

2010 UKRAINE

Tuesday, August 3, 2010. This is a special trip for not only are Mary and Tom going on it but also my dear friend Elizabeth Cerulli. I booked the trip a year ago when the travel industry was really hurting and they offered me great discounts. I did not feel I been to the Ukraine, despite having spent one day in Kiev long ago. Ev and I were in Romania and they offered a one-day excursion to Kiev. Little did we know that most of our time would be spent getting out of communist Romania and into the then communist USSR and having to repeat the process going back! There was only time for a brief bus tour of the city and the inevitable tourist lunch. I remember we had Borscht¹ and Chicken Kiev². So I consider this trip a first!

The limo picked us up at 9:30 and we managed to check our bags at the curb. I elected to forego the wheelchair since there were a lot of people waiting ahead of me. We went through customs like ordinary people. Unfortunately we picked the line adjacent to the handicaps and they seemed to have priority so it was rather a long hassle getting through.

The flight to New York was one of the overseas planes and though the TV didn't work and they had some issues with the lighting system, it was pleasant enough. They served a good lunch of a turkey sandwich and salad.

When we arrived at JFK³ a wheelchair took me up the ramp only to discover that this was the same gate and plane from which we were to embark. I felt like such an idiot taking such a short ride. Elizabeth and I went in search of the lounge and there they allowed me to bring Elizabeth in even though she is traveling on a coach ticket. We found Mary and Tom and spent an hour or so until it was time for the plane to Prague.

Once aboard I told the steward I hoped they had fixed the TV for this was the same plane I had taken from Atlanta. He assured me it was not. "This plane just came in from Europe", he said. I bet him a dollar he was wrong. He checked and I am one dollar richer. They had fixed the lights but not the TV.

I got through dinner as fast as I could and put on my eyeshade and went to sleep.

Wednesday, August 4. I slept so soundly that I didn't even get any breakfast for we were in the landing pattern when I woke. My seatmate was a young man who dropped out of college after a year and joined the Junior Hockey League⁴. He is now too old and will go back to college. He is visiting a Czech friend that he met playing hockey.

I got off the plane and into the wheelchair and was whisked up the ramp before I remembered I had left my cane. It was quite a hassle trying to get it back as we were not allowed to go back to the plane. Finally the wheelchair pusher got frisked and went back for me. One of the stewards also helped and my precious cane was retrieved.

We were taken to concourse A and I dismissed the chair so we could go into a restaurant for something to eat. Had an orange juice and chocolate muffin, which improved my perspective on life. Then we had a rather long wait for our 11:45 plane to Odessa. They would not let us through security until the last minute.

As I struggled down the steps to the waiting bus with my carry-on, a strange man took pity on me and said he would carry it onto the plane. I must really look helpless (or should that be hopeless). Czech air from Prague to Odessa took about 2 hours and they served a pleasant lunch.

We landed at Odessa⁵ and got through immigration before a wait for the bags. The airport looks like something out of the fifties. I don't even think the taxi way was paved. There were no trolleys. Finally the bags came piled high on one wagon. It is hard to believe that this is the largest city in the Ukraine and has such a minimal air terminal. It is a major seaport on the Black Sea with a population of over a million people.

Viking River Cruises⁶ were waiting outside of customs and we had a bus for the half hour ride to the port, where the M/V Mikhail Lomonosov was waiting.

Mikhail Lomonosov⁷ (1711-1765) was a poet and man of science. His eagerness for knowledge

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borscht>

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicken_Kiev

³ <http://www.panynj.gov/airports/jfk.html>

⁴ <http://www.usajuniorhockey.com/jrleagues.asp>

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odessa>

⁶ <http://www.vikingrivers.com/>

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Lomonosov

was unbounded. He became a professor of chemistry in the University of St. Petersburg. He ultimately became the rector and in 1764 was secretary of State. He is considered the father of Russian poetry.

The ship is an old one, 125 meters long. She has five decks and 112 cabins that can carry 202 people and a crew of 100. She has been recently reconditioned.

As we boarded we were greeted not only by the captain but also a girl in native costume holding the traditional welcome bread loaf. It was delicious warm fresh baked bread.

And then the trouble started. I had booked our "suite" a year ago when the prices were so low they couldn't be ignored. No one was traveling because of the recession and my mailbox was full of attractive offers. On the top deck it promised to be one of the best rooms on the ship. But it only had one double bed! Elizabeth and I are dubious about sharing a bed for we each have to get up often during the night and will disturb the other. The ship is full so there are no extra rooms. They told us they would bring a couch to our room that makes into a bed but that never happened. I suspect our "suite" was once two rooms for it has a strange configuration. The bathroom juts out into the middle of the room with an entrance hall on one side and on the other a sort of dressing room. In the main section are our bed and a loveseat and coffee table. Two large windows look out onto the promenade deck. It is not large and I wonder about the lesser categories. I heard from someone that they could not even get their suitcases under the bed because that is where the life vests are stowed. Ours are in our large cupboard.

