

# River Cruise The Netherlands & Belgium and a Paris Visit

April 2nd to 21st, 2010



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This is our second river boat cruise with Tauck Tours. It was a tulip time cruise of the rivers and canals in both the Netherlands and Belgium. After the tour we visited our former 1978 French Foreign Exchange student in Paris for a planned three days. Because the Iceland volcano caused ash cloud delayed our return flight; we spent seven days in Paris.

On April 2<sup>nd</sup> we took a taxi (\$35.00 + \$5.00 tip) from our house to the airport. We found they had new sign-in kiosks and were not at all busy so the gal

behind the desk came out to chat and sign us up while she chatted with us. (Later we commented that these kiosks were logically set out and a big improvement.)

April 2, 2010 - Friday - We ate a light breakfast and visited before going to our gate. As we were just waiting to sit down, someone said "Well, imagine running into you two out here!" We turned around it was our nephew, Mark. He asked us if we were headed somewhere and Doug told him about the trip. Then his wife, Megan, joined in the conversation and we ended up chatting several times before boarding the plane.

We left Des Moines around 10:30 AM. We arrived later than planned in Detroit so had to rush to catch our International Flight. We had never flown with Delta before and were very pleased with both flights to Europe and returning to the USA. The food was edible and the Stewards and Stewardesses were very friendly. The flight over to Amsterdam was in two legs - First flying from Des Moines to Detroit and then to Amsterdam. (7 Hrs. & 20 Minutes)



In the Detroit airport we admired their underground walkway from Domestic to International



flights and its ceiling changing different colors. Next we saw their electric train above the businesses as it shuttled people silently to the farthest gates. We had to rush to our gate and then as we waited to take off, we saw seven Policemen

going through bags that were coming off a plane that had just arrived. Soon they brought out the dogs that began sniffing at several bags. We pulled away after awhile and did not know what happened after that. [Ahhhh beginning of the trip intrigue!] The sun was setting as we left Detroit. Although it was night time, I did not sleep at all and Doug took only one 15 and one 10 minute nap before we arrived in the sunrise and saw many windmills in the ocean and the beginning of the city. [Returning, we flew from Paris to Minneapolis and then to Des Moines.]

April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010 - Saturday - We were unfamiliar with the airport but followed the crowd to "Customs" which was slow and then came out into a large shopping hall - we did not know where Tauck was going to pick us up and I finally asked where to go and they pointed to another area .... Then we saw someone with a Tauck Sign that said Frank Rasmussen. She was very nice, spoke excellent English and took us to the Pulitzer Hotel - very "old world quaint" and our room was ready upon our arrival at 10:30 AM. Doug napped until noon - I could not sleep so put clothes away and set up the bathroom.



How Doug's body knows it is noon no matter where he is, is a mystery to me .... But he woke up and was hungry for lunch! Doug asked for a café and they gave us a map to the hotel café .... Yes, you needed one as you wound through various sheltered walkways to get to another part of the hotel. [The original hotel had bought several different buildings in a block square so you meandered from one part to another.] The food was wonderful.

After lunch we picked up a city map from the Concierge of the hotel and he marked several places



of interest for us to see and we walked with cameras out for their first assignment, in the light mist. It tended toward a gray day but that did not dampen our resolve as we snapped away at the canal bridges, Flemish Design, Riverboat houses, thousands of bicycles, and loads of busy people bustling here and there. In the late afternoon we both napped after our walk. Before long

we lost the electricity in our room, called the front desk to report it and they said they would have someone check it out. Soon, Doug's clock told him it was time for dinner and we returned to the hotel dining room where we ate vegetarian meals which were fresh and delicious. We stopped at the Concierge's desk to say we had called about losing our electricity but no one had come to check it out and we were going to dinner so we would not be there. He said he would make sure it was fixed. After dinner, it was fixed. The outside temperature was 46 degrees. It was raining off and on. We stayed in and read books, plugged in our electronics for charging, and soon nodded off for the night.

April 4, 2010 - Sunday - Sunday was the day most people were arriving for the river cruise. We ate breakfast in the hotel café and watched the rain come down. At 9:00 AM we went to the lobby, met two of our guides, chatted a bit and then found out when we would board the cruise ship. We met Karen and Novel from Houma, Louisiana and chatted awhile as it was raining pretty steadily. Karen thought she had laid down her book and it had been taken. She said the name was "Steve's Guide Book" and asked us to watch for it and if we found it to give it to her. Finally we decided to go to the café again for tea, as it rained harder.... They would not accept our money as they said we had been there earlier as they recognized us and it was just an extension of our free breakfast!

We returned to the lobby and ran into Karen and Novel again. They had gone to church and Karen said she felt stupid, as she was rummaging through a bag she carried and found her book, so it was not taken or lost but she had forgotten where she had put it! We all laughed. We went for a short walk of four blocks and then returned to the hotel for lunch.



We packed our large bags, left them in our room for pick up and checked out of the hotel after leaving our small bags in the hotel storage room where we would pick them up later to take to the ship. The sun had come out so we took off for another walk -first we saw the Anne Frank House which was closed for Easter. We decided to continue walking and walked around 15 blocks, taking many unhurried photos before returning to the hotel. When we

arrived they were loading the large bags on the trucks to be taken to the ship. We boarded buses at 4:00 PM to go to the ship with our "carry-ons" in tow. We arrived at the ship at 4:15 PM and went aboard to show them our passports which they held and someone showed us to our suite. We went to the main



lounge at 5:30 PM for the Safety Drill and met all of the crew at that time. [Sandy listened and found out there were nine Indonesians on board.] Our Ship Director was Steve. Happy Hour began at 6:15 PM and the Tauck Tour Discovery Briefing, [what would happen and when, the next day] was followed by dinner at 7:15 PM. We sat at a round table toward the back of the dining room with Karen & Novel and Shirl & Phillip of Nether Poppleton, UK. Paul and Sherry of Potomac, MD asked if they could join us and everyone said yes and that began our first meal on board the Swiss Sapphire Ship in Amsterdam, Netherlands. The conversation was varied – we had lots of laughter – and Sherry filled us all in on everything proper in the Jewish Religion. She also questioned Shirl & Phillip about the Royal Family and all their relationships with others. We finally left for our room at 10:00 PM and did not even read. We had a full day - sleep was welcome.

