged a ball, which rolled down the circular ramp on its side. There were musicians who could play their instruments. Words cannot describe this wonderful object. We then were shown rock crystal flagons and pitchers. There was an ivory galleon. The pride of the whole exhibit was a diorama. There must have been more than a thousand figures in enamel of people coming to celebrate the birthday of an Indian sultan. There was a miniature scale where the sultan would be balanced against gold coins, which were to be given to the common people. It was unlike any treasury I have ever seen. While there was some jewelry it was not particularly memorable except for the large green diamond!

Gerold found a cab for us who took us to photograph the Golden Horseman (Augustus the strong) and then returned to the boat.

We sailed for Meissen and passed our sister ship the M/V Dresden on the way. There were toots from the whistle and much waving.

Meissen is different from Dresden since it is still much like a medieval town. In Dresden the medieval has given way to Gothic and, of course, due to the destruction during the war, is still evolving. Meissen was not damaged in the war.

We went first to the Meissen factory and were shown how the porcelain is made and then hand painted and fired. Then there was a museum of Meissen porcelain, but we hurried through to have time in the shop. The prices were extraordinary but we found among the "seconds" a great plate for Mary's salade nicoisse. We also found a beautiful lead crystal vase. The artist is Marlies Sandig and the vase is beautifully decorated with flowers. We paid to have it shipped since we would hate it if we had to carry it halfway around the world.

Then the bus took us to the top point of Meissen where Jerold showed us an old monastery. He pointed out the cathedral whose towers weren't added until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Near it was the palace, which was never occupied. However, it was where the first porcelain was made. The manufacture of porcelain had been brought here from Dresden in order to keep its secrets hidden. We walked down over a hundred steps to a shopping street and the main square, where after a short time to shop, we were walked back to the ship which does not lie too far away.

The entertainment tonight was a wine tasting of Meissen's wines. The English-speaking people were unanimous that they wanted their tasting before dinner. The Germans wanted their tasting after dinner. So we had our tasting before dinner and ate late. These are the most expensive wines in Germany because little is made and none is shipped out to other parts. I bought a bottle of Spatlese for 13 euros.

[http://www.antique-china-porcelain-collectibles.com/meissen\\_history.htm](http://www.antique-china-porcelain-collectibles.com/meissen_history.htm)

[http://www.collectics.com/education\\_meissen.html](http://www.collectics.com/education_meissen.html)

<http://www.meissen.de/engl/schau.htm>

<http://www.friendsofdresden.org/SYN-comp.htm>

<http://famousdiamonds.tripod.com/dresdengreendiamond.html>

[http://www.germany-tourism.co.uk/pages/museums\\_1944.htm](http://www.germany-tourism.co.uk/pages/museums_1944.htm)

<http://www.gloryofdresden.com/modularbuilds/tour12.html>

<http://www.frommers.com/destinations/meissen/0819010031.html>

<http://www.edenwines.co.uk/Sachsen.htm>

Thursday, August 18. We had a lazy morning doing nothing on the way to Wittenberg. This is the birthplace of Martin Luther's reformation. Our young guide, Silvio, is doing his thesis on Martin Luther so he was most knowledgeable.

The city received its city charter in 1293. It became a boomtown in the time of Friedrich III. After 1492, the castle church was rebuilt and there was extensive construction in the city with the

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founding of Wittenberg University in 1502. The University was one of the first in Germany and very prestigious. During the 7 year war (1760) the city was badly damaged. It remained a fortified stronghold of the Saxon Kings but in 1817 the University was merged with the University of Halle, and now is but a branch of the latter. The city was not much damaged by World War II but the East German government did little to maintain the buildings. After reunification, property reverted to private hand and in the 11 years since most of the buildings have been painted and restored. Pictures show a gray city before reunification, now it sparkles with color and shops.