Then an even worse disaster was that I discovered I had forgotten to pack my medications. How I managed to do this is beyond explanation. Many of my meds are essential to keep my heart beating correctly and to control the arthritis pain. I may have to go home! However, first I decided to go see the ship's Dr. Olga. She spoke no English but Luda, the receptionist was the interpreter that allowed us to consult. She told me that some of my meds were not available in the Ukraine but that she could write me prescriptions for the ones that did. She was also going to go on the web and find out what might be substitutes for the ones that weren't available. Its not the best solution but it seems better than going home after coming so far. If this doesn't work, we'll cross that bridge later. I have had a wonderful life, so if something happens to me, it happens. Better it happen while I am enjoying myself that staying home waiting for the grim reaper.

Because of my doctor visit I missed some of the orientation talk. It was then time to go the sundeck for the welcome champagne party. We found a cool spot with a breeze under the shade roof (the temperature is in the 90s). The program director introduced the Captain and his crew and we all toasted them. Then we were introduced to housekeeping staff and again toasted. "Na zdarovye", "cheers" in Ukrainian. Lastly we were introduced to some of the English-speaking guides (some are still meeting people at the airport.)

We have our own dining room on this deck although both dining rooms serve the same food. It is open seating. We sat at a table for six with a window and shared the table with a British couple named Beryl and Roy. They have been married over 60 years.

Then it was finally time to go to bed. It has been a long day.

Thursday, August 5. Odessa. Elizabeth woke me up at 8:30 and it was a scramble to get ready for the city tour at 9:30. I got all the way to the bus and then had to go back for my forgotten cane.

We are in bus 2 and our guide is Maria, which we are told is short for Marsha. She is a Russian Ukrainian and her English is very good. Odessa is an old city dating back to before the Vikings when Scythian people settled in ancient caves. The Vikings came in the 8th Century. Its name is the feminine of Odysseus and means traveler. About a million people live here in the "Pearl of the Black Sea."

She pointed out the various buildings and streets, until our first stop at the top of the Potemkin steps⁸. Grigory Potemkin⁹ (1739-1791) was a Second Lieutenant in the Chevalier Guards when he caught the eye of Catherine the Great. They became lovers and he became the most powerful man in Russia. In 1776 Emperor Joseph 11 gave him the rank of prince of the Holy Royal Empire. He became the ruler of Russia's southern provinces. He founded new cities and created the

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potemkin_Stairs

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grigory_Potyomkin

Black Sea Fleet. In 1783 he carried out the project of annexing Crimea to Russia. There are 200 Potemkin steps that lead from the port up to the town, but only 192 can be seen for the first eight were covered up by the construction of the modern road. They are the symbol of Odessa. From the bottom you can see that they are an optical illusion where the steps look equal but in actuality they are pyramidal in design with the lower ones much bigger and taller than the upper ones. There is a funicular if you do not want to walk. If it ever cools off we may come back to see the steps from the bottom.

A statue of the French Count Emmanuel Richelieu¹⁰ stands near the top. He fled to Odessa from the French Revolution. He became the first governor of Odessa and worked for twelve years developing the town. He constructed port facilities and encouraged agriculture and commerce. After Napoleon was exiled he returned to France and served twice as Prime Minister. Along the base of his statue are gods representing trade and wealth. The wealth symbol has been rubbed till it shines for people hope rubbing it will bring them wealth!

Primorsky Boulevard, a long allée of chestnut and locust trees made a park and along the way we saw an excavation where they were displaying ancient amphora and other ancient objects found on the site. It was a pleasantly cool walk to the City Hall, in front of which was a statue of the poet Alexander Pushkin¹¹, (1799-1837) banned by Czar Nicolas 1 because of his political poems and views.

Then it was a very hot walk of about two blocks up to where we could see the magnificent opera house¹². The neo-baroque building was opened in 1887 replacing an earlier one that was destroyed by fire. It has perfect acoustics.

Nearby was a statue of Catherine the Great¹³. The statue was removed during the communist years but has been restored to its original position.

Nearby was a bank and we all dutifully exchanged dollars to hryvnya. I believe the rate is about 9 to one. I had some trouble with the ATM machine. It only worked when I said I was using a credit card but I was using a debit card. The heat had really gotten to me and I went back to the bus while the others walked around to get more pictures.

Our last stop was at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier¹⁴, a tall obelisk in Shevshenko Park. Taras Shevshenko¹⁵ (1814-1861) was a Ukrainian poet, artist and humanist. He is thought to be the father of modern Ukrainian literature.