April 5, 2010 – Monday – The briefing the day before told us to have breakfast no later than 7:30 AM as we would need to meet in the lounge at 7:45 AM for a demonstration of “Quietvoxes” for our afternoon visit to the Rijksmuseum. [Quietvox – a receiver with an ear piece that picks up a signal from the tour guide’s broadcast Unit. We could all hear what was being said from several feet away which allowed you to mill around as you were being told about the art work in a room.]

At 8:00 AM we boarded three different buses for an hour long ride to “Keukenhof Gardens”. This was a Spring Flower Farm of Tulips, Hyacinths, crocus, lilies, and lilacs. We were to be there for three hours to wander about at our own speed. It was a fantastic place for photo taking (see next page for photos). The layouts of various parts of the park were amazing in design and color. Even the building housing the new plants to be set out in a few weeks was fantastic and gave each one of us ideas for our own gardens. Everyone was taking photos galore. I bought postcards, porcelain Dutch shoes (for Jean and Sharon), and tried to find the Dutch Canal Houses again, but they did not have them.

Peter was our guide on the bus and talked about the animals of The Netherlands and their contribution to the ground in fertilization which helped grow the grasses and trees and plants on the reclaimed land. We could tell he was a natural storyteller as he gave us humor along with his facts which had us nodding and laughing. [He had just completed his 20<sup>th</sup> year with Tauck Tours and obviously loved his job as well as meeting and entertaining different people.]

We left the gardens at 12:00 PM and went to some canal touring boats as city guides explained the buildings, how they were built, the architecture and other types of interests while we ate lunch that was served by a catering service. We sat with Bill and Nancy from Hilo, Hawaii. He was a college Professor and she was a teacher. He was quite silent but she was pleasant. Later, he became friendlier and really enjoyed talking to Doug, periodically.

**KEUKENHOF GARDENS**

**APRIL 5, 2010**



**KEUKENHOF  
GARDENS HAS  
IT'S OWN PAGE  
OF PHOTOS DUE  
TO THE BEAUTY  
OF THE  
GARDENS.**





I took several photos but did not like them as the angles were odd as one 'looked up' to the buildings from the boats "down in" the canal. I ended up throwing many of them away.

At 3:15 PM, local guides met us where the boats let us off, walked us to the Rijksmuseum for an Art lesson on Rembrandt and Vermeer while talking to us through our "Quietvoxes". This worked very well and we did not have to crowd around the guide as we could even hear her in another room. Most people agreed it was nice to have a sense of freedom while walking around a room and still be able to hear the facts. After the museum we went into a store as I was hoping to find the "Dutch Canal Houses" I wanted to collect. They did not and I

decided to try other places. The buses picked us up as we were to dress up for the Captain's Dinner after the "Welcome Reception". Dinner was held in the ship dining room at 7:15 PM with many different courses. We had started to leave Amsterdam and journey down the river toward Hoorn at 6:30 PM. Novel and Karen joined us for dinner. We enjoyed watching the world slide past us and we arrived in Hoorn at 10:00 PM. I took a couple of sunset photos and then we were off to our room to read our books and slide into sleep.

April 6, 2010 - Tuesday - In the morning we had to choose a



time to take a walking tour through the town of Hoorn. We chose 9:00 AM as we were up, had breakfast and ready to go. One of the guides (In our case it was Szilvia) walked us to a city square explaining many things we were seeing along the way for 45 minutes and then left us to peruse the city by ourselves. This was an old city, many nifty buildings with ancient old architecture, clean and neat and a busy place. We took many photos, once



again. We even stopped to have hot chocolate in a neat bar before returning to the ship at 11:30 AM. [The Dutch girl that waited on us was tall and blonde and cute and we both admired her!] Once everyone had returned from their walking trip, we departed at 1:00 PM and enjoyed an Asian Lunch in the ship dining room. I said "selamat siang" to our waiter and he immediately smiled and said in English "You know Indonesian?" and always smiled and talked to us after that greeting. [They always want to know where we lived and then they would tell us where they were from in Indonesia.] There were nine Indonesian staff aboard and we obviously were pointed out as they each separately would greet us in Indonesian. [I am learning that I am losing the language slowly and this helped me have to think in Indonesian again.]

We arrived in Enkhuizen at 3:00 PM, collected our Quietvoxes and walked toward the ferry dock. The ferry was late but we enjoyed the sunshine and finally boarded to take it to the “Zeiderzee Museum”. We met our local guide who walked us through the open air village as she explained



things to us. It was very interesting and she took her job very seriously. Once again it was nice to wander off to catch photos away from the crowd and yet still be able to hear the guide informing us about the area. We departed at 5:00 PM via a ferry ride back to our ship and the Swiss Sapphire departed at 5:30 PM for Kampen. Just before Happy Hour I went into the ship's gift shop and found seven Dutch Canal Houses! [I had probably been in seven other shops in various towns and could not find them and here they were staring at me.] I had Doug come to look at them and he said, “Well, you might as well get them all” ...so the gal wrapped them all up for me and kept them until we settled the bill before getting off the ship.

