

CRUSING THE DANUBE + PRAGUE 23 Sept- 4Oct 2014

September 23, 2014, Tuesday: Jim drove the four of us (Laveta me, Sharon & Russ) to SEATAC with time to spare. We had a three hour wait plus a late boarding of our plane to Amsterdam. But winds proved favorable allowing us to make up time which was a good thing, considering our short layover at *Schiphol*.

Our A330 had power outlets in each seat row! (120 VAC and USB). Wi-Fi was also available but for a pricy \$15 an hour!

Around midnight local time, at 37000 ft. while crossing the southern tip of Greenland- a large Aurora Borealis became visible on our (north) side of the plane. Beautiful!

September 24, 2014, Wednesday: What a long day! We arrived in Amsterdam's *Schiphol* airport around 8:00 AM, local time. Schiphol seemed larger, more crowded, friendly, helpful and dilapidated than I remembered from previous trips. Our KLM flight to Budapest was 30 minutes late but went well. Way too much food on these flights though!

Viking met us after baggage "reclaiming" and bused us through Budapest to our "*Njord*" tied up on the Danube. Nice boat- all 135m (443 ft. of her), nice moorage, nice cabin. We had dinner aboard at 19:00 then crashed.

September 25, Thursday: Today we had our bus and walking tour of Budapest, the sky mostly overcast and temperature in the low 60's F.

We began in *Pest*- the large flat main city, and ending in Buda, on the monument filled, hilly west side of the Danube. For our tour we had a wonderful guide.

We visited monuments and parks, the financial center and residential sections. Most interesting was *Hero's Square*, the enormous and beautiful *Parliament Building* and The famous *Chain Bridge* over the Danube. All in all Budapest is a really neat city- though with more architectural treasures than it can possibly restore or maintain- sort of like an old woman who's youth-

ful beauty is slowly fading. In Buda we visited the 14th century, late Gothic style *Matthias cathedral* which was beautifully restored.

The *Njord* began motoring north when we began our bus tour- which we finished by driving About 60 km north from Buda along the river re-joining the *Njord* in Visegrad around 12:30 just in time for lunch. Later that evening we were treated to our welcoming reception and dinner.

Continuing upriver under cloudy skies we made our way to Vienna. At 21:00 we entered our first lock- the first of over 30 locks on the trip! It was very dark as we made our way upriver- so smoothly I couldn't tell we were moving without looking outside

September 26, Friday: Must have gone through a dozen locks last night! We woke up with the *Njord* tied up three abreast at the dock in Vienna.

Today was our Vienna city tour. Boarding our bus we spent an hour riding around the *Ringstrasse* with our guide pointing out the many sights. We then proceeded on our walking tour in the downtown center followed by an hour of free time. This was Laveta and my second visit to Vienna. But it's a big city and there's always more to see.

Returning to the *Njord* at 12:30 we found ourselves just time for lunch. Laveta and I took the rest of the day off while Sharon and Russ went on to two more excursions. Weather was cool and cloudy all day

September 27, Saturday: After breakfast we climbed up on deck as the *Njord* motored through the beautiful *Wachau Valley* lined with vineyards, orchards and lovely small towns each with its own church. Arriving in *Melk* about 11:00, we had lunch before boarding our bus for a 6 minute ride up the hillside to the spectacular 900 year old *Melk Abbey*.

The abbey (a UNESCO world heritage site) was actually a palace before it was added on to,

and turned into an Abbey. In addition, it has a private school and a wonderful museum. The museum displays were mostly of religious objects, golden, old and interesting. The church (a cathedral really) was just spectacular and the adjacent library awesome.

All that looking up, bothered my neck though- which I later successfully treated with ibuprofen and red wine while sitting on our balcony and watching the *Strudengau* region of Austria drift slowly by.

September 28, Sunday: The Njord went through many more locks last night and arrived in *Passau*, Germany in the morning. We left for our guided walking tour at 10:00. Our young (and pretty guide) was humorous, informative and talked nonstop. *Passau*, located at the confluence of Danube, Liz, and Inn rivers is a gorgeous little city and since it was a Sunday, the town was pretty much closed up.

It would have been nice to go into St. Stephen's Cathedral but services were being conducted so we abstained. Even so- the weather was sunny, warm and windless. After the 1 1/2 hour guided tour Laveta and I walked around for another hour looking for charms at the few shops that were open.

We had lunch onboard then Sharon and Russ left for a walk up to *Veste Oberhausen* fortress high above the Danube. Laveta put an ice bag on her knee and I pattered around.

Casting off at 15:15 we headed upriver. A few kilometers out, we passed through the oldest lock on the Danube, built in 1926. The countryside was beautiful and since it was Sunday the riverside was dotted with folks fishing, bicycling, jogging and picnicking- all visible from our veranda. Weather on deck today was sunny and in low seventies. Great day!