From May to September the various schools in the city provide girl Honor Guards for the Unknown Soldier Monument that change every 15 minutes. They marched around almost knocking down the tourists that got in their way. One feature of their costume was large pompoms in their hair. Walking toward the monument we saw the graves of the martyrs along the path and the monument base was adorned with many fresh flowers. Then at noon, blaring from loudspeakers was Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's "Requiem". It was very moving.

At lunch there was a salad bar and wonderful Monte Cristo sandwiches (cheese and ham between slices of French toast!). I thought that was lunch but then we were offered soup and a main course, which we all declined. I did manage to squeeze in some ice cream with berries for desert.

Some of our neighbors, Dorothy and Larry Lindberg, were curious about our room. She was impressed by its size. Their bedroom was one square room with bed and sitting area but they could not put anything under the bed. I am glad I booked the most expensive category!

We napped for about 2 hours. The heat takes so much out of you. We have free WIFI but I had been having trouble getting on line. I believe it is our stateroom for when I took my computer to the bar I had success. I asked Susan to either air ship my meds to me or get Dr. Thatcher to email me prescriptions and hope the local pharmacy would accept them. I was sitting in the bar keeping Elizabeth company while she had her pre-dinner drink, when the pretty receptionist name

¹⁰ http://www.dating-world.net/guide/ukr/what_to_see_in_odessa.htm

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Pushkin

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odessa_Opera_and_Ballet_Theater

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_II_of_Russia

¹⁴ <http://www.travelsignposts.com/wordpress/ukraine-river-cruise/odessa-ukraine/tomb-of-the-unknown-sailor-shevchenko-park-odessa-ukraine>

¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taras_Shevchenko

Luda came and found me. She had tears in her eyes because she was worried about me. She offered to go with me to a pharmacy and see if I could get them without a prescription. She changed out of her uniform, called a taxi and off we went. We couldn't get all of them but we did get the four most important ones. I am so relieved. I didn't want to die of a heart attack over here. I got back to the ship in time to catch the end of dinner and then we went on deck to watch our sail away at 9:30. Odessa sparkled with lights.

Friday, August 6. We woke to find ourselves cruising the Black Sea. There is a heat haze and we can't see the shore. At breakfast we met a lady named Tina from Rochester, NY. She is a first-time new grandmother.

We then reached the Crimea¹⁶, a peninsula jutting out into the Black Sea and docked at Sevastopol¹⁷. This was the Russian Black Sea Naval Base and until recently not open to visitors. The Russian and Ukrainian navies now share the port facilities.

Our tour did not start well for the road was blocked by an accident. Yuri, our driver, finally backed about a quarter-mile until he could find a place to turn around. I am impressed how well he handled the bus.

Our tour took us out into the country to the Sapoune Ridge, a horseshoe ridge of soapstone. This ridge commands a view over the battlefield made famous by the ill-fated Charge of the Light Brigade¹⁸ on October 25, 1854. 600 men rode into the Valley of Death in the battle of Balaclava in the Crimean War. They had been sent the wrong way into the hands of the enemy. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, commemorated them in a famous poem. The Crimean War was the result of the Tsar trying to expand his empire to the Dardanelles. He wanted access to the Mediterranean. Also Istanbul was the seat of the Orthodox religion¹⁹. Several other countries joined Turkey in its effort to repel the Russians so the Crimean War is sometimes referred to as World War 0! While the Russians were defeated this time, they were successful in another battle 20 years later

On top of the ridge is the obelisk and sacred flame commemorating the fighters in the Second World War who defended Sevastopol²⁰. The siege of Sevastopol took place from 30 October 1941 to 4 July 1942, between the German forces and the Red Army and the Black Sea Fleet. Battles were fought in the valley near the Sapoune Ridge and the Germans occupied the city for two years. There is also a memorial chapel and a museum of war vehicles and armaments.

One of the local customs is for brides and grooms to tour various nearby famous sites to be photographed and a bridal party was posing against the retaining wall. Most of the brides we saw wore white but there was one that had chosen a crimson gown!

It was very hot and I was happy to get back on the bus.

We drove further into the countryside and at Chufut-Kelah saw caves where there once was the Uspensky Monastery²¹ that was founded in the 15th century. Part of the hill had been destroyed by road construction and we could see into the cave rooms that had once been the church.

Our destination was a Khan's Hansaray²² in Bakhchisaray, the capitol of the Crimea under the Ottoman rule. The palace is much restored but Maria our guide pointed out the small mosque and the audience chamber where people sat on rugs on the surrounding benches. Originally there were fountains in each room providing a sort of air-conditioning. Today they can only be imagined. There was one beautiful fountain called the fountain of tears. The water dripped like tears from one level to another. It is supposed to have been commissioned to mourn a lost concubine. Originally there were four houses for the four wives and a fifth for the Khan's mother. Only one house survives. It was not clear where the 380 concubines had their rooms.