At 6:15 PM Happy Hour, Doug and I had diet cokes and then returned to the room to nap. Whew, the time flew by as we ended up sleeping 45 minutes so we rushed to the dining room to eat at 7:15 PM. We joined Kay and Bridgette from Michigan. [Both were teachers, but Kay had retired.] Also at the table was Philip, an accountant with a non-profit “for the poor” organization, who said he had traveled and made 52 Tauck Tour trips. [A little unbelievable as he looked to be in his 40's and that would mean he would have to make two to three trips per year over a 20 year period.] Anyway he got into an argument with Kay and Bridgette about teaching and the New York City schools. He told them they had not experienced real discipline problems until they had taught in New York City schools. It was an interesting discussion that left both sides unsatisfied with the talk.

After dinner we chose to go into Kampen in the dark and take some photos. We managed to take several unusual photos of brick entry gates, a Cathedral, some store fronts, an artsy building, and a great bridge lit up across the river. The reflections of the bridge's lights were awesome.



After we returned to the ship we went to the lounge for diet cokes while we looked at our photos. We headed to our room and bed at 11:38 PM.

April 7, 2010 - Wednesday - We left Kampen at 6:30 AM ready to enjoy a leisurely morning as we cruised on IJssel River. At 10:00 AM in the main lounge we saw a 45 minute movie on water management in The Netherlands which gave us a very real look at how they captured the land back from the sea. They are concerned that because of Global Warming the sea may someday take the land back. The movie told about what signs they were already seeing that may prove this to be true.

At 11:30 AM we enjoyed an Italian lunch in the dining room and Paul and Sherri sat with us. She saw that Doug had a Blackberry phone and talked about not being able to get on the internet with her Blackberry and that she had bought it especially for this trip, since it was supposed to be a "world" phone. She asked if he had problems too and he told her he did not have a problem. She asked if he could look at hers and see what was wrong. So he said he would - she left to get it in their room and her husband Paul proceeded to say they did not buy it she rented it for the trip. She came back and Doug did look at it and said she did not have it set on the correct network type it should be on GSM and he told her how to change it.



As we continued to cruise we took various photos of houses, farms, a huge herd of ponies, one falling down castle, windmills, large cranes in the trees, other boats and the river. It was a relaxing ride.

At 12:45 PM we arrived in Zutphen. We then boarded coaches for an excursion to De Hoge Veluwe National Park and to the "Kroller Muller Museum" which housed a private collection. It had many Van Gogh paintings, some Picasso paintings plus many other artists as well as an outdoor sculpture garden. The setting was rather unique and many people were in the park. Once again it was nice to have the Quietvoxes on as we could hear what the guide was talking about even though we had gone ahead of the group as we wanted a faster pace and to take more photos. When finished we walked back to the buses which drove us onto Arnhem where we caught up with the ship. We set off cruising toward Nijmegen and returned to our room. We both napped but I napped for a couple of hours. Doug finally woke me up to get ready for dinner, of course! We went to the lounge for our daily "Discovery Briefing" to find out what we would be doing the next day.

Off to dinner @ 8:15 PM and we sat with Frederick & Julie from Wilton, CT and Guy & Sue from Annapolis, MD. We saw many other ships going both ways as the river was much wider. Several were Cargo ships (coal, containers from trains, and huge barges.) All of a sudden we made a 180 degree turn and ended up parking next to another cruise ship. After dinner, at 9:15 PM we were entertained by the group named "La Strada" that played classical music. (Two violinists and one guitarist) They were excellent and I took video to go onto our DVD of photos. Soon another ship made the same maneuver we had and parked right next to us. I talked to Steve our Ship's Tour Director a bit about the movie on capturing the land back from the sea and India as Doug had told him we were going to India next. [Formally he had been an Engineer but was now a Tauck Tour Ship Director which he said he loved.] Doug was pooped and was already in the room in bed when I returned but he did not wake up.

April 8, 2010 - Thursday - We had stayed overnight in Nijmegen and I did not get to sleep until 1 AM as I kept hearing a metal pinging noise for an hour and a half. The ship rocked and rocked



and I was ready to call the office to see if something was loose when I decided to get up and look out the window ... as I walked passed Doug's feet I saw his feet moving, lifted up the covers and saw him flicking the metal support of the bed and realized that it was him making that noise. I woke him up after covering the



metal piece with a blanket and let him know what he was doing! I took three aspirin and finally got to sleep. I woke up at 6:30 AM and we had breakfast

at 7:30 AM. At 9:30 AM we picked up our Quietvoxes and walked up the street to the Valkhof Museum. The Romans had taken over this city, renamed it Ulpia Noniomagus, and it became a prosperous city. It was considered to be one of the oldest cities in The Netherlands... 70 AD! The museum was great with many findings from the Roman era but our time was short so we only saw five different rooms. We had free time after the museum so we walked around the town and took many photos of unique buildings, lamp posts, onion top domes, Fancy brick buildings, quaint doors, and of course a Cathedral. We made it back to the ship at noon, in time for lunch at 1:30 PM. We ate with Don from Pinehurst, NC and Ann & Jim from Larchmont, NY.

At 2:00 PM we decided to go to the Lido Bar for a snack and watch the river as we traveled. Kay asked if I played bridge, and I said yes ... she wanted me to join them as the fourth at the table, so I did that as Doug lounged around a bit and then returned to our room. I quit playing bridge at 3:00 PM as we had an appointment for a tour of the galley. I picked Doug up and we headed for the galley. We met the Chef and his assistant and he explained how he organized things. The galley was three times as big as we thought it would be and he was certainly much younger than we thought he would be. The organized kitchen was quite nice.

