

TODAY'S NEWS

By Anne Greeno

The Danube River

The Danube River, located in Central and Eastern Europe, flows through ten countries. It originates in Germany and empties into the Black Sea.

The Danube is a popular route for river cruising. It is equally popular for cycling, as a 2,875 kilometer bike trail runs from Donaueschingen, Germany to the Black Sea.

Prague

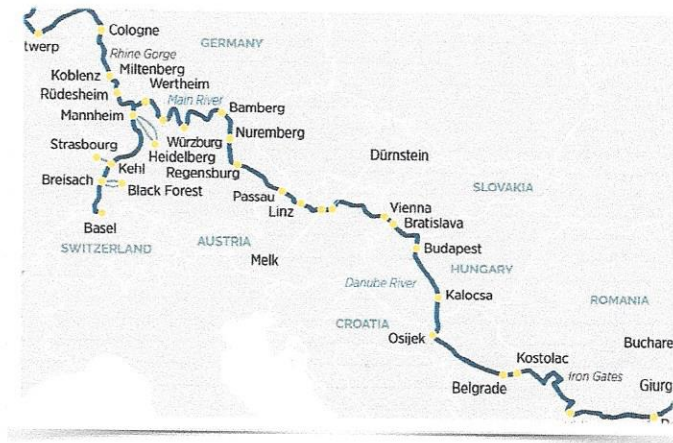
Prague is the capital of the Czech Republic and has a population of 1.3 million.

The city is home to such marvels as the Prague Castle, the Charles Bridge and the astronomical clock.

During WWII, Prague was a German protectorate and saw the demise of the Jewish community with most of them killed or deported. Some of us visited Terezin, a former Gestapo prison and Jewish concentration camp.

Danube River Cruise and Classic Prague

It was once again time for another Wendy Dunham Travel adventure. Wendy Dunham and Emerald Waterways put together an excellent itinerary for our group of 68 travellers.

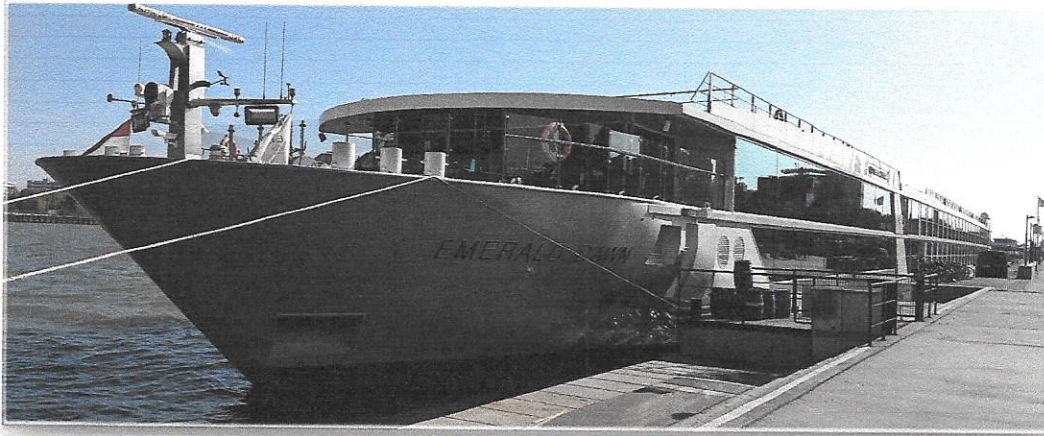


Our journey would take us on an exciting eight day cruise along the Danube River through Hungary, Slovakia, Austria and Germany, followed by three days on land in the Czech Republic.

Europe is a special place, steeped in history dating back centuries. We learned a lot about royal families and their lives in palaces, but we also learned a lot about the many people affected by the two World Wars. Emerald Waterways arranged for us to meet a local Slovakian family who live somewhat differently now than when their country was under Communist rule. They had great pride in their home and their way of life. It was a very exciting time for all of us.

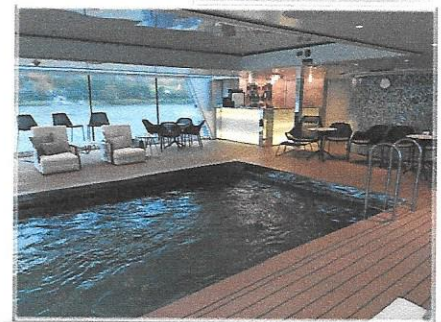
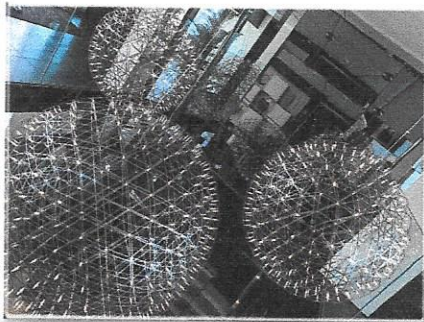
Please follow along on this pictorial of our trip of a lifetime.

Emerald Dawn



Let me introduce you to our floating hotel. The *Emerald Dawn* is one of Emerald Waterways' five sister star-ships. It can accommodate 182 passengers in 92 cabins. There are 47 staff onboard, including Captain Gyula.

The interior of the ship is beautiful, with elegant finishes, plenty of space for all passengers to dine together plus a lounge area for relaxing and enjoying the many activities hosted by the ship's Director and Activity Manager. For anyone looking for a spa retreat, the ship has that too. Look at this pool area!



The exterior of the ship has two areas to relax and enjoy the scenery. The front has a terrace area right off the lounge, while the sun deck has a walking track, mini-golf and plenty of lounge chairs and tables with sunshades. We were fortunate to have many sunny days so we spent a lot of time in both places. There were not a lot of very low bridges so the sun deck remained open to us every day except the last day.

Budapest, Hungary



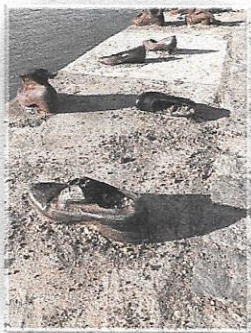
Getting Acquainted

Our group arrived in Budapest the day before the official start date of the river cruise. After a restful night at the Courtyard by Marriott Budapest, we were taken by coach to the Emerald Dawn. Emerald Waterways' dock is directly opposite the *Hungarian Parliament Building*!

Our Activity Director, Niall, gave an orientation walk from the ship that led us from the Buda side of Budapest, across the *Chain Bridge* to the Pest side, a stop at the very touching *Shoes on the Danube Bank* memorial, a look at the *Parliament Building*, then back to the Buda side via the *Margaret Bridge*.



Shoes on the Danube Bank Memorial

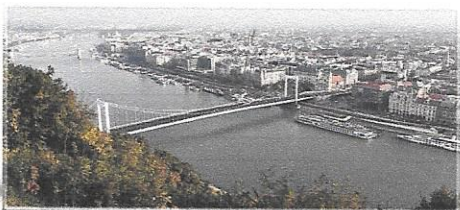


Between December, 1944 and January 1945, the fascist Arrow Cross Party police executed 20,000 Jews, 800 of these on the Danube River bank. Jews were lined up at the edge of the river and ordered to take off their shoes, which were considered valuable commodities. The Jews were then shot, their bodies fell into the water and were swept away. In February 1945, the Soviet forces liberated Budapest. Sixty pairs of iron shoes are in memory of these Jews.