Then there was time for souvenir shopping before the hour-long ride back to the ship.

We got back to the ship at 7:15 and had only 15 minutes to clean up before dinner. There was no way I could go to dinner so sweaty and dirty. I took my time and showered and washed my hair. I

¹⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimea>

¹⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sevastopol>

¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charge_of_the_Light_Brigade

¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox_Church

²⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Sevastopol_%281941-1942%29

²¹ <http://www.blacksea-crimea.com/Places/uspensky.html>

²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bakhchisaray_Palace

still got to dinner when they were just starting the second course. Peter and Carol Ann Crowe joined us. Peter once owned one of the last independent newspapers in the US and still maintains a website that is enjoyed in over 50 countries. If he gives me the address I will check it out. We discussed the problems in the newspaper business today.

After dinner I was finally able to get on line (it does not work at sea). There was much to attend to. Susan even went to my house and got my meds but FedEx will not ship drugs abroad. Dr Thrasher does not think sending me the prescriptions will do any good. So I will make do with what I have and hope for the best.

Saturday, August 7. We had our city tour of Sevastopol. I have apparently pronounced the name wrong, for it is Sev-as-to-pol with the accent on the last syllable.

Because of its strategic location and several harbors. It is easy to see why Sevastopol was picked as the site for Russia's Navy. Today the Ukrainian and Russian Navy share the base. We could see dry-docks where ships were under repair and even a submarine. We drove up onto the base to where the officers lived.

A magnificent statue of Vladimir Lenin²³ commanded the spot. His huge statue stood with his finger pointing the way. Around the base were smaller sculptures of the various classes that he unified into one. Lenin was the Marxist revolutionary who led the October Revolution of 1917. He headed the Soviet state from 1917-1924 and forged the socialist economic system.

Nearby was the St. Vladimir Cathedral²⁴, much damaged in the war but now repaired. We entered to find a funeral in progress. An officer was in the coffin and people were receiving the sacrament and bringing flowers to place in the open casket. It was certainly an unusual sight for a tourist!

I did not get out of the bus at the last stop for again the heat is overwhelming. We parked near a statue of Admiral Nakimov. The Ukrainians have statues everywhere. The tour walked along the shore promenade and could see people swimming.

As we drew up to the ship I decided to buy a Matryoshka doll²⁵ from the vendors and found a set of ten nested within each other. They are the famous wooden doll within a doll that was first introduced at the Paris World's Fair in 1900. They can have as many as 17 but the most we see only have ten dolls. We are seeing the dolls everywhere in Ukraine, from the tables in the dining room to the vendor stalls.

And then I had my disaster of the day. I lost a lens out of my glasses and cannot find the spare pair. What else can go wrong! Fortunately the lady at the tour desk was able to put the lens back in again.

Elizabeth and I took the afternoon off, but Mary and Tom took the optional tour to the Panorama Museum²⁶ where the Battle of Sevastopol is shown in Atlanta Cyclorama fashion. You stand in the center of a circular painting while the 'War' rages around you.

The highlight of the day was a performance of the Black Sea Fleet Band²⁷. They played and sang. They also had the Russian dancers who could do extraordinary acrobatic feats. Highlight of the whole thing was the Balalaika player who managed to clown as he strummed his way through the tunes.

We had a late supper after the performance.

Sunday, August 8. Yalta²⁸. We docked in the early morning. The breakfast room was so full I could not find two seats together so I sat with a couple from New York. He was so affected by the heat he had to go to a hospital yesterday! They also told me they had been scheduled to take this cruise last summer but that it had been cancelled since the boat Viking had chartered was so bad. This is a replacement ship. Since the M/V Mikhail Lomonosov has decided limitations like no phones or elevators, and the air conditioning only keeps the temperature in the low eighties, I am

²³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin

²⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Vladimir%27s_Cathedral,_Sevastopol

²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matryoshka_doll

²⁶ <http://www.cwreenactors.com/~crimean/image16.htm>

²⁷ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moHUON4_jPE

²⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yalta>

grateful I did not try the trip last year.

Yalta is such a contrast to Sevastopol! This is a resort town and with many Cyprus trees looks more Mediterranean than anything we have seen. It has a population of about 80,000, but in the popular summer season can swell to three times that amount. Its narrow winding streets mean that only the most experienced bus drivers are allowed access. It is situated on the site of an ancient Greek colony, founded by sailors looking for a safe shore on which to land.

We had a fairly long walk along the dock and through the customs area to get to the bus. Elizabeth had been able to get us seats fairly near the front so we could enjoy the scenic ride through the Crimean Mountains to a view of the 'Swallows Nest'²⁹. This picturesque castle perches on a rocky cliff and looks like it should be one of the castles on the Rhine River. A Russian general built the first building for his mistress about 1895. In 1911, Baron von Steingel, a German who made his fortune extracting oil in Baku, tore down the original wooden building and created this fantasy castle for himself.