At 4:00 PM Tom and Szlivia put on a demonstration about “Dutch Treats and Traditions” in the Ship’s lounge. It was fun and many of us decided to find some of the same treats they served us on our next trip to a town. At 6:45 PM it was Szlivia’s turn to fill us in on what to expect from Friday’s events. We went to dinner at 7:00 PM and Don joined us.

At 9:00 PM “THE BATTLE OF THE SEXES” took place in the lounge. Steve hosted the event, gave us tough questions to answer and also judged who gave the best answers. It was great fun and allowed for a lot of laughter. THE WOMEN WON! We were off to bed at 11:30 PM. I was able to capture four sunset photos before going to bed.

April 9, 2010 – Friday – I woke up to noises and discovered we were inside a huge lock. Doug had gone to the Lido Bar for coffee. I was awake so cleaned up and dressed and Doug returned and was ready for a full breakfast in the dining room at 7:30 AM. We then went to the lounge to pick up our Quietvoxes, met with our City Guide who took us through the streets of Maastricht for two hours. We were happy taking many different photos of buildings, cobbled streets, Cathedrals, Sculptures in the Square, The inside of a Catholic Cathedral and its collected Treasures. After that tour, we were on our own and we took more photos of this fascinating city, and it dawned on me to take photos of the fashions inside the windows. Then we walked across a huge bridge and took pictures of the Swiss Sapphire ship from different angles.



Maastricht, one of the oldest cities in the Netherlands, is in the most southeast corner of The Netherlands surrounded by both Belgium and Germany. In December 1991 the heads of 12 European Countries met here and reached an agreement on a political, monetary and economic union. Thus in February 1992, the Treaty on the European Union was signed by the heads of government of the 12 countries in Maastricht. [The town’s beginnings dated back to 1611]

We returned to the ship for a Spanish Mexican Lunch which we thought was delicious. One of the things we ate was Dragon Fruit – White with black seeds – Slightly sweet with a citrus taste. We both liked it. Doug’s back was bugging him so he went to our room to lay flat on the floor. I went back into town to de Bijenkorf Department Store to find the waffle cookies with syrup (Stoopt) from directions given to me by a “Pastry Shop” lady. As I wound my way around – a lady started talking to me in English (I recognized her as part of our tour group) but had not met her yet, and I touched her shoulder and said “I do not think you mean to talk to me” and she

looked at me and said “Oh, I’m sorry, I thought you were my sister-in law.” Then her sister-in-law walked up and said “Hello” and we all laughed. I told them I was on my way to pick up some of the waffle snacks, and the sister-in-law said “I just bought some, go to this store behind us, they have them on the first floor through that door.” I thanked her and bought three sacks for ourselves, Chontel and Keiron. They cost 2 Euros or approximately \$ 3.37 in USA dollars. I found my way back to the ship area and walked across yet another bridge and took photos of the ship from a different angle, more buildings, the river, and architecture. Then I ambled back to the ship. I took photos of some art work in the halls of the ship as well as the lobby before dinner.

Doug felt better and we ambled back to the Lido Bar and relaxed. The Hungarian boy (Barnabas) stopped to ask me where to go shopping for clothes by “Tommy Hilfiger” as he needed more. I told him where the department store was and off he went. When we ate dinner of Italian Gnocchi, he waited on us again and said “that store was too expensive”. He said he had tomorrow morning off so would go shopping with some other crew members who knew where there were better prices. (He waited on us a lot in the dining room and felt like he could talk to us.) After dinner we were to go to the lounge where they would fix us Bananas Foster for dessert. As we ate, Peter gave us a Family History lesson on the Tauck Family. He had worked for them for 20 years and enjoyed every year. After that talk he asked us to please fill out our “Comment Page” and give something to “Robin’s causes” [Which were helping children in Africa; Habitat for Humanity; and the National Parks] as she now devotes her time to helping others. Robin Tauck is the granddaughter of the original Tauck that started the company.

He had us in stitches more than once. He was a natural storyteller and loved to embellish the facts with a little acting! We sat with Darla and Gene for dinner and in the lounge for the dessert. We agreed that he made any story funnier. We finally made it to bed at 11:30 PM.

April 10, 2010 - Saturday - Doug was up early again at 6:30 AM and went down to the Lido Bar for coffee. I slept in until 7:30 AM and then we both went to the dining room for breakfast. We boarded the buses in the morning for a ride to the Netherland’s “American Cemetery and



Memorial” near Margraten. The cemetery was awesome in size. The number of white crosses and the trees added to the solemn feeling. It was a very nice memorial and its setting in the countryside was very appealing. We were each handed a white rose and were told to place it wherever we wished. A very nice gesture, we thought. My rose went on a “Unknown Soldier” cross.

Next, we loaded onto three buses and were taken to the Chateau Neercanne Castle for lunch. It was a terraced grounds castle near Benelux and very interesting in its architecture. We had to



climb up 50 some steps to get to the top. Gene and Darla asked us to join them for lunch and introduced us to Dan and Nancy from Fort Wayne, Indiana. We



found a table for six inside one of the caves, donned our Chef hats except Doug, and were told when we could enter the kitchen to pick up our meal. The lunch was truffle soup with goose liver with croutons, veal, mashed potatoes and lettuce. Everyone had

chocolate cake with mousse in the middle on top of an orange sauce. Doug did have a beer and then half of mine. After lunch, we took photos inside the caves and the outside grounds. We were high on a rock hill and overlooked the farm land below as well as the small town. We boarded the buses, drove through the Belgian country side for 45 minutes and caught up to the ship in Hasselt. We boarded the ship and it was soon time for us to meet in the lounge for our next day's briefing and reminded not to forget the "CREW SHOW" after dinner in the lounge.