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben in 1483, the second son of a miner, Hans Luder. He started studying law but during a severe thunderstorm he prayed that if he were saved, he would become a monk. He was ordained in 1507 in Erfurt Cathedral. He was called to join the Monastery of the hermit Augustinian monk in Wittenberg in 1511, receiving his doctorate in theology in 1512. He accepted a professorship at Wittenberg University. He began questioning the doctrines of the Catholic Church, feeling that man should communicate directly with God, not separately through elaborate church intervention. He wrote 95 theses criticizing the practice of indulgences, where people bought indulgences to relieve themselves of sin. These theses were printed in 1517, being nailed to the door of the church. In 1524 he cast off his monk's habit and on June 13, 1525 married Katharina von Bora, a former nun. They had a happy marriage that presented them with six children. She was his partner in many ways, sitting in on the discussions and inheriting his property, although despite her husband's wishes, this was placed in a trust for her. He died in 1546, and is buried in the Castle Church in Wittenberg.

We started at the castle church. It was built 500 years ago during the reign of Frederic the Wise. In 1760 the church went up in flames. It was rebuilt on the same foundation so the present church is not the church that Luther preached in. It is, however a very interesting building. The original wooden door where Luther's theses were posted is of course no longer extant, replaced by an imposing iron door with the words of Luther engraved upon it. The top of the tower resembles a Prussian military helmet. Luther's grave is here as well as the grave of Philip Melancthon, his friend and a Greek professor at the University.

St Mary's Municipal Church is the oldest structure in town. Around 1280 a small chapel dedicated to St. Mary replaced the original wooden church and the present three nave gothic church was built around it. Here we found the beautiful altarpiece of Lucas Cranach. Surrounding the nave were statues and coats of arms of the important personages of the town, including Martin Luther.

Our walk continued to the Luther house that is actually the original monastery in which Luther lived. Here he lived with his family and students. The most interesting room is Luther's study, with a large tiled stove in one corner and the table around which the discussions were held. There was even a chair for Katharina von Bora who attended the sessions although she is not known to have ever spoken.

The whole building is a museum showing some of the original Bibles for part of the Reformation was to translate the Bible to German for the people instead of the original Latin. Luther translated the New Testament in just a few weeks, the Old testament, which was translated from Greek took him a little longer.

I enjoyed seeing the pulpit from which he preached, a simple pulpit with somewhat primitive paintings on it. He knelt in the pulpit while the congregation stood.

Mary and I enjoyed a coke and Mary had some Luther beer before going back to the ship.

After dinner there was a performance in the lounge put on by the ship personnel but the whole place stank of cigar smoke so I did not stay to see it. It is the only time we have been bothered by smoke on the trip.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wittenberg>

<http://www.educ.msu.edu/homepages/laurence/reformation/Luther/Luther.htm>

[http://www.uni-halle.de/MLU/universitaet/darstellung\\_e.htm](http://www.uni-halle.de/MLU/universitaet/darstellung_e.htm)

<http://www.augustana.edu/religion/lutherproject/TemporalAuthority/frederickwise.htm>

<http://www.reformationtours.com/site/490868/page/180550>

<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/cranach/>

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10151a.htm>

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Friday, August 19. Our last day! We woke early to be ready for the tour of Magdeburg, which started at 8:00.

Magdeburg was first mentioned in the year 803 and in 968 became the seat of an archbishop. During the Reformation, Magdeburg became protestant. In 1631 this proud Hanseatic city was destroyed during the seven years war. Otto von Guericke was the city's mayor and represented the town during the peace conference. He helped in the rebuilding of the town, bringing a porphyry fountain to be used as a baptismal font and also some porphyry columns that were salvaged from the original Cathedral. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the town became a Prussian fortress town and lost its independence. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial development came to Magdeburg with shipbuilding and machinery construction. Thus it is no surprise that during World War II it was destroyed again.