We drove on to Livadia³⁰. The Romanovs came to this area and Tsar Nicholas II³¹ and his family made their summer home in the White Palace. Unfortunately they only enjoyed it four summers before the Russian Revolution put an end to the whole family!

Then the White Palace became a sanitarium for the peasants. When Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill had their historic conference³² (Feb. 4-11, 1945) where they redrew the map of post war Europe, it was here in this beautiful palace.

The front marble entrance is in Romanesque style with elaborate carving in the marble. Inside they have restored the rooms used in the conference. We saw the round table where the leaders deliberated and the private rooms where Roosevelt stayed. Roosevelt wished for Stalin to join in the War with Japan and in private negotiations Roosevelt agreed to Stalin's demands for control over large areas in the post war era. Stalin then aided the Americans, but in ten days the War ended! It has taken many years for many of those sacrificed territories to regain their independence.

The rooms were decorated the way they looked in 1945. Much use of historic photographs helped one to visualize the events. Many of the original furnishings were in place but it was difficult to photograph them with such a large group in each room.

From there we went to see the restored Romanov apartments. They are decorated with hundreds of family pictures, which showed the Tsar and his handsome family. We were shown the royal bedroom. While the bed is no longer extant the icons that hung above it were displayed. In the Tsar's study you can see his original desk and over the mantle the Tsar and Tsarina stand with their son in a portrait. There was a schoolroom for the children.

Then there was a long hot walk through the two gift shops and around the palace back to where the bus waited. I didn't think I was going to be able to make it! I will never take a summer trip again unless it is to a polar region!

I did buy another doll in the souvenir shop on the dock but decided to forego the trip to Chekhov's house planned for the afternoon. Mary went in my place.

Tonight there was a cocktail party for former travelers with Viking River Cruises. It ended with a special vodka toast in souvenir glasses.

Monday, August 9. We had decided against the suggested optional tours for they both promised to be a lot in the heat. Also, Elizabeth needed to get her hair done and I needed to get my glasses fixed. One of the temples fell off.

We walked down the long dock and through the custom shed and there we found another Yuri. He started out as an engineer but now calls himself a guide. He got on his phone and made a hair appointment for Elizabeth at 11:00. Then he took me in his Mercedes to find an Optic. The first one couldn't handle the problem so we found another. The lady said it would take a half hour. During the wait Yuri took me to a bank where I could cash some money. I have been working on a loan from Mary! When we went back for the glasses with their new temples, the

²⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swallow%27s_Nest_%28Crimea%29

³⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livadia_Palace

³¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_II_of_Russia

³² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yalta_Conference

cost was only 35 hryvnya, which is about \$4. Yuri was so solicitous helping me over curbs and so forth. We got back to the ship and then he took Elizabeth to her hair appointment. He was well worth the 200 hryvnya an hour that he charged. Neither of us could have done it without him.

We sailed at 1:00. No sooner did we clear the harbor than the ship died. She wallowed in the waves for some time while they repaired one of our three engines. During this time the electricity was off and lunch was in a very warm dining room, I'd guess about 95 degrees. However it did end with a banana split, which helped improve our attitude. I have been having ice cream twice a day and dread getting on the scale to see the weight I have gained.

We headed back across the Black Sea almost to Odessa to reach the delta of the Dnieper River³³. To entertain us there was a tour of the bridge, Ukrainian language lessons, followed by a talk on Ukrainian education. There was also a port talk. We will not have the promised tour of a fisherman's island for there were too many complaints about it but instead will have a city tour of Kherson.

After dinner Henry, the Hotel Manager, told us about the Dnieper. The Dnieper rises near Moscow and is a belt that divides the Ukraine in half. It is almost 1500 miles long, two thirds being in the Ukraine. There are only five locks to make the river navigable as far north as Kiev. They are all about the same excepting for the one at Zaporozhye that is one of the biggest in the world with a 120-foot rise. The locks are 18 meters wide while the ship is 17 meters wide so it will be a tight fit. All the locks are 265 –275 feet in length. We will have to pay to go through each one. There are only four passenger ships on the river and very little freight traffic.

Tuesday, August 10. I did not sleep well and felt queasy during breakfast. I went to see Dr. Olga after breakfast and she found my blood pressure 130/85 so at least I am okay in that respect.

Spent the morning mostly sleeping. Elizabeth kindly brought me some ice tea for lunch. Then we sat out on deck and watched the river. Marsh lands with occasional houses and as we got closer to Kherson the scenery bristled with cranes (machines not birds). However, we saw none in action. The Ukraine is having a recession like everyone else. There were freighters and rusty old oil storage tanks. There were small runabouts and people fishing. People were swimming in the water.