We ate dinner with Dan and Lucia from Union City, CA. We enjoyed talking to them very much. [He told us about growing up in America in the Japanese prisoner camp and how it so embarrassed his parents.] After dinner – back to the lounge for Foster's Bananas Flambé while the crew got into costume for the CREW SHOW. They performed several skits, sang and played Indonesian wood instruments. The show was enjoyable and we laughed several times. We headed off to bed at 10:30 PM.

April 11, 2010 - Sunday - We had breakfast in the dining room at 8:00 AM. The Green Group boarded the bus at 9:05 AM for the city tour of Antwerp. Yes, we were in the green group with Peter as our guide. Once again we were entertained. We left the bus, were introduced to the City Guide and started walking. First stop was the home of the artist, Peter Paul Rubens who was loyal to his country and stayed in Antwerp where he raised his family. He built his home based on an Italian architecture style. The house is now as a museum.



The house contains many of his paintings and sculptures. He was considered to be a prolific Artist – many commissioned work from him. His subjects were mostly religious but he also painted and sculpted historical and mythical subjects. He was known as a Flemish Baroque Era Painter from 1577 to 1640 AD.

Next we were off walking several blocks to H. Burie Chocolatier who stayed open on Sunday to show us how they made chocolate. At the end of the tour, each person was presented a box of 36 chocolates called the “60 carat chocolate” in the shape of diamonds. The boxes contained a row of dark chocolate diamonds, white/chocolate diamonds and milk chocolate diamonds. [It was through the blocks of shops going to the Chocolatier that I was able to take photos of clothing in the shop windows, once again.]



Our guide then walked us to a small Market Square with a huge and gorgeous Cathedral. We took photos from the side and then we walked into the main market Square known as Grote Market. In this market we found beautiful old Gothic architecture, with many sculptures, a huge fountain



with more sculptures and a lot of Gold gilt. Each building kept us captivated by trying to see every bit of their detail. Needless to say it was photo heaven.

The guide then steered us toward the Rooden Hoed Restaurant (it means red hat). It was a Quaint old two story, medieval appearing restaurant. We were shown to the top floor. That was as good as it got ... the food was not good and no one was happy. As the French say “Say le vie”! (Phonetically spelled - do not know the French spelling.) This meal was the worst of the entire trip soooo not bad for three weeks! And to top it off, two couples who were not part of our group, skipped out without paying and the waitresses were running after them.

We were on our own after lunch and found “Leonidas Fresh Belgian Chocolates” and we bought three sacks of the seahorse and shell chocolates that we first bought on tour in 1992. We then walked back to the ship, taking more photos on the way, and arriving about 3:00 PM. We agreed that Antwerp was a fascinating place due to the architecture.

We next went to the desk and settled up our bill with Tauck Tours, paying for stamps, postcards, two drinks for me and “Our Remembrance gift” of seven Dutch Canal Houses and a red fleece vest for Doug with Swiss Sapphire on the chest -paying \$ 160.00. [Canal houses – “Amsterdam Ptnsengracht”- Royal Goedewggen “Poly Delft” painted by hand.... Cost \$ 115.50]

Doug took a nap at 3:30 PM while I packed some of my things. We went down for the Discovery Briefing in the lounge and were told that we must pack as we were to leave the ship no later than 8:00 AM the next morning as it had to be cleaned for the next tour. Someone came to say dinner was a bit delayed due to a problem with the ship that the Captain had to attend to at the moment.

Within a half hour we were told to go the dining room. The Captain's table was at the end of the dining room and he raised a champagne toast to everyone to celebrate a successful voyage and then told us to enjoy the Dinner of 5 courses. We sat with Herb and Lois of Des Plaines, IL. The dinner was very good and everyone had dressed up for this goodbye dinner with the crew.

We returned to our room at 11:00 PM and packed more items, leaving just a few things for the next morning.

April 12, 2010 - Monday- We were up at 6:00 AM, dressed, finished packing the big suitcases, set them in the hall and went down for breakfast at 7:15 AM. We ate oatmeal and rolls then made the rounds to say Thank You and Goodbye to the food servers, all the girls that organized things for us, and Steve, the Ship's Tour Director and grabbed our roll-ons for the bus ride. We left promptly at 8:05 AM and had a toilet stop at a large gas station. Then we were back on the bus to Brugge and many people fell asleep. I took the opportunity to take photos out the windows of the farms as we drove. We arrived in Brugge, Belgium around 9:40 AM. City guides met us and took us around as they explained various parts of the city to us. We went with the slower moving group so we would have more time to take the photos we wanted. About half way through, Kay said to me "Well, I finally figured out why you two are going with the slow group, as you drift off here and there and take photos!" I said, "yes, that was the master plan".



We had wanted to see Brugge ever since we had seen a movie made in this town. It certainly was even better than even the movie portrayed it to be. We liked the architecture, canals,

eating places, and everything we saw. Everyone commented on how much fun it would be to come back and spend a couple of days there.

When lunch time rolled around we were on our own. Six of us ate in a corner restaurant – Bill and Nancy sat with us. Kay and Bridgette sat at the next table. One of the dishes on the menu brought about a discussion of what Chicory and Endive were and we found out they were the same thing according to the Italian people who waited on us. (I had Endive in a casserole dish with cheese and ham – totally not expected– and it was very good.) [I thought I was getting a ham & cheese sandwich!]

