

The Blue Danube - Budapest to Prague

Rasmussen Travels

May 1st – 15th, 2007



May 1, 2007 – Tuesday

We began by starting out a day earlier than needed. We have learned through experience that we have less stress in the event planes are late in arriving which can throw the entire schedule off. This time however, the booking route seemed strange to us. We took United from Des Moines to Denver where we were booked onto Lufthansa Airlines (which we really like do to superior service, comfort, and good food) to Frankfurt, Germany. There we changed planes and flew on to Budapest, Hungary.

We left Des Moines on May 1st at 2:25 PM after Chontel drove us to the airport at noon. We had a layover in Denver and did not leave there until 5:35 PM. We flew all night and then arrived in Frankfurt to catch our next flight to Budapest, Hungary where we arrived on May 2nd, 2007 - 9 hours after leaving Denver.

May 2nd, 2007 – Wednesday

To our surprise there were 10 people who were at the airport and we met John and Sandy from California as our first tour mates. We were led to a bus and all went to the hotel to settle in for our 4 night stay in the Inter-Continental Hotel which faced the Danube River. We unpacked four days of clothes and laid down for an hour nap. Oooops, the next thing we realized we had slept for three hours. Obviously we were more tired than we thought. We cleaned up, took our



cameras, decided to eat dinner in the hotel, and then walked along the river for several blocks taking pictures of the night lights of the city. It was so nice we continued to walk to the “Chain Bridge” where we took more night time views. We did not know what we were looking at exactly but knew we would find out the next day. We had a great time, the weather was perfect for a light jacket, and the sights were interesting. At 9:15 PM we decided we were tired again and went to our hotel room and both were asleep by 9:30 PM.

May 3rd, 2007 – Thursday

We had a note in our room to come to a desk in the lobby to sign in and receive a packet of information dealing with the tour. We decided to eat our buffet breakfast first.

We met our three guides: Annalee, Virginia and Sara. We learned that there was to be 112 passengers on the ship and about 50 or so crew. We learned we had “Free Time” to explore on our own and then we would meet in the hotel for a “Welcome Cocktail Hour at 6:00 PM before Dinner was to be served at 7:00 PM”. We rummaged through our packet and found a map of Buda and Pest and decided to walk around Pest. Doug decided to get some Hungarian Florint and went to a “Money Changer Shop” where the exchange was 144 Florint to \$1.00 American. This was a BAD rate since the paper had said the rate was 186 Florint to \$1.00 American and once more we learned to not exchange money at Money Changer shops. (We found the Hotel ATM was the best rate.) We decided to head into the city and quickly found many photo ops in the architecture, colors, and sculptures. We took many photos of things we would not see on tour - Shopping Street, St. Stephens Cathedral, Vigado Concert Hall, a Park with sculptures, trolleys running back & forth in front of the hotel, many gorgeous doors for Sandy’s collection and finally pictures of our hotel room.

Our “Doug Clock” told us it was time for lunch. We had found the “Salama Bombay” restaurant on our map and decided to try it for its India Food Cuisine.

We were the first people into the restaurant and met the owner and chatted with him a bit before ordering. We spoke of “Hazara” India restaurant in Jakarta and we talked about their cuisine and learned his restaurant served some of the same dishes so we finally decided to take a stab at ordering. We had Cokes, Naan Bread, Dall (A lentil Bean like heavy soup), Doug had roast lamb and I had chicken with peanut sauce and we both had rice and a fluffy dessert. The cost was \$60.00 American We about fell over! The food was good but not the same seasonings we had in Jakarta. [Funny side story – we did not realize an 10% tip had been tacked onto the bill and left another tip of 10%!! I bet he really liked us, after we left! Ha]



After lunch we continued our walk back to the hotel and decided to park ourselves on one of the many benches which overlooked the trolley tracks, the Danube and across to Buda. We enjoyed this relaxing time to watch the people and the comings and goings of the city traffic. We sat under trees so the shade made it comfortable as it was quite hot in the sun.

Soon it was time to go to our room to get cleaned up and dressed nicely for the Welcome Cocktail Hour and Dinner. When ready we went down to the hotel dining area at 6:00 PM. We all stood at little tables as waiters came around with drinks. A big table was set up in the middle with a variety of appetizers. We met John and Sandy again and they joined us. Soon a couple by the name of Vern and Alice asked if they could join us and we all chatted. Then they called us to dinner. We were escorted into the Banquet Room and found round tables seating 8 set for the dinner. A couple by the name of Herb and Dorothy joined us. It was very warm in this room as 112 people sat at the 14 tables. I noticed many fanning themselves and I was once again happy that I had brought my personal fan with me. Dinner was very good and the chatting level was horrendous. Most people had arrived on this day and were very tired so when dinner was finished at 9:15 PM, they all went to bed.



Doug and I walked outside with our cameras and took more “night light” photos of the lit up buildings across the Danube of what we know knew were the old Royal Palace. We sat a bit to take in the cooler air outside and then decided to get a drink in the Lobby Bar. Doug had decaf coffee and I had a diet coke. We then left for our room, read our books a short time, and were off to sleep by 10:30 PM. Doug was up several times during the night which woke me up so it was not a restful night. But, we felt fine the next morning.

May 4th, 2007 – Friday

We dressed casually and went to the Corso restaurant for our tour buffet breakfast. We were greeted by Gilbert and Marymeade who asked us to join them. They were from North Carolina and I loved their accents. We chatted awhile before we all headed for the buffet. We liked them immediately. (Gracious southerners entered my mind.) We continued to visit as we ate.

After breakfast everyone was to meet in the lobby and told we would go on a city tour with a city guide in three different buses. We should remember the color of our bus and continually go back to that bus. As we went out the hotel door, our Tauck guides counted us off into buses. We ended up on the blue bus. We were first told that Buda and Pest (pronounced Pesht) were separate cities but always referred to as one Budapest. We drove around Pest and they pointed out Androssy Street, Parliament Building, Vaci Utca, a City Park, National Opera House, Hero's Square and the Covered Market.

We stopped at three different places and allowed extra time for photo taking. The 1st stop was at the Opera House for a tour of the inside. We soon were stopped in the lobby and told we could not take the tour as there was a rehearsal going on and we were not allowed in. We took photos of the lobby and heard a little about its history. Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph had the Opera House built. When done, he made one visit, never to return as he was upset that they had modeled it after the Vienna Opera House that he had previously had built. He did not think the Pest Opera House should be as beautiful as the one in Vienna. [Side story Annalee was very upset that they had not told them their people would not be able to have their regular tour. The tickets had been paid for by Tauck and she wanted to straighten these people out as they obviously did not understand that they could not do this!]



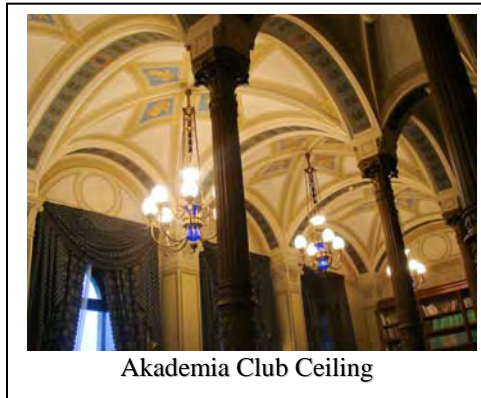
The 2nd stop was at Heroes Square. It was raining so we got off the buses with umbrellas in hand and walked the square taking photos of the various statues and stone columns surrounding the area.

Our 3rd stop was the huge Covered Market which is where they said the locals shopped for food, clothing, and trinkets. It was very busy and we were given extra time. Doug and I managed to purchase Budapest tee shirts for Talia and Nash. When we walked out of the market, the rain had stopped. We were taken back to the hotel and told we had a free afternoon and lunch would be on our own. Doug and I chose an outdoor café full of others and took that as a good sign. After we sat down and ordered we listened to those around us and realized most of the people were locals. Doug ordered French onion soup and a pork chop with fries. I ordered a brochette with 5 pieces of toast and we both had cokes. Here all cokes are served in the small bottles at a cost of \$4.00 USA and refills are not free. Doug said the onion soup was strange but the pork chop was delicious.



While eating lunch we looked at our city map and decided to walk to the Parliament building for photos. I had taken some out of the bus window but they did not begin to do justice to the architecture. Doug thought it was three blocks from the hotel and I thought it was six blocks. We walked it and it turned out to be seven blocks from the hotel but worth every step. It was fantastic in architecture, color, layout and huge. It took up the entire block length wise and width wise. We took our time to get the photos we wanted which included an adjacent park with sculptures, gorgeous plots of colorful pansies, the Ethnographic Museum complete with

sculptures on the top of the building and a Cathedral with an unusual roof and steeples across the Danube. We also took time to sit on a park bench for awhile in the shade. We then walked back in the shade as much as possible – it was hot in the sun. On our return to the Hotel, we dressed up once more for our evening dinner in the Akademia Club inside the Science Academy.



Akademia Club Ceiling

We took buses from the hotel the four blocks to the Science Academy where we were shown into a room for Cocktails and chamber music for one hour. Then bells were rung to notify us to move to the next room for our dinner. The building was not air conditioned and the 112 people + the servers were making the room even hotter. They did open the huge windows for a slight breeze. Dinner consisted of an Avocado stuffed with shrimp for the appetizer, celery and tomato soup, Veal tenderloin medallions, potato donut with roasted goose liver pâté, forest mushroom, Ragout with chestnuts, and a Grand

Marnier soufflé. It was all very delicious. We felt sooooo full that we chose to walk back to the hotel. This was cooler and helped our digestion. We walked passed a Casino owned by Sylvester Stallone and saw many people entering it. We reached the hotel and went right to our room and bed.

May 5th , 2007 – Saturday

We ate our buffet breakfast in the Corso restaurant. We had the morning free so we finished packing our bags and then walked to the Old Town of Pest one last time. We soon returned to the hotel. I bought postcards from a street vendor, filled them out and mailed them at the hotel. We retrieved our hand luggage from our room, went to the lobby where Doug checked out, put our hand luggage in the bottom of the bus, and boarded the bus for our tour of Buda. Our first stop was at the Apetito Café which was run by the Hilton Hotel. [Side Story: Zaza Gabor was married to one of the Hiltons. He wanted to build a hotel in Buda. The government would not let him as they thought it would be too modern compared to their other old buildings. They wanted tourism to come into their country to see the old buildings. Zaza, being Hungarian, went to work on the government officials and told them they would build it unobtrusive to the older buildings; convinced them of his sincerity and they allowed it to be built.]

Our lunch paid homage to Hungarian cooking. We had cream of paprika soup, grilled Breast of chicken with chive sauce, ham mixed with noodles and a famous Hungarian dessert called “Eszterhazy cake”. Everything was excellent.



Fishermen's Bastion

After lunch we were taken outside, split into groups, and a city guide took us through the inside of Matthias Cathedral. When we walked out the Cathedral door we were in the courtyard of the Fisherman's Bastion. [Fishermen's protected area.] Inside the middle of the courtyard was St. Stephens Statue. [We had a picture in black in white of it in our hotel room and I liked it so it was pleasure to take photos of it ourselves.] Then we were given a choice of going in the Palace Museum or having free time. We



St. Stephens

chose the free time and walked the grounds around the palace and took photos of the gardens, across the Danube to Pest, of the Palace statuary, fountains, gates, surroundings and the buildings themselves. We enjoyed every minute. The palace was situated on a hill and the views were wonderful looking toward Pest. (We had decided one day not to go across chain bridge, up the funicular to the top of Buda, so we could spend more time in Pest and now wished we had done that.) We were called to the buses, walked down part of a hill, and were taken to “Gellert Hill” for our last panoramic view of the Danube with Buda to the left and Pest to the right. It indeed was a great view.



We boarded the bus to take a trip to our embarkation on our ship the “Swiss Emerald”. She was 361 feet long with a 4 ft. draft for cruising rivers. The Captain was German and the rest of the crew was varied in country origin. The Cruise Director was Lynn and she was very “on top” of things, every minute.

We arrived at our ship at 4:30 PM. We were handed our electronic key to our room, found our bags in the room and unpacked for our seven day stay. The only way to describe the suite is to say that it was the size of a large hotel room, yet compact and using every inch of space. We were called over the intercom to head upstairs to attend a safety instructions class which was mandatory. They showed us how to put on life vests, where they were located, and other instructions. Then the Cruise Director gave us our first instructions: What time the evening meal started in the Dining Room, How to go there, and what entertainment would be provided. We were also told we could go to the lounge at any time and told of its location, which everyone had spotted off the Ship’s lobby upon entering.

We cleaned up, went to the Dining Room at 7:00 PM found a table and Alice and Vern joined us. We ordered our food enjoyed the conversation and the food and wine.

After dinner we went to the lounge to be entertained by a Local Slovakian Folklore Group who sang, played Slovakian instruments, and danced. They had boarded the boat at the last lock we had gone through. We were off to bed at 10:30 PM. We could have watched a movie on our TV but we were too tired and read our books for awhile and went to sleep. We both woke up several times due to the boat’s movement as we were sailing and went through two different locks. We would chat a bit and then go back to sleep.

Facts about Republic of Hungary: Population as of 2007 was 10,165,000 – The Capital City is Budapest with a population of 1.77 million. Land mass is 32,652 square miles or slightly smaller than the state of Indiana in the USA. Bordering countries are (7) – Austria, Croatia, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine. Landforms: Mostly flat country – some hills on the north along Slovakian border with the highest elevation of 3,330 feet. Land divisions: 19 counties, 20 urban counties and one capital city. History: It was part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire which collapsed during World War I. It fell under Communist rule following World War II. They revolted by announcing withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact in 1956 but Moscow met it with a massive military intervention. In 1968, Hungary began liberalizing its economy under Janos Kadar. Hungary held its first multiparty elections in 1990 and initiated a free market economy. It joined NATO in 1999. It became a member of the

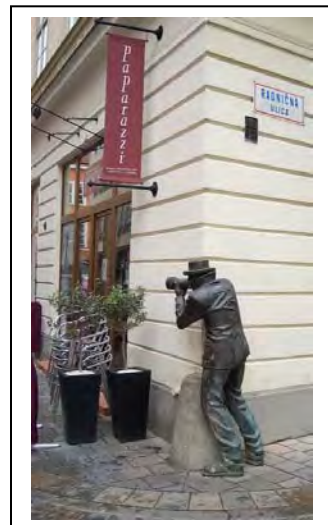
European Union along with nine other states on May 1, 2004. It is gearing up for more tourism by learning more about tourism, cleaning up its old buildings, and trying harder to smile. (As we have learned before, coming back from communist rule is not always easy.)

May 6th, 2007 - Sunday

We were up and went to the buffet breakfast at 9:00 AM. While we ate a Slovakian official boarded the ship and went through each of our 112 passports in the lounge. After we ate we walked around to see more of the ship. The Captain's deck, the sun deck, the small café/bar with computer at the back of the first floor, the hot tub, and the different floors. Then Doug went back to our room to get on the computer (the boat had WiFi Internet access) while I went to the lounge to join in an hour long stretch class. I felt great afterward and the rest of the day. We were still moving and arrived in Bratislava, Slovakia around 10:45 AM. At 11:15 AM "Martin Sloboda" boarded the ship and talked to us about Slovakia's history via a talk titled "Slovak Republic". The Cruise Director pointed at her watch and let Mr. Sloboda know he had gone over his allotted speaking time and that they were waiting in the Dining Room for us all to go to lunch. We all left for lunch at 12:25 PM.

Lunch was very good and at 1:45 PM we disembarked, divided into our three groups, and took off with a city guide for our walking tour of Bratislava. Most everyone had umbrellas with them which were used quite a bit in the mist. Periodically Doug and I would drift away from the group to take photos. We were intrigued by the whimsical sculptures and took their photos. [Such as the helmeted worker coming out a manhole; a paparazzi reporter peering from a

building corner with camera in hand; A Bronze storyteller with characters attached to him, etc.] We saw several Baroque style buildings that dated back to the Habsburg era of Maria Theresa.



We wound our way through many different streets and then at the end of the tour, we went to a special bakery for a coffee and pastry of our choice. This was our first "unannounced surprise" of the trip. Then we were given free time and walked back to various spots that we thought were intriguing and took photos. We were given a certain time to return to the ship which was easily met as the mist became stronger. We walked back with several others from the boat. We all chatted about the clever sculptures.

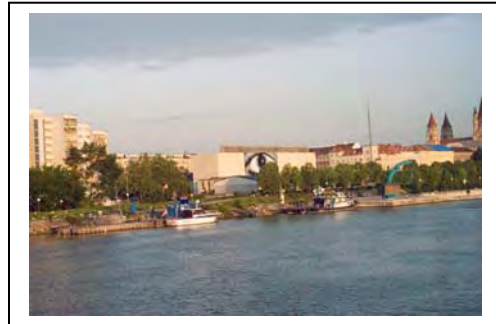
We returned in time to get some drier clothes on and go to the lounge for half priced Bloody Marys. We all had one except Doug who had a Gin and Tonic. The bar was a very busy place! At 6:45 PM the staff gave us a Discovery Briefing which filled us in on the next day's activities. We then went to the Dining Room for dinner, once again, excellent food. I asked our waiter what country he was from (He looked so familiar) and he said Indonesia. I asked where in Indonesia and he said Bandung. I told him we had lived in Jakarta, Indonesia, but had spent

three days in Bandung once. He asked if I spoke Indonesian and I said “sedikit” and he smiled and said “Madam you mean Kecil” ... sedikit is few and you mean a little.” I said “Terima Kasih” (Thank you) and he smiled and said “Kembali, Bu”. (You are welcome, Mrs.) When he left, Alice said “I think you will be getting preferential treatment!” and we all laughed. Then after dinner we went back to the lounge for drinks and another Slovakian Group Folklore Performance. We were off to bed to read a bit before falling asleep.

Facts about the Slovak Republic: Population in 2007 was 5,430,000 – Capital is Bratislava – The Red/white/blue flag was new as of 9/1/1992 – The country is twice the size of New Hampshire – It borders: Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and the Ukraine – It was once a part of Czechoslovakia - when that country split in two it became Czech Republic & Slovakia.

May 7th, 2007 – Monday

I was up at 5:00 AM, looked out our sliding glass door and saw buildings approaching. I knew we must be coming into Vienna. The sun was shining on the buildings so I must have been looking west. I saw two things - a building with a huge eyeball on it and a beautiful cathedral. I



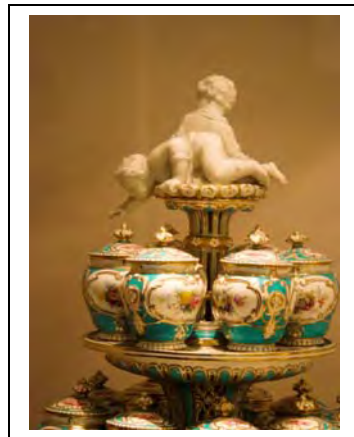
grabbed my camera and Doug grabbed his and we began taking photos with the sun on the buildings. Soon we pulled up to and docked at Dock #3.



We got dressed and went down to breakfast early and were amazed at the spread

of the buffet. Doug ordered an omelet and the Indonesian boy told him he did not have to wait for it, he would bring it to him! (Oooops, more preferential treatment! Ha) He delivered the omelet and stopped to talk to us for a few minutes again. It was amazing as he had me recalling more Indonesian words. I had not spoken it for so long yet the words must be buried back in that brain somewhere! Before long another Indonesian went past our table and said “Selamat Pagi, Bu” (Good Morning Ms) and I now knew he had told other Indonesians that we had lived there. (We were to find out there were 9 Indonesians on that boat.)

We had our walking shoes on for our trip into Vienna for the day. First we had a bus tour of



Vienna as a city guide pointed out the Four Danubes, Hunderwasser House, Opera House, Parliament, City Hall, and Ringstrasse. Our tour group then split into two groups, two thirds of the group went to the Shoенbrunn Palace (We had been there in 1992) and the other one third of us went to the silver Chamber at the Hofburg Palace. We saw room after room of silver of all kinds; Meissen



Porcelain figures; gorgeous dessert china; and various gold vessels. We returned to the ship at 3:00 PM to rest for the evening outing. We all left the ship in three different buses at 5:45 PM for a Cocktail hour and dinner at the Palais Pallavicini which was near the Hofburg Palace. We were rather crowded into a room with a piano player and gorgeous chandeliers for cocktails. The windows were thrown open, thank goodness. We were also able to walk into a reception room and Doug and I did that so we were not so crowded.



Gilbert offered to take our photo together since I had taken four of their group. It turned out to be a favorite photo of ours.

After an hour we were ushered into a much larger room for dinner where the windows were all open again. We had a threesome playing string instruments of classical music, a man singer, and a dance couple. They all took turns entertaining us while we ate. We sat with completely different people this particular evening. The food was excellent and we enjoyed talking to others.

Everyone was dressed up for this dinner and it indeed was a beautiful evening. I took a photo of a flower arrangement



with a back mirror. The reflected chandeliers make for an interesting photo. I saw the huge flowers in front of the mirror but did not realize I was also capturing two other chandeliers on either side of the big chandelier.

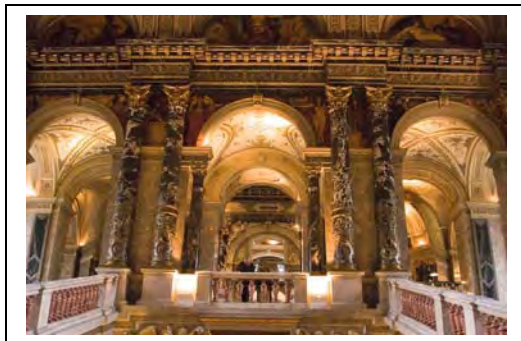


The room was quite beautiful as you can tell. The colors were cream and gold. The flowers were the blast of color besides the clothing on the people. It was ornate but somehow not overly so. The music was wonderful.

We were driven back to the ship at 10:30 and everyone mumbled about going to bed quickly. We were very tired from a full day of sightseeing and eating! Ha

May 8th, 2007 – Tuesday

Today we were given the choice of staying aboard the ship or going into Vienna on our own via the Tauck shuttle bus. Doug and I decided to go into Vienna and left on the shuttle to be



dropped off at the Fine Arts Museum. We went to the east building and spent one and a half hours going up stairs and walking various halls to see

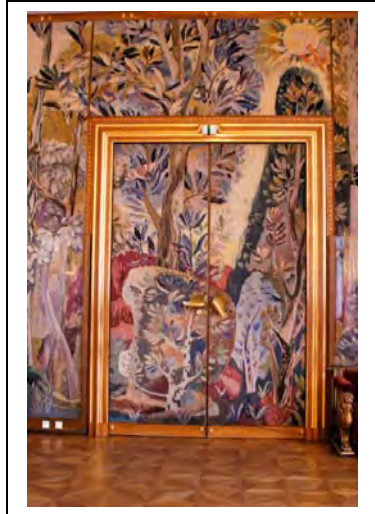


sculptures and oil paintings. We took a break in the snack room and ordered cool drinks and a pastry and marveled at the use of beautifully colored

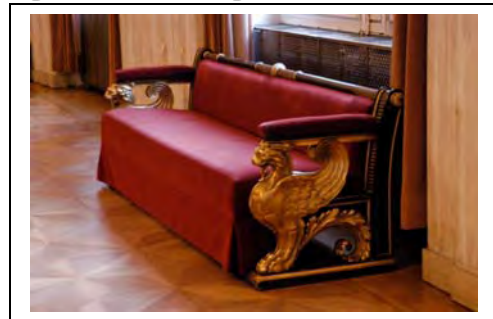
marble everywhere and the many décor sculptures. The ceilings-walls-pillars and floors were as amazing as the oil paintings we saw. When it was time for us to leave I was once again happy that I had taken an umbrella as it was raining again. We hurried across the road and walked through the palace park and decided to run into the Palace Garden Café to get a bite of lunch. It continued to rain so we used the umbrella once again to get to the Opera House for our 2:00 PM tour.

We got our tickets and moved inside the waiting room. Before long a guide told us she would take 22 people in with her. We were going up the stairs when Susan lost her balance and started falling. Luckily Doug grabbed her and held on until she was stable again and helped her up the remaining stairs. Her husband was ahead of her talking to someone else and had not realized she had a problem. (If Doug had not grabbed her she was headed for a tumble down five marble stairs to a marble landing Disaster. She had some physical disability from a previous stroke.) Her husband was the person who had grown up in Waterloo but they had lived in Houston, Texas for years. When he found out we were from Iowa he came over to talk to us.

We continued on with our Opera House tour. We expected it to be more beautiful than it was, but judged too soon. (Hmmm were we beginning to be spoiled by the ornate and beautiful architecture?) As we continued through the various rooms, we found it also had a grandeur to it that was different than other places. The carpet on the doors and walls of one



intermission hall was beautiful. Some of the furniture looked as if it belonged in Egypt. The Chandeliers were sparkling and many. The mirrored stairwell



allowed patrons to view themselves and as well as others as they descended down the stairs, as the mirrors were two stories tall. The marble and gold

were also stunning. The Opera House played homage to its favorite son, Mozart. He was featured in the wall paper as well as with a nice size bust above the wall and into the ceiling area of another intermission hall. The last intermission hall was a surprise with two modernistic paintings on the wall, a bar, and modern interior. They obviously tried to please all tastes.

After we finished the opera house tour, the Alice and Vern joined us on the street as we admired the outside of a building done in Baroque style architecture. We all decided to return to the ship and caught the 3:00 PM shuttle, as we had to be back on the ship no later than 4:30 PM. We returned to the ship at 3:20 PM and joined others on the sun deck as we pulled away from Vienna Dock #3 at 4:40 PM and headed toward Durnstein, Austria. Since the bridges were low, tall people had to duck and the Captain had to use the hydraulics to lower the Captains Bridge. This was very interesting to watch and all the men were fascinated! [Doug and several other taller men had to duck going under two bridges. Most people were sitting in lawn chairs but many were standing taking photos.] At 6:00 PM we went to the lounge for half price Gin and Tonic drinks night [One of Doug's favorites]. I had a Fanta Lemon drink. We had changed our clothes when we came back to the ship and met Alice, Vern, Dorothy and Herb in the lounge.

When they asked if we wanted to join them for dinner, we agreed. Herb said he would get us a table for six, by going down early.

At 7:00 PM we found Herb waiting for us with a nice table next to a window. I had my camera with me so when we were seated, I asked the Indonesian waiter to take our picture and he did. Once again he had me use some Indonesian words which I thought I had forgotten and he answered me in Indonesian. He was very attentive to us again and Alice teased me saying “I think he really, really likes you.” Ha [What he really liked was someone talking to him about his home land and family]. We had a good time visiting and I was able to take some photos of the sunset as the ship was cruising down the Danube. I also took a photo of an oil painting which we all loved that was near our table. We had all walked a lot this day and so headed for our various rooms after dinner was ended at 9:30 PM.

May 9th, 2007 – Wednesday



We had traveled all night and were still cruising when we went down for the breakfast buffet. We were continually amazed at the wonderful pastries. We noted that it was raining again and Lynn [Cruise Director] explained to everyone that they were all happy to see the rain because they had not had any for so long, and there was talk of shutting down the river cruises due to the decrease in river depth. The comment was well taken by all of us. She then said we would dock soon and they would furnish umbrellas for those who did not bring one. Everyone left the ship, split into three groups, and headed off with a city guide for a tour of Durnstein in the Wauchau Valley. Our guide was very easy to understand She was American, had married an Austrian, now lived in Durnstein with her husband and three children and loved to talk to

other Americans. She loved the town and that came through easily in her conversation. We entered Durnstein through a Rock Gate; saw the old fortified wall remnant, several small houses with painted stucco walls & little gardens. We also saw the terraced Grape Vineyards climbing up the rocky hills that had been started by the Monks in the past. The town was started in 1000 AD and she gave us a little history lesson as we walked the streets. We loved the town and thought it would be lovely to come back another time in sunshine. We ended our tour with her and she turned us over to a man who walked us through the Church and parts of the old Monastery with its blue and white Baroque tower. The paintings, Baroque décor, and religious artifacts were fascinating. [Yes, it was worth many photos both inside and outside.] Our tour ended there but we had free time and continued our own tour.



Our tour included stops in a couple of shops to look around. A walk down a long road brought us to the entry of a great looking hotel and an outlook over the Danube River. We stopped in a shop to taste the Apricot Liqueur and finally found a café on the second floor of an old building that served coffee and pastries, which we bought. Soon 5 other couples joined us. As we walked down toward the Winery, I spotted a little shop and we went in and found many things we liked. We bought Doug an Austrian hat pin, Ashlin an Austrian cami and Logan a “Tour the World” tee shirt and finally a round postcard of all the “photo hot spots” in Durnstein.



I had noticed an interesting gate at the top of a batch of stairs and convinced Doug to go back with me to look at it for a photo. When I got to the top of the stairs I said to Doug “Come up, you have to see this, I have found a cemetery and it is beautiful”. We both went in and took many photos. In this cemetery, the entire grave is humped with soil and flowers are planted on the hump instead of in pots. It was just beautiful and the Crosses were varied in structure. It was unique and we were glad we had made the stop.



We then continued down to the winery, the “Kloster Kellar” and were surprised to find out the Church guide was the owner of the winery. He gave us samples of six different wines they made



as he gave us a history of wine making in the Wauchau Valley and his involvement through many generations. We were not sure we wanted to attend but found it very interesting and a highlight. We were to return to the ship by 1:00 PM and we did so.

Our schedule for the day said we would have lunch on the Sun Deck. But this did not happen as it was still raining. We went to the dining room for lunch. The ship started cruising as soon as everyone was settled

into the dining room. After lunch, Annalee had another stretch class but I wanted to take a shower and wash my hair and Doug decided to read, so we returned to our room. We stayed in the room and after awhile [my shower was done and my hair was dried and curled] I began taking photos out the sliding glass door. Doug soon joined me and we snapped several different castles in the hills, saw mountains in the distance, more wine vineyards, various little villages, fog, nice green grasses with lots of trees.



At 4:45 PM it was announced that we would be going through a big lock. Lots of people went to the Sun Deck, like we did, to watch how the process looked in the daylight when you are



on a ship. It was fascinating and worth several photos. It was amazing to see how much water had to be put into the lock to raise us up to the next river level!

It was announced that the 6:00 Cocktail hour would feature half priced martinis.

We went to the lounge but I had an Orange Fanta and Doug had a diet Coke. The “Donau Klang Trio” (Donau means Danube in Austrian) played classical music as we drank and ate appetizers, from 6:30 to 7:30 PM. We went to the dining room for dinner at 7:30 PM. We could not find an empty table for six so Alice, Vern and Doug and I sat at one table and Dorothy and Herb sat across the narrow isle at another table. No problem with carrying on a conversation unless the waiters came to serve food.

9:15 PM we went to the lounge and watched others dance while I drank another Fanta orange and Doug had a diet coke. We left for our room at 9:45 PM. Even though the movie was “The Sound of Music” on the TV we read our books and went to sleep around 10:30 PM.

Facts about the Wauchau Valley We were among steep hillsides with rock outpourings which supported terraced miles of grapes as well as rows of Peach and Apricot trees. Long ago, this section was the NE fortified border of the Roman Empire. (It never ceases to amaze us how huge the Roman Empire was at one time.) Also in its past, Charlemagne used the Danube river for his campaigns and ferried troops to the Holy Land during the Crusades. (It was said that these were the reasons you saw so many castles along the Danube, whether they were being used or were abandoned.) The Wauchau Valley is known for grapes that produce the following wines: Riesling & Gruner Veltline as well as Muscat, Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay and Muller-Thurgau.

May 10th, 2007 – Thursday

We were told to eat breakfast early as we would need to board the buses for our trip to Salzburg by 8:00 AM. We are a timely group and most were done eating by 7:30 AM.

They called the buses by name – Blue, Green, or Yellow – and we filed on per our instructions and indeed left by 8:00 AM. The trip was two hours long so they gave us a combo restroom & snack break. We went to the restroom but opted to go outside to catch a breeze and take photos of the mountains and lake. After 15 minutes we were soon on our way. Once we arrived in Salzburg, we were unloaded by bus color and each group received a city guide. We started the tour in the Mirabelle Gardens which were in front of an old palace, now a museum. We enjoyed



the flowers and sculptures in their unique layouts. As we continued we walked passed various buildings that used to be in the hub of the city where Mozart lived.

We passed over the Salzach River via the Market Bridge and walked into more of old town. Our guide pointed out the following: Shopping Street, Mozart’s 2nd story six room apartment, the Open Air Market, Salzburg Cathedral, the Church of the Franciscans, Residence Square, Alte Market and part of the University. There was lots of walking on cobblestones and up and



down hills. It was enjoyable even if it was very hot. We were then shown to the Elefant Hotel where our lunch was to be served. We climbed up to the second floor and found a table right

next to one of the three windows and sat with Alice and Vern. We controlled the windows and opened both sides to allow a meager breeze into the three rooms. We enjoyed our meals but were ready to go back outside to our free time afternoon.

Doug and I went to Mozart's apartment and museum. We felt it was trying to tell us something but we did not know what and found it to be strange. We decided to see if we could find the same area our 1992 tour took us to and meandered around. (Where Hitler gave his "Pro Germany" talk and we walked among the gravesites But we never did find the exact spots?) Salzburg Cathedral looked different to us also as it had been cleaned on the outside.

We finally realized that we did not go into Old Town the same way we did in 1992 and that seemed to play with our minds as to where things were located. At any rate we saw new things as well as a few of the old things and it was well worth the trip. We enjoyed seeing the countryside to and from Salzburg. It was an exhausting day as it was extremely hot and humid which made the uphill walks even harder. The fact that it was packed with tourists also made "getting around" inconvenient. So when the call came to come back to the buses was made, not one person



complained!

Our ride back was fairly quiet as everyone was enjoying the air conditioned bus. We had much more traffic than in the morning hours and we were a half hour late coming back. No problem, since we were cool! Ha. When we arrived at the ship, most of us went to our rooms to clean up and then we went to the lounge as it was half price Margaritas and this was the most popular drink yet. We went to the dining room at 7:00 PM and enjoyed our dinner once again. After dinner we headed for the lounge at 9:30 PM to see the "Crew Show". They performed a skit about the "Good Old Days", a music show, a magic show, a barkeeper's show, a fashion show, folklore dance, towel and napkin folding show, a man as a ballerina, the gnomes, the Indonesians playing bamboo instruments and a crocodile puppet song. We were very entertained and laughed most of the night away as they had put a comedic swing to each show. All nine Indonesians performed in the skits, as we knew they would since they love to perform. We told them all how much we enjoyed them and gave them a standing ovation. We filed out of the lounge at 11:00 PM and went to bed.

Facts about Austria: Official name is Republik Osterreich (Republic of Austria) – 2007 Population was 8,040,000 – Capital City is Vienna with 1.5 million – 31,945 square miles, slightly smaller than the state of Maine in the USA - Bordered by: Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Switzerland.

May 11th, 2007 – Friday

Once again we loved the ship's breakfast pastries. [Thank goodness they have us walking approximately three miles per day.] We were still traveling on the river at breakfast time. When we were done eating we took our cameras up to the sun deck and took photos as we arrived at



9:15 AM in Passau at the junction of the glacier sand filled "Inn" river coming into the "Danube" river. It was interesting to see the milky white glacier water merge into the Danube. We docked on the Danube and they pointed out the third river called the "Ilz" coming into the Danube. Thus their pamphlets say Passau is the city of three rivers. The town is full of bright colored stucco buildings on one side and an old fortress and palace that are now an

Elderhostel and

museum on the other side. As we came into dock we disturb ducks and their babies sunning on the cement steps. The all scuttled into the water. We can see clean streets, Baroque architecture, Gothic architecture, many bridges and an Orphanage. We split into three groups and we meet our city guides and we are off on another walking tour.

(Time to walk off those pastries) The guide is

enthusiastically telling us about the city and it is obvious she is proud of it. We saw our first Apricot Tree up close. [It reminded us of the Kiwi vines in New Zealand, in color and leaf shape] We walked up hills, through inside courtyards, and into a square housing St. Steven's



Cathedral. The Baroque décor was outstanding and almost unbelievable. This cathedral has the largest pipe organ in the world. The décor is intricate yet not gaudy. Needless to



stay we both snapped away and took many photos. This was the last stop on our city tour and we had one and a half hours of free time next. We wandered around on our own and took many photos.

One of the Tour Guides had told us about a glass shop where the man did his own etchings and the price was reasonable. So we set off to find it and stumbled upon a



little shop that sold all kinds of different things. We bought laser cut Christmas ornaments at the first shop and then four



wine glasses at the second shop. I chatted with the man as he was wrapping up our glasses for traveling. I told him I had German heritage on my father's side of the family and

my maiden name was Hemmen. He cocked his head and questioned that name. I told him that Grandpa Hemmen (Kaos) had told me it was changed to Hemmen from “Hemn” and then he smiled and nodded his head and said “Yes, Hemn is a good German name”.

We stopped at an outdoor market to admire the beautiful flowers and Herb asked me if I would take he and Dorothy’s photo. I had them stand a little apart with a beautiful purple flower between them and they liked the photo. Free time was ticking away and we had to go back to the ship. As soon as we boarded they announced that Mimosas would be served on the sun deck at a reduced price as we moved up the river to Straubing, Germany. Soon it was lunch time and we all retired to the dining room.



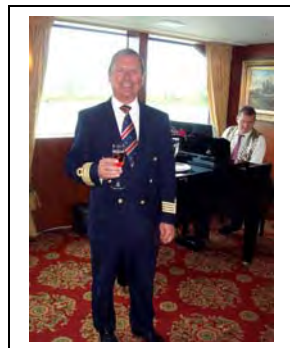
I asked our Indonesian waiter for a sedikit (sa dee Keet) drink and he said Bu, you want to say “Kecil” (ka cheel) Sedikit means small in quantity and Kecil means small drink. Aha



I am still learning. I would use other Indonesian words that would just pop out of my memory because I sure had not used them for a long time. I asked how long he would be working on the ship. He said they all would work for seven months and then be home in Indonesia for five months before the next seven month contract would be signed. I asked if he was married and he said yes and had two children. Most all of them were college graduates speaking English very well and usually other languages as well. We ate our lunch and then returned to the sun deck to watch the shores as we cruised along.



At 3:00 PM we became serious about packing. At 4:00 PM we had to go to the lounge so the directors could give us a briefing for the next day – our last day – disembarkation, ending the rest of the tour by bus, and calling out names and times of flights out of Prague for our return home. At the end, Lynn asked if she had not named anyone, and I raised my hand. She said she had missed our name and gave us our information. The Alice, Vern, Dorothy and Herb were kidding us later that they forgot we were around! Ha

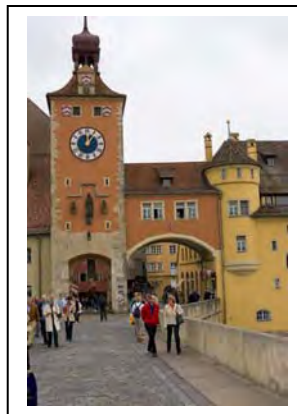


The Captain’s Farewell Party was in the lounge at 6:15 PM with special appetizers and wine. We went to the dining room at 7:00 PM for the Farewell Dinner and enjoyed laughter and conversation. At 9:00 PM we went to the lounge where Zibi played his acoustical piano for us. They announced that “The Phantom of the Opera” movie was available in our rooms but most of us went to bed. We docked in Straubing, Germany around 10:30 PM for a Crew required rest but most of us did not even realize it as we were sleeping.

Facts about Germany: The official name is “Federal Republic of Germany” – 2007 population was 82,000,000 – Capital City is Berlin with 3.95 million people – There are 134,910 Square Miles – There are 16 states within the country – When Hungary dismantled the security along the border of Austria and East Germany in 1989, East Germans streamed into West Germany and West and East Germany unified. West Germany ended up spending over \$1 trillion dollars to repair environmental damage and property damage as well as upgrading the standard of living in East Germany. Today, the West German economy still feels the effects of unification but has always been the driving force in the European Economy.

May 12th, 2007 – Saturday

The Swiss Emerald left Straubing, Germany at 3:00 AM and cruised toward Regensburg where we arrived at 7:30 AM. We had been told to have our luggage ready for pick up before we went to breakfast. We did and went to breakfast. The removal of the luggage was orderly and neat and taken to three different buses. We returned our keys to the receptionist, paid the bill for our drinks, purchases of postcards, stamps and Doug’s sweatshirt and received our passports back. At 8:45 AM we said goodbye and wheeled our hand luggage out to the bus where they put it while we went on a morning walking tour of Regensburg, located in the state of Bavaria.



We walked the town for one and a half hours with a city guide, touring “Old Town” which is the largest surviving medieval town in Germany. It had a St. Peter’s Cathedral which is Bavaria’s most impressive Gothic wonder. (Gothic – Pointed arches, Rose windows, increase in window sizes, flying buttresses, stone foundations, Pinnacles, and always reaching to be taller Closer to God!) The town also is host to a medieval stone bridge, as well as some medieval buildings. We were shown part of an old fortified wall and turret incorporated into a stucco building, preserving the old stones of the medieval wall. We also found buildings reminiscent of the Flemish design we had seen in Belgium and The Netherlands. Inside a large courtyard we found paintings on an outside wall of Knights. [I loved the gargoyles on St. Peter’s Cathedral.] Doug and I found the architecture fascinating.

We even learned that couples must marry in the Town Hall for their legal ceremony. If they then want to have an additional wedding in the Church, they may do so. We saw two couples and a few family members in the town hall in full dress the day we were there. After the City Tour we had free time and lunch was on our own. We took off for more photos. Time was going quickly so we walked down to one of the suggested places to eat “Salzstadel Café & Restaurant” and sat down with Betty and Lisa for Brats & Kraut. We ordered one order which included 8 small brats and a mound of kraut. It was so delicious, we could not believe it. The sausages were lean and the kraut had a sweet taste. Doug ordered another half order for himself. We decided to try their Apple dessert and found it was outstanding. We finished in time

to join the others with a walk across the medieval stone bridge across the river and over two small islands to yet another side of town. One last bathroom stop and we all boarded our three buses for our three hour long trip to Prague, Czech Republic.



Facts about the Swiss Emerald Ship: It was built in 2006 – It is 361 feet long – It is 37 feet wide - The draft is 4 feet (depth in the water) – It can hold 124 guests – The Registry is “Swiss” – The Captain was German – It had two 1000 hp Caterpillar engines.

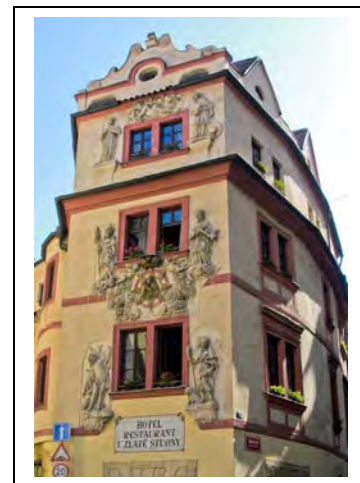
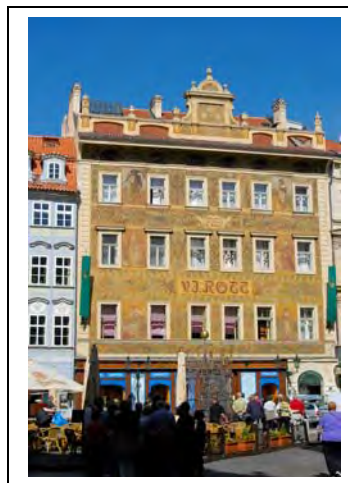
The ride to Prague was comfortable and we arrived around 3:30 PM. Our bus load was silent as we drove through many blocks of dirty streets, dirty buildings, graffiti, and broken windows and boarded up places. Then we crossed a bridge into the “Old Town” section with gorgeous architecture, clean and busy streets, which were full of different colored buildings. Everyone gave a sigh of relief! We drove up to the front door of the 5 Star Marriott, our keys were ready and we were off the bus and heading for our rooms. The rooms were big with nice bathrooms. We unpacked for four days and rested a bit before cleaning up and dressing up for a dinner in the Conference Room. It was hot in the dining room and 112 more people made it worse. We ate and soon retired to the bar off the lobby for a drink with Alice, Vern, Dorothy and Herb and then headed off to read books awhile before bed.

May 13th, 2007 – Sunday

We headed for yet another buffet breakfast. The café had the atmosphere of coziness, was clean, and the variety of food was wonderful. After we ate we went to pick up our cameras and then waited in the lobby for everyone to gather for our city tour. Once again we were divided into three groups and each had a different guide. We could not hear our soft spoken guide and when asked by our tour director if she could speak up, she told her she was doing the best that she could and people would just have to come closer!



Jan Palach Square



We also had problems understanding her dialect and decided we would be better off periodically listening and going off to take photos, since we had a city map. We walked all morning and saw the Charles Bridge, Jan Palach Square, Town Hall Square, Astronomical Clock, while weaving our way through thousands of people attending the nationally televised marathon. We ended the tour with a trip to the Museum of Communism which was dark, dreary, and had a very small

room for a movie on how they lived under communism. We decided we wanted to end our tour on an “up note” and left the museum early to be on our own.

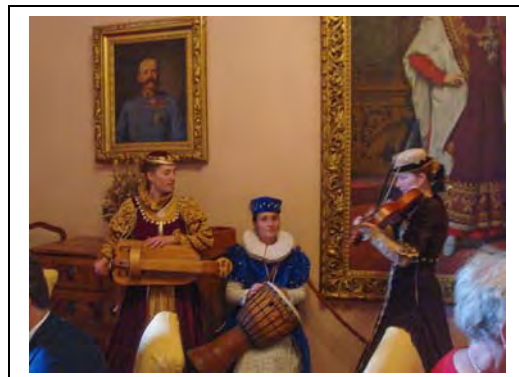
It was hot and humid but we continued taking photos and finally decided to stop at a TGI-Fridays café. I ordered appetizer plate and Lemon Fanta and Doug had a pork chop with fries and a coke. (\$40.00 later we finished!) We continued taking photos after lunch, walking the cobblestone streets, not enjoying the crowds but certainly enjoying the architecture. Finally, we decided to head back to the hotel for a rest before cleaning up and dressing up for our Tour Farewell Dinner at the Nelahozeves Castle.



We boarded three buses for our 45 minute ride to the Castle. We headed into the countryside, through the small village of Veltrusy, and up a long hill to the castle. We got off the bus and walked the stone bridge to the courtyard entry where people were waiting to serve us drinks. Soon Mr. Lobowitz joined us and began telling us his experiences in owning a castle. He started by telling us the reason we could understand him so well was because he was American, had grown up in Boston, MA and had been in Commercial Real Estate. (Herb smiled – as all these things applied to him also But he had no castle! Ha) He continued to tell us he was one of four children and his father had grown up in one of the other ten castles his family had owned but they lost

everything between the Russians and the Germans and the wars.

He explained that when the Czech Republic proclaimed 10 years ago that they could petition for the lost property and personal items, his father asked him if he would help him. He said it had taken 10 years and four attorneys and they now had about everything returned to them. When asked questions, he said it was a very expensive to have your items returned back to you. He also said he and his wife and their two children did not live in the castle, they lived in a six room apartment in Prague because: A) They could not afford to live in the castle B) They wanted their children to have friends to play with in the city C) They had many different functions in the castle in order to earn money to pay for all the renovations D) He had entered into a contract with Tauck Tours 10 years ago to bring their tours to the castle, he would talk to them, and they would feed them and show them part of the rooms for a fee and this was a big part of what kept the castle open.



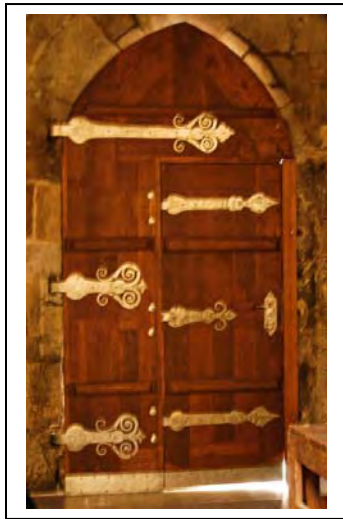
We were soon ushered into the castle, walking two long halls to get to our five individual rooms set with round tables, linens, and a traveling girl’s classical music trio playing the old instruments from the times of the castles. We were served a three course meal with different wines.

Our evening in the Nelahozeves’ Castle on top of a hill near Veltrusy was great. Before leaving, we made a trip through the gift shop and purchased note cards that feature the details from the panels of a 17th century pietra dura cabinet on exhibition in the Castle.

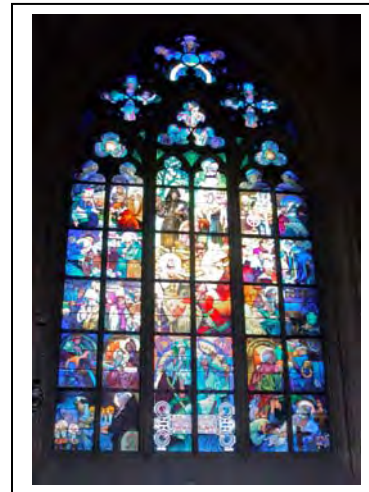
We boarded the buses for our 45 minute drive back to Prague and off to our rooms and bed at 11:00 PM.

May 14th, 2007 – Monday

This is our last tour day. We were up at 6:30 AM for our “Praha Brasserie” café breakfast in the hotel - excellent food. We met in the lobby at 8:30 AM bus departure for the Hradcany District and the Prague Castle. Our city guide took us to our first stop, which was a tour of the Cathedral of St. Vidas. Once again we astounded by the beauty. [And I love the gargoyles – Waterspouts in the form of a grotesque man or animal – meant to keep the bad spirits away]



Once again we are taken back by the “riches of the churches”. But if all of these things were destroyed, imagine the loss of history, story telling, and beliefs of all of those before us?



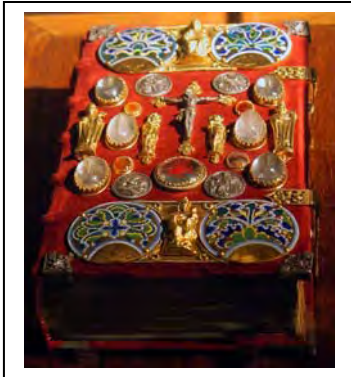
Then we went into the courtyard of the Castle itself. I took Doug’s photo taking a photo.



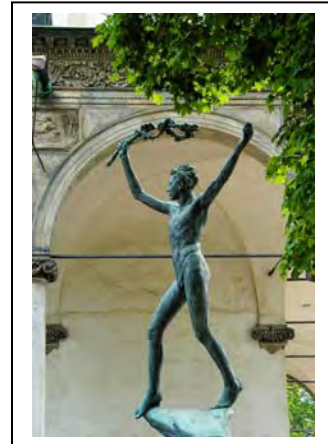
Our next stop was the Strahov Monastery Library. Once again Tauck Tours have made a deal to get its tours into places where others have not been able to go. We were allowed into the library with the city



guide. She explained that the Monks kept complete records of the past and people may make an appointment for research purposes for a fee which is used for the upkeep of everything we saw. The items included books of course but also furniture, oil paintings, architectural décor, Knight Helmets, a wooden ship, Swash Buckle Boots, Gem covered Bible cover and on and on.



Our next walk was taken through the Palace Gardens to see the plants, flowers, other buildings, and an outlook spot with the city below. Also at the outlook, the little Eiffel Tower was pointed out to us on another hill near the castle.



At 12:30 PM we were on our own. We asked to be dropped off on a certain corner and Alice and Vern joined us in a hunt for a place to eat lunch. We found an outdoor café serving fish & chips with an ice cream sundae for dessert. This was located next to the water and under the Charles Bridge. We pooled our money and just made it paying our bill with the last Czech Kroners that we all had. We then went our separate ways.



Charles Bridge

Doug and I went even deeper below the bridge and found an entire shoreline of hotels, businesses, and shops at the river line. We took photos of the bottom structure of the Charles Bridge. Then we decided to go on top of the Charles Bridge and take our time walking it. It was full of vendors, sculptures, and people. A place all unto itself and it was a great place to take photos of different parts of the city.

We started our long walk back to the hotel but could not help keeping the cameras ready as we would see several magnificent buildings we had not seen before. We were also on a mission to buy a piece of Czech Glass and some glass pieces for Keiron and Chontel. We stopped in “Mosers” glass shop It was huge and covered an entire half block. It did not take very long for us to find “our” glass piece. Then we



walked closer to the hotel and found a second glass shop that sold Etched Czech glass and bought the girls a blue etched and green etched Liqueur glass. We had everything carefully padded and packed to take home by hand carrying them. The artist of our glass piece was Frantisek Halama



who created a vase of women in periwinkle blue. (Our vase was \$172.00 USA and the girl’s glasses cost us \$22.00 for the two glasses).

We continued our walk to the hotel and taking photos along the way. I bought postcards and made some out to mail when we got back to the Hotel and kept some for our photo book. Doug took a nap for an hour and I began packing as we had to leave the hotel at 6:30 AM the next morning. I packed everything except what I needed this night and tomorrow morning. When Doug woke up he did the same. We both took showers, cleaned up, and put on clean clothes for our French dinner with Alice, Vern, Dorothy and Herb. We were to meet Virginia (guide) in the lobby at 7:00 PM and she walked us to our French Café and made sure they seated us and gave them instructions for our meal. We had a good time, laughed a lot, and took our time. Once again my personal fan had saved me from completely melting away.

We all walked back to the hotel together and decided to have one last drink in the bar of the hotel with some conversation. Then we said goodbye and went to our rooms. We jumped into bed right away as we had to get up by 4:30 AM.

May 15th, 2007 - Tuesday We were indeed up by 4:30 AM. First we got ourselves ready, then finished the last minute packing and went down to the Praha Brasserie for our last buffet breakfast. We saw many others and said goodbye as we were all going to the airport at different times. Then we went back to our room to get those carry-ons with their presents. We made it down to the lobby on time and boarded our shuttle for the airport. Dorothy and Herb were on the same bus we were although going on a different airline. They got off before we did and we said goodbye once again.

It was our turn to get off and we took all our luggage to check in with Lufthansa. We got our tickets, went through security and asked for the location of the Vat Tax Counter. We were sent to three different places The last one was correct and outside security so we had to go through security again with our carry-ons! Live and learn. No, cause they will change the rules the next time!! Ha. After a short rest and a coke, we ran into the Alice and Vern again and said our second goodbye to them. Finally, we were off for our long ride home. We arrived late on Tuesday evening. Ahhhh the house looked bigger and we fell into bed and went to sleep immediately.