I did not get off the ship at Kherson³⁴. Either the heat, the filtered water in the dining room, or the change in my meds, or maybe all three are not making me feel good. Kherson is the homeport of our ship and a lot of the crew was on deck watching as we came in. Potemkin, under orders of Catherine the Great, founded the city in 1778.

Elizabeth went on the tour and reported it was oppressively hot. This evening was the "Pirate's dinner." I think they hoped we would dress as pirates but I only saw one couple that did. Our guides and the wait staff were all dressed as pirates.

Wednesday August 11. We played found some bridge players and played for several hours with Julia and Carol. They started out with a slam so we did not win but it was enjoyable. I finally bowed out for I needed a nap.

We missed the lecture on the history of the Ukraine. However, Mary and Tom went and Mary found out that Tom's grandmother might have been Ukrainian in origin. Poland is very close to the Ukraine and there were times when the area Tom's ancestors came from was actually in what is now the Ukraine. What his Polish relatives will think of this we do not know.

Lunch had no sooner been announced than we entered the Zaporozhye Lock and a lot of us raced out on deck to watch us go through. When it was completed in 1932, it was the second largest in the world. The ship just fit in with a large fender on each side. We tied up and the water started rising. When we had been raised high enough to see over the retaining wall, whom should we see greeting us but a massive statue of Lenin pointing out what he had created here. An envelope was passed to the dock attendant, probably paying our fee and the green light came on, the gates opened and we were soon docked.

Zaporozhye³⁵ means 'above the rapids' and before the dam was built no shipping could go north

³³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dnieper_River

³⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kherson>

³⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zaporizhia>

of here. After lunch we had our city tour and drove down Lenin Avenue, a huge divided avenue while Maria pointed out the various buildings. Much of the town was destroyed during the war but has been rebuilt. In the older section we did see some of the old buildings with the decorative details that do not exist on building built during the Russian years. It is an industrial city, the sixth largest in the Ukraine with a population of about three quarters of a million people. The dam created a huge power plant.

We stopped at one park where many got out to take pictures of a fountain that seemed to have been turned on just for us. Two young women went out into the fountain and sat in the cool water reminding us of the fountain in Centennial Park in Atlanta. As soon as everyone was back on the bus the fountain was turned down to a much smaller cascade.

We drove across the top of the dam. Our goal was Khortitsa Island. This hook shaped island was the home of the Cossacks³⁶. In the 14th century peasant tribes were driven off their land by social and religious pressures. They formed armed bands and their skills were many. They were often hired as mercenaries by other armies. Even today there is a Cossack troop in the army.

We were taken to the Cossack Museum and Maria walked us through pointing out the dioramas that depicted a battle in the 10th century and the museum was full of Cossack ancient armor and pipe, Icons and embroideries.

Back on the bus we drove to the other end of the island to the Cossack show. It was great fun with the horsemen performing tricks on their horses as they raced across the stage. The Cossacks also had other tricks. One man with a bullwhip was able to cut branches, so close he almost hit the hand that held them. There was also much clowning around. Then a couple of brave men were drafted out of the audience to hold the sticks. At last we were invited to pay 20 hryvnya and ride the horses. I paid my 20 and was boosted up on a horse. It is so humiliating that I cannot get on by myself anymore. Even more humiliating was the fact I was not allowed to hold the reins and was led around for about 10 minutes. At least I proved I still could sit on a horse despite my age.

We were then treated to Cossack food and vodka. The food was a rice dish. I did not try the vodka. We walked around to look at some of the handicrafts.

On the way back to the ship Maria passed out sheets and got us all singing Ukrainian songs. Then she invited the various groups on the bus to sing their own songs. I was impressed with the diversity of Bus 2. We had Germans, Australians, Jews, and Americans.

This night was Ukrainian night with the wait staff in their native dresses and the dishes all Ukrainian. I had borscht and Chicken Kiev.

Thursday, August 12. We woke to find ourselves in Dnipropetrovst³⁷, the third largest city in the Ukraine. It's another hot day. Catherine the great, who seems to have founded many of the cities along the Dnieper, founded this city. It was a closed city until liberation in 1992 for it was where the Russian space and missile program was based.

We were driven down a large wide avenue to Shevshenko Park and disembarked at the columned entrance. There was an old palace built by Count Potemkin. It had been abandoned and fell into disrepair, but now it has been renovated and serves as meeting rooms for the nearby university. Nearby was a statue of a girl waiting for her lover to return from War dedicated to the students.

When we got back to where the bus was supposed to be waiting it wasn't there. Maria had left her cell phone on the bus and had to work with Olga to call Yuri to return for the ones who did not want to walk to the museum. Finally we set off with Olga but Maria ran to catch up with us at the cathedral. She pointed out the nearby "milestone" that indicated Catherine the Great had been here.