After lunch we all went separate ways – I found a lace shop and bought a piece of lace that had a batch of Canal Houses in a rectangular length for me. Then I bought two lace Christmas ornaments, and two Christmas wreaths and a pack of postcards. We continually took photos as we walked around. We had been given a meeting time and place by the Tauck Guides and met



at a certain street and Tom told us all to go down to a different area where several small vans would pick us up for transport to the buses. We got on the big buses at 1:30 PM. It was windy and

cooler but the sun was shining. Off to Brussels, the last leg of our trip. Most people slept on the way.

On arriving in Brussels, we drove through the World's Fair grounds. We stopped, got out of the buses and took photos of the Atomium from the 1958 World's Fair.



Then we headed to Hotel Amigo in "Old Town" as we were told it had formerly been a prison! The traffic was horrendous and the streets were filled with people, but we were finally dropped off to check in. Across the street I saw more Canal Houses of a different color and made a note to check them out the next day.



We had dinner in the hotel and it was excellent. I had Cod/Polenta with tomatoes and olives; tomatoes and other veggies and finished up with chocolate cake with pudding & cream. Doug had tomato pasta and cake. We sat beside Ed & Doris from Hamilton, NJ and a batch of two single men and two single women.

After we finished dinner we went across the street to check out the different colored Canal Houses but the store was closed. We went to our room, cleared our cameras of photos after putting them onto the Epson, charged our batteries and went to sleep by 11:00 PM.

April 13, 2010 - Tuesday - This was our last meal "On Tauck" so we had breakfast in the café in the hotel and then went walking to find the famous "Pissin boy" fountain. (Several different stories abound but one of them is that the little boy pissed upon the fuse, which put out the explosive charges that were set to burn up the city by an enemy.) Next we went to the shop across the street .... We found the clay colored canal houses were twice the cost, smaller and did not rival the ones that I had already purchased, so we left them there.

Next we walked to Grand Place (previously known as the Butcher's Trade) to check out the Flemish Designed buildings, gold gilt trim, flowers, paintings and watched the people in the sunshine. It was a very busy square. We decided to return to the hotel dining room for lunch. We both had cooked vegetables, fresh baked bread, water and coke. (Coke cost \$ 8.50 each and a bottle of water was \$ 7.00 each.) Our lunch cost us \$ 66.00 USA! Gulp!

We went to the Concierge to ask how to get to the train station. They were helpful and then Tom (Tauck Guide) gave us some pointers. It was unusual as the train was booked for us through



Air France, had a flight number, but it was actually the Bullet train to Paris. Tom told us they had a special car for our big

luggage, we had to take them to the first two cars and they would load them . . . .then we would walk down two more cars to get on and find our seats. We figured it would be a new adventure and it was.

In the afternoon, we decided to head out going east to find a certain Pastry Shop that Guide Peter had recommended. Our cameras were ready and we took many photos of buildings, parks, sculptures, flowers and a Cathedral on the way. We finally found it, went inside to pick out the pastry and were given a number for that pastry and told



to sit outside. We did that and a lady came around to take out pastry ticket and asked what we wanted to drink. This itty bitty snack cost us \$ 24.50! Once again we wondered how people could afford to live in the city. We returned to the hotel after our 15 block walk and took a nap.

We decided to cancel our hotel dinner reservations and walk to Grand Place to find a small café. We found a small Bistro – walked down 10 steps, walked through the door and felt like we were in a brick lined cave. It also had a rounded ceiling of bricks and was warmly lit with yellow light with tables everywhere. Our dinner: Eggs with mashed potatoes and cooked veggies. The dessert was custard with caramel sauce. We took a couple of photos inside. We wanted to take photos of the Grand Place at night but we could not stay awake so scooted off to the hotel, packed, read awhile and went to sleep.

April 14, 2010 – Wednesday – We were up at 5:00 AM and never could go back to sleep. We dressed, finished our last minute packing, went down to the hotel for breakfast, sat in the lobby and talked to other people on our tour that were waiting for transportation to the airport to fly

home. We had some good last minute visits. Departure time for us was running close so we went to our room to get our luggage, then Doug paid our bill, and Tauck arranged for a taxi to take us to the train station. The taxi driver had been told to take us to the last door for Air France. He did not but dropped us off at the first door. (Of course, we did not realize this until we were inside the station and he had left.) We asked several people and one finally told us to go to the end of the hallway, turn left, go through the doors and we would see the Air France office. Doug left me with all our luggage as he was not sure this was correct either. Twenty minutes later he returned. We went through the doors, took an elevator up to Gate 4 . . . . waited and were confused because the board listed a different train. We asked four different people until we found a business man who spoke English and he told us we were in the correct place but another train was coming first. It did, he came back and said this is not your train, and we thanked him for his help. Ten minutes later our train came and we had to hustle our big bags down to the first two cars, then run back to get on the 4<sup>th</sup> car. No one ever collected our boarding passes. The inside was very clean, the seats were comfortable, and the train ran nearly 200 miles per hour . . . . It truly was like a bullet! (No picture taking out of these windows!) One hour and 30 minutes later we arrived and it was straight through to Charles De Gaulle Airport. We got off, retrieved our large suitcases, followed the crowd to an elevator and wondered where we should go to meet Veronique and Marc. While we waited our turn to take the elevator up a floor, we heard clomp, clomp, clomp, clomp and there was Veronique running toward us. She took the elevator with us and when we walked out, there was Marc with his car trunk open, waiting for us. He loaded our bags in the Citroen and we were off to Paris. The traffic was horrendous.