September 29, Monday: Our Njord's forward progress stopped at 02:00 in the morning due to a disabled commercial vessel blocking the river.

It was very foggy and we should have been docked in *Regensburg*, leaving on our guided tours. Boats were backed up behind us but because of the fog we didn't have permission to back down river and dock- so we'd been station keeping. It was possible that this would mess up all the day's excursions and perhaps Nuremberg the following day.

Later that morning the fog lifted some, allowing us to back down the Danube for thirty minutes to a place where we could dock (tied to 2 other boats). Because we were still so far away, buses ended up saving the day, taking us to Regensburg at 13:30. Drive time on the autobahn was about an hour through beautiful farmland and small towns.

Arriving in *Regensburg*, we began our guided walking tour at the *Stone Bridge* built in 1138 and the only solid crossing on the Danube for 800 years.

We stopped by *Alte Worstkuch* (Old Sausage House) Germany's oldest restaurant which has been serving food since the year 1135! After some *Bratwurst & Brochen* we toured the old city and finally visiting *St. Peter's Cathedral*. Completed in 1320, its twin towers are nearly 350 feet high. Inside it was rather dark but illumination coming through the stained glass windows was beautiful.

Buses picked us up at the cathedral and returned us to the Njord. Captain's dinner was tonight- problem was, it didn't start until nearly 20:00. Lots of food and wine just before bed naturally led to acid reflux problems. Tonight we motored up the Main-Danube canal that links the Rhine with the Danube. Completed in 1992, it's 16 locks, raising us 1332 feet; with the last two locks dropping us down in elevation... to Nuremberg.

September 30, Tuesday: An easy morning today. Our buses didn't leave the Njord for Nuremberg until 13:15. First, a driving tour of about an hour which included the *Documents*

Center (Coliseum), followed by the *Palace of Justice* (where Carol had worked as a telex operator (1967-1968) when Jim was in the army. And finally the site of the Nazi rallies. All of these places seem to have aged since Laveta and I last saw them in 1968. In particular, the rally site (deliberately disrespected) was now a storage field of truck semi-trailers. But the platform and the railing where Hitler stood were still there.

Leaving our buses, we walked up to Nuremberg Castle. The castle, which together with Nuremberg's city walls, all made from sandstone, once comprised one of Europe's most formidable medieval fortifications. On the wall I posed Laveta against a background where I had taken her picture in 1968.

Back in town walked around the *Hauptmarkt*, or Central Square in Nuremberg's old town (home of December's *Christkindlesmarkt*) and saw its famous fountain. This ornate and richly painted (golden) fountain stands in an octagonal water basin and resembles a Gothic church spire. The fountain is 19 meters tall and features 40 sculptured figures which reflect the world-view of the Holy Roman Empire.

We also visited the *St. Sebaldus* Church (St. Sebald, Sebalduskirche) which was being refurbished inside.

October 1, Wednesday: Bags out at 06:00, breakfast at 07:00 and we boarded our buses at 08:00 bound for *Prague (Czech Republic)*. The trip west, mostly by autobahn took about four hours. The *Corinthia* hotel is located on the edge of downtown, is modern and seemingly the largest around. We were tired and took the afternoon off. My throat still hurt from my acid reflux, plus both Sharon and I seem to be coming down with colds- had a good night's sleep though.

October 2, Thursday: Laveta and I went down for breakfast at 06:30 and were later joined by Sharon and Russ. Our shuttle left for our Prague

city tour at 08:00, which began with an hour long bus tour followed by three hours walking through town. We did see *St Vitus Cathedral*, located within Prague Castle, and the Old Town Square with its medieval, Astronomical Clock that features an hourly "Walk of the Apostles" show. Then finally a walk over the famous "Charles Bridge" begun in 1357 and finished after 50 years or so later. For 500 years it was the only solid means of crossing the *Vltava River*- turning Prague into an important city for east-west trade.

October 3, Friday: Today we were on our own. I was coming down with a cold but still managed to take the shuttle downtown with Laveta, Sharon and Russ. We walked the length of *Wenceslas Square* through which runs Prague's main boulevard. It is vibrant, alive and beautiful- reminding me of the *Champs-Élysées* in Paris. At this point Sharon and Russ continued on their way while Laveta and I made our way back to the shuttle and the hotel.

October 4, Saturday: Alarms went off at 04:45 and bags in the hallway at a little after 05:00. We went down to the lobby where Viking met us with a bag breakfast too large to eat and the Viking shuttle left for the Prague airport. Viking virtually held our hands, helping us with our boarding passes. It was a nice airport but we were early. We also a long layover in Amsterdam and of course the flight to Seattle was over ten hours.

Jim met us at SEATAC as soon as we claimed our bags. It's good to be home!

clw, October- 2014