Originally the Transfiguration Cathedral was designed to be as large as Saint Peters in Rome, but after almost a century of building it only reached its present much smaller size. It was quite handsome with its white walls and golden dome. During communism it housed a museum of atheism but has now been restored. Inside I was pleasantly surprised by how light and airy it appeared. So many eastern orthodox churches are dark. Many icons decorated the walls and

³⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cossacks>

³⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dnipropetrovsk>

there were candle offerings before some of them. The altar was hidden behind an elaborate altar screen.

We walked on to the museum. A large amount of WW2 tanks and military equipment was parked here, including some of the missiles from Russia's missile program.

The old part of the museum was beyond and we paused to admire the bust of the original curator, Dmytro Yavornytsky³⁸ (1855-1940). He started with about 5000 objects. Now the museum has many more treasures thanks to his leadership. The museum was stifling and after a room or two I felt overheated and the sweat was pouring off my face. I was also having trouble with my breathing. It seemed wise to retreat to the air-conditioned bus.

We ate lunch with the Lindbergs. He was career army and spent most of the lunch telling about how he had taken part in the Mariel boatlift³⁹ in 1980 when Castro allowed a lot of Cubans to leave. Unfortunately he also released a lot of hardened criminals as well, who still languish in our prisons 30 years later. Of the better citizens released there were baseball players and boxers and a few peasants, but few of the man-in-the-street.

The ship was running a bus shuttle into town for the shoppers but nothing would induce me to go out again. We tried to organize a bridge game but had no success so we went back to the room and watched the CD that has been taken of the trip. It is hardly the quality of the National Geographic CDs but has a few pictures that I can add to my own slide show so I decided to pay the \$20 it cost and buy it.

Then Elizabeth and I napped before we went to enjoy the Ukrainian Tea. Plates of cakes were prettily displayed and Ukrainian dumplings were in the servers on the buffet⁴⁰. I even found some Ukrainian jellybeans but they weren't as good as ours. We sat with Irwin and Arlene and listened to Alexander's accordion music. Tea and Vodka are the two most popular drinks here. We were told how important the samovar⁴¹ is to the household for this is where they make the tea.

At last we went back to the cabin and I was able to catch up my journal. It has been hard to find time to write it except in the early morning before breakfast.

We had dinner with Mary, Tom and Ron Huffman, a very talkative man from San Antonio. He is a pharmacologist, has never married, and is a consummate birdwatcher. Has seen well over 7000 species. He makes 7 trips a year, mostly birding to remote parts of the world.

Friday, August 13. We played bridge with Carol and Julia in the morning and after lunch came into Kremenchuk⁴², a small industrial town, almost totally destroyed during the 2nd World War. Its economy is based on minerals and there is steel works here.

The city tour took us past the inevitable Lenin statue and down Lenin Avenue to the Holocaust Memorial. This impressive sculpture commemorates the 9000 people killed here in 1941. They were not all Jews, but everyone that the Germans found undesirable. The figures in the monument are very moving.

Our next stop was at Liberation Park and the nearby museum. I got far enough into it to see the small art gallery in the entry room and a long hallway of photographs of the city before it was destroyed. When the tour was set to clamber up two long not air-conditioned stairways to the galleries above I decided the better part of valor was to return to the bus. I could hear much of Maria's talk on my headset from the bus.

We drove to Liberation Square with its monument. There was a small pond with Swan Boats for the kids to ride but it was a far cry from the ones on the Common in Boston. Adjoining the square was a department store but it was somewhat different from our department stores, as each department seemed to be under different management. It was air-conditioned after a fashion. I bought some Roshon chocolate candy bars and looked at the small room of souvenir items.

Elizabeth and I got dressed in our best clothes for the Captain's dinner. We went to the Panorama Bar for a drink. I discovered the bar help all thought I had bought the expensive "all the drinks you can drink package." I had briefly considered it but when I found the wine was free at

³⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dmytro_Yavornytsky

³⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mariel_boatlift

⁴⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_cuisine

⁴¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samovar>

⁴² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kremenchuk>

dinner cancelled it. The barmaid found two bottles of water I had bought but not signed for and I gladly signed both.

Then Mary and Tom appeared. She was gorgeous in a hot pink and black flowered dress and wearing her Ukrainian hot pink hat. We had our pictures taken in all our finery.

Our dinner was 15 minutes before the dinner in the Kiev Room. This was so that the Captain and his officers could greet and toast us as we entered the dining room. They then repeated it for the other dining room. The dinner was the most elegant of the trip and ended with the traditional parade of baked Alaska. We had dinner with Jenny and Tom Hinkle. After the cruise they are going on to Lvov and the nearby town where her great grandfather came from. We had a spirited conversation about our origins as well. Many of the people on this cruise seem to be seeking their roots.

After dinner we went to the Crew Show and saw some of our waitresses and staff sing and dance. One even got Tom up to dance with her!