First stop – We stopped at Vero’s condo and dropped off our bags. Then Vero said she wanted to take us to a neighborhood café that she thought was very good so we walked four blocks to it. At 2:00 PM we ate lunch. The food was very good; we stayed and talked for a while. I asked our waitress to take our pictures, which she did. On our way back, Marc suggested to Vero that we go to a grocery store to get groceries.



Second stop – As we followed them around the market both Vero and Marc asked “Do you like this, do you like that.” We took the groceries to Vero’s condo and put them away and met “Eclipse” her black cat that was very small and dainty. [She had been abused by her former owners, not fed regularly and neighbors had turned her abuse into animal control. They picked her up and started feeding her, testing her for problems, and then Vero arrived and thought she was adorable and brought her home with her to live after they gave her shots.] We enjoyed more visiting time and then Marc said he must go back to work but would see us Thursday evening for dinner.

Vero had taken Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday off work so we could spend time together before leaving on Saturday for our return flight to the USA. I took photos of her condo and told her Keiron's walls were about the same color in her living room. Vero put potatoes in the microwave, tore up bread, and prosciutto. We heated our racklette cheese over the fondue fire and swooned over the taste.

She looked very tired and had taken at least 15 phone calls from people in the office. We told her we were tired, so she took us to her room, where we were to sleep and she said she would be in the living room on her new hide a bed, as she said she was tired also. Eclipse was always at her side when she was not playing with her toys. We were off to bed at 11:00 PM.

April 15, 2010 - Thursday - We ate croissants and Chocolate tea for breakfast. Soooo good. Vero suggested taking the subway downtown to Champs E'lysee area to walk around and have lunch there. We agreed that sounded good and we took off for the long subway ride, then walked a few blocks before finding the Italian restaurant she liked. It was extremely busy, obviously very popular but they seated us in 5 minutes in an upstairs room overlooking the street. It was nice and relaxing and the food was excellent. Doug told her he was to have the bill which Veronique said No, no... but he insisted and said we should have dessert.

Next we walked Champs E'lysee. We took the subway ride back and stopped in a pharmacy for her to get a prescription filled then had a 3 block walk to the condo. Vero showed Doug the VCR and the CDs she had been given by friends including the "Shark" TV program and suggested he put it in to watch. I decided to go outside for a while to take photos of the gorgeous flowers in the courtyard of Vero's condo. The courtyard was filled with planters at different angles to each other and they were all filled with flowers.

Marc came to pick us up to drive us to the Café by the river for dinner. Frederique, Johanna and Romain were in another car and followed us to the Café. Romain was driving and they let us out at the front door while he and Marc parked the cars. It was a complete surprise to see Johanna. She is soon to be 19 years old, is very pretty (looking like Marc), and we received our kisses on both cheeks from she and Frederique. We went on into the café and were seated.



Then Romain walked in – he is now 20 years old, looks more like Frederique, and he kissed us on both cheeks and then we spent the next two hours talking and laughing. Romain’s English was quite good and he told us he wanted to come to the USA and be a DJ somewhere.

The restaurant was in a heavily treed area by the river with big windows and of course candles were all around us. The food was excellent and we ate over a two hour period of time. It was an enjoyable evening. Then Marc informed us that we would be coming to their house on Friday evening for dinner. Then he took us back to Vero’s condo and we chatted some with Vero before heading to bed.

April 16, 2010 – Friday – She asked what kind of food we liked and we said Indian. She said she knew a café not far away, did we want to try it and we were game. The Indian café had Nan bread and Lentil soup + some chicken dishes. Vero had a chicken dish while Doug and I had the bread and soup. Then we had a dessert of ice cream. It was all good.

Marc called Vero in the late afternoon to say he would be picking us up in a while but right then he was stuck in traffic. He did come later, we got into his car and he drove us to their house. Both Romain and Johanna were there and Frederique had been busy cooking. Marc brought out a bottle of champagne to toast to our good health. We had our hour to eat appetizers and chat. Then we went to the table filled full of good food. [Cheese potatoes, salad, Prosciutto ham - chicken - bologna - sausage - and goose liver.] We ate and talked and laughed. We always have a



good time with them. I brought out my camera and started taking photos, then Frederique got her camera and took more photos. Romain put his cap on my head then Frederique put it on her head and I took a photo. The last dinner

item was a chocolate cake that Johanna had made. Before they ate it all, I was able to take one photo!



Marc took us back to Vero’s condo. We flipped on the English speaking channel and heard they were still concerned about the ash cloud and wondered if we would make it out on Saturday. Then Doug checked his Blackberry and found out via email from Delta Airlines that our flight had been cancelled and they would rebook us when they could. He tried calling the 24 hour number in the USA but they informed him that all the airports were closed and they would have to follow the European guidelines. We decided to go to bed as rebooking would happen when it happened. So we all went to bed around 11:45 PM.