We toured the large park and recreational facilities of the town. Then we toured the Cathedral that is the third largest gothic church in Germany (depending on how you measure size). It is dedicated to a Nubian Saint Mauritius and also to Saint Katharine. The door handle of the church is shaped like a bird feeding its young. The baptismal font is near the door to the church so that the baby can be cleansed of sin before entering the church. It is made of red porphyry from Egypt, 2000 years old, and a tale is told that it was carried over the Alps by horses. Its stained glass windows are long gone so the church is full of light allowing us to admire the lovely alabaster pulpit and the many carvings. It would cost 200,000 euro to replace each window with stained glass. The interior stones have been sand blasted which allows you to see the details. Sandstone in Saxony is usually left in its blackened state since the stone is too fragile to be blasted. One small chapel is in the nave with two figures inside depicting Otto and his wife, Edith. Otto's tomb is behind the rood screen covered with a simple slab. Edith also has a tomb here but it is empty. A statue of St Paul supports the pulpit. Adam and Eve are also shown on it. The hands of people who have prayed here wishing to have a child polish Eve's statue. The huge marble altar dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. An indulgence chest is shown. This was where people could donate money to purge their sins. Luther did away with the indulgences since he saw that the money only went to Rome. The Paradise Chapel shows the six wise and six foolish virgins on the way to Paradise. The happy figures have retained their oil; the foolish virgins have wasted theirs and look sad. In this alcove, bodies once rested before the funeral. The church has commissioned a huge organ to replace the small one presently there. It will be finished by 2009 and will have 60,000 pipes. Schuke Company is making it.

Silvio, our guide, told us how the church encourages all to come. There was even a service attended by Harley Davidson and some motorcyclists. Dogs and other pets have been brought into the sanctuary. Anything is accepted to attract people. In Germany, people who belong to the church are taxed a percentage of their income tax to support the church. As a result only 16% confess to being Lutheran and 4% say they are Catholic.

One unusual altar is made of wood and dedicated to people who have lost their lives in war. It was hidden during World War II and the East Germans were very dubious when it was restored to its original place. Here people burn candles to these war heroes.

There is also a miracle Virgin Mary where people burn candles and ask for miracles.

After the church tour we were taken to the market square. Otto as a golden horseman presides over the square. There were the usual stalls of flowers and food. At the other end of the square was a statue of a 14<sup>th</sup> century wag who told the people he would slide down a rope from the church tower. When the people came to witness the trick, he fooled them all by turning and mooning his audience. The small statue shows this act.

Back on the boat, we had lunch and then retired to our cabin to pack. One interruption was to see a place where the Elbe-Havel canal actually passes over the river on a bridge. We entered the canal and passed through some very tight locks. For much of the afternoon the sundeck is closed for the bridges we pass under are very low.

Our farewell dinner was made special by a special presentation of the main course as well as the traditional baked Alaska. We said farewell to our tablemates. It has been a delight to travel with them.

<http://www.magdeburg.de/english/>

<http://www2.hsu-hh.de/PWEB/hisfrn/hanse.html>

[http://www.schuke.com/english/index\\_english.html](http://www.schuke.com/english/index_english.html)

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<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/6914/ottoe.htm>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magdeburg>

<http://www.wna-magdeburg.de/eright03.html>

<http://www.foodreference.com/html/artbakedalaska.html>

Saturday, August 20, 2005. I arrived with a cold. I am leaving with a cold. Mary has been fighting it for several days so it was inevitable I would get it as well.

Our transfer to Berlin Tegel airport was by Mercedes Limousine with a very nice female driver. Tegel is a delight. We drove right up to the gate and parked. It was just a few steps to check-in. The flight home was uneventful. I managed to look at a movie for a change, "Madagascar" which is very entertaining.

Mary and I parted on the plane. I was met by a wheelchair and never could have made it on my own for customs was in one building, my flight in another.

I enjoyed the cruise but found it too much like an elegant cruise boat. The food was overwhelming. Between midmorning bouillon and afternoon tea, it was possible to eat non-stop. Every meal offered six or seven courses. I found myself eating less and less as the cruise continued. I longed for a simple sandwich instead of some beautifully presented morsel.

On the expedition ships there is usually a presentation of what you are to see before you see it. On the Katharina we only had a brief description of the tour. I also wish our tours had had more leisure time in which to look around on our own. Even shopping for postcards or a book was always very rushed.

[http://www.airwise.com/airports/europe/TXL/TXL\\_07.html](http://www.airwise.com/airports/europe/TXL/TXL_07.html)

<http://www.madagascar-themovie.com/>

Francis Bacon said, "Returning home, the traveler shall not change his old habits due to experiences abroad. Rather, he should implement the best he has seen into his own world".