Saturday, August 14. I packed a bit and then we waited for the call to go settle our bill. This was done more smoothly than any cruise I have ever been on with each deck going down when called. There were no lines and no wait.

We sat in the Panorama Bar and watched our approach into Kiev. There were many dachas⁴³, seasonal second homes, and building developments of what looked like mini palaces. In the distance we could see the flashes of gold and as we came into Kiev there were gold domes every way we looked. The Ukrainian church domes are pear rather than onion shaped as the ones are in Russia.

It was somewhat of a cultural shock to see the wealth in the Nation's capitol, after seeing the more modest towns along the Dnieper. There were sail and motorboats. It seemed that everyone was out enjoying the river this weekend. There were places where people were camping and enjoying the sandy beaches. Lunch was called and the scenery was so distracting I had to go out on deck a couple of times to get pictures.

As soon as we docked we were loaded into the buses for our sightseeing. Our first stop was St. Sophia's Cathedral⁴⁴, now a museum. The bell tower was decorated and painted so that it looked like a piece of blue Wedgwood. In the reconstruction of the church, they have peeled back the modern stucco in places so we could see the original stone construction.

Inside we viewed a model of the cathedral as it once was. There was a tall dome for Jesus and then 12 other domes for the disciples. We moved on to see a section of the original marble floor although it is a foot or two below the present surface. The Mongols⁴⁵ came this far west and destroyed the church in 1240 when they captured Kiev. It was rebuilt in the 17th century and some traces of 400 year-old icons can be seen on the walls. Where the original is gone there are painted suggestions of what they might have been. The church was dedicated to Yaroslav the Wise⁴⁶ (978-1054). He had built the city to greatness and cemented his diplomatic relations by marrying his daughters to various kings. His marble casket is displayed in one of the alcoves and studies have shown that the two skeletons found inside were probably he and his wife.

I was also interested in another model that showed how the city looked with its medieval walls. I am reading a book about Genghis Khan and how he destroyed the cities with his catapults as his tribes moved west⁴⁷. Kiev is perched on a high ridge and it must have been quite a battle to subdue it.

We then drove on to Kiev Pechersk Larva⁴⁸, the Monastery of the Caves. We entered through a high gate where the walls were painted with icons. The main church was destroyed in WW2 and a modern building now sits on the site. Numerous other buildings in the complex house museum exhibits. Outside there was an exhibit of some of the original brick foundations that date back to

⁴³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dacha>

⁴⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Sophia_Cathedral_in_Kievhttp://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Sophia_Cathedral_in_Kiev

⁴⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongol_Empire

⁴⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yaroslav_I_the_Wise

⁴⁷ "Genghis: Bones of the Hills: A Novel," written by Conn Iggulden

⁴⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiev_Pechersk_Lavra

before Genghis Khan. The bell was also at eye level since the bell tower is still being restored. We went into the refectory church with its large green dome, where services were held while the new church being built.

Then we went to a lookout where we could see the old monastery and admire the many golden spires on the numerous churches in the city. Dominating the view was the huge Mother Motherland Monument⁴⁹, the tallest statue in the world. She would dwarf the Statue of Liberty.

We were supposed to tour the catacombs of the monastery but Maria looked right at me when she said there were many steps and perhaps some people would not want to go. Elizabeth went and reported that it was excessively hot and you could not see much since there was only candlelight.

I spent about 45 minutes near the entrance to the complex watching the people come in. Some were devout and genuflected before the paintings on the wall and then turned to honor the elaborate gate through which they entered. There were tour groups and tourists and even a bride and groom with a somewhat bored flower girl. As I have said before, it is the custom for the newly weds to be photographed at the important sites in their city. I had a close-up view of a lovely bride and her wedding party.

When it was time to wait for the bus someone suggested we walk to meet it and I went with them, grateful to be back in its air-conditioning.

So we returned to the ship and said farewell to Yuri and Maria. Bus Two has been the best of the five and it is due to our very good guide, Maria.

Sunday, August 15. Our plane did not leave until noon but we had to vacate our staterooms at 9. We were able to find seats in the 12-seat library for the wait. At last our departure was announced and we boarded the bus for the airport.

They did not have wheelchair available but a man escorted us through the security using the crew and diplomat gates. The flight to Paris was just under two hours long. Our connection to Atlanta was short but at least it was in the same terminal. Charles De Gaulle used to be a nightmare, but now they seem to have their wheelchair act together. Even the baggage made the less than one-hour connection!

A chatty man named Nick sat beside me for the Atlantic crossing. He is a professor at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville and very proud of how well it ranks among the Florida colleges.

It was three days later that I fell and broke a bone in my foot. I am so lucky it didn't happen in the Ukraine!

⁴⁹ <http://englishrussia.com/index.php/2007/04/10/volgograd-mother-motherland-monument/>