April 17, 2010 – Saturday – Chocolate tea and croissants for breakfast were laid out by Vero. She had talked to her father and he said he and Frederique would pick Doug and me up and we would go to Montmartre in the afternoon. Doug and Marc sat in the front and Frederique and I sat in the back. Marc’s English is very good but Frederique still struggles with her English. I

tried to speak slower which helped her. We drove to the area below the big hill and finally found a parking place. Then we had to climb the gazillions of steps up the hill. I had to stop to catch my breath half way up. We decided to walk around the area first and went into the St. Pierre Church. The stained glass windows and pulpit were absolutely beautiful and very colorful. [Hmmm wouldn't it be neat to have a table of the glass in the side of the pulpit table? WOW!] Then we worked our way around the "Artist's Square" where it was very crowded but we were still able to admire the art work. We walked around the streets and decided to have coffee or cold drinks,



sat at one of the tables and "People watched". It was unbelievably crowded and after 45 minutes we walked to the front steps of Sacre' Coeur Basilica and listened to musicians and comediennes entertain the crowd. Hordes of people gathered around. After 30 minutes we were ready to leave. We

walked down the gazillions steps, to the car. Marc stopped on a street and went into a store and bought Johanna a Guitar. [Her birthday was coming up.] Then he called Veronique and told her we would be arriving to pick her up in 20 minutes and we would then go to Timsit's house for a Saturday evening "Small Dish" dinner. The entire table was full of vegetables, nuts, meats, chips, cheeses, crackers, and topped off with almond cookies that Johanna made. It was another fun evening. Marc took us back to Vero's condo and we climbed in bed at midnight.

April 18, 2010 - Sunday - Today we had regular black tea with chocolate pastry and yogurt for breakfast. For lunch, Veronique made a big salad with tuna in it and we drank cokes.

At 2:30 PM Emmanuelle (Vero used to work with her and she is a very good friend) came and took us all in her car to Albert Kahn Park. Doug said he would pay for everyone and the cost was only 5 Euros for the four of us. (\$6.75 or approx. \$1.69 each) We had to wait in a very long line



and then realized it was Easter Sunday and many people were enjoying the day outside. The sun was shining and the park was beautiful. We spent almost two hours walking the grounds. It was nice to meet Emmanuelle as we had seen many photos of her over the years as she was always with Vero on her birthday. She was pregnant and expecting her baby in June.



Before we went to the car, Vero made a stop to purchase more pastries. Then Doug suggested we all stop for a cool drink and dessert. We found an outdoor café and Emmanuelle and I ordered 3 kinds of sorbet and Doug and Vero ordered ice cream-cake and strawberry desserts. [Cost was 47 Euros or \$63.45 American. That turned out to be the biggest expense of the day and

Doug said it was his treat. We then jumped into Emmanuelle's car and went back to Vero's condo, waving goodbye to Emmanuelle.

April 19, 2010 - Monday - Vero went to work. At 12:30 we went to lunch ... and came upon a café not too far from the condo but as we went in to talk about the food, there was not one person who spoke English, so we thanked them and left. We walked another block and saw a nice Italian restaurant, "Venci" and walked in and asked if they had a English Menu, they said yes, were very helpful and we had a good lunch of pizza for me and Gnocchi for Doug. Doug raved about his so I tasted it and said I should have gotten it also. We split a Tiramisu which was OK, not great. We enjoyed our time alone and walked back to the Pharmacy where we had gone with Vero so I could buy a few things. We returned to the condo and watched some more Shark episodes. I put the dry dishes away and folded the clothes and put them on the table for Vero. Eclipse was our constant companion she played by herself, laid on Doug's chest to sleep, or jumped onto my shoulders to purr.



April 20, 2010 - Tuesday - We were up at 7:15 AM and the English news said there had been another spurt of ash from the Icelandic volcano. Ireland and Scotland canceled flights again. Doug got on the internet and sounded like we were still a go. After Vero left we went to the Pharmacy again for decongestants for me and Cimetidine for Doug. This time we found a small bar on a corner serving lunch. We ate Spaghetti Bolognese and cokes and then one dish of two small scoops of coffee flavored ice cream. This cost us \$57.00 and we wondered how they all could afford to live in Paris.

We read our books in the afternoon - continued to check with Delta Web site for news. They had rebooked us to leave Wednesday and we were really hoping to go home. We watched some "Shark" episodes and I hung up more washed clothes onto her lines on the balcony and when they dried I folded them again. Vero did not get home until 7:40 PM so we ate late. The news for us: We would be flying back to the USA tomorrow. Vero called her taxi guy and asked him to pick us up at 7:20 AM to get us to the airport. [One of Vero's jobs is contracting with taxis to take their customers or employees to the airports so we paid 60 Euros (about \$ 78 US) rather than the metered 78 Euros.]

April 21, 2010 - Wednesday - Yes, we were up at 6:00 AM had chocolate tea and pastries. Vero came downstairs with us, reminded the driver of their contract and kissed us goodbye. The taxi driver was a very nice boy and talked to us all the way out to the airport and told us we had a special price because of her. He said she was a very nice person.

The airport was monstrously busy with people in long lines waiting to leave. We got in line, moved slowly and it took an hour to get up to a ticket person. When we finally made it up there we

found out my duffle bag was too long to fit on their belt so it had to go in a special cart. [I made a note to myself; the duffle bag cannot go overseas due to their restrictions.] We were supposed to leave at 10:40 AM but an announcement was made that we had to change planes due to technical problems. We also had a gate change. We hurried to the next gate in time to wait! We ended up being delayed three times until 11:50 AM. Next we were loaded onto three buses and taken to another area to a DELTA plane and loaded ourselves onto the plane by walking up the stairs.

There were very few empty seats but luckily there was one between Doug and I so we were able to spread out somewhat. A guy asked a Steward if they had flown in to pick us up – he looked at him and said “No, we have been stuck here for four days just like the rest of the people.” He continued by saying they found several good places to party in Paris.

The people on the plane were very chatty. You could hear them talking about how long they had been stuck in Paris, where they stayed and they were all excited to go home. We arrived home around 4:30 PM to a very long lawn as the taxi driver told us it had rained practically the whole time we were gone. We didn't care, we were happy to be home in green country, smaller crowds, and once again the house looked darned good to us. AND the prices are right!

The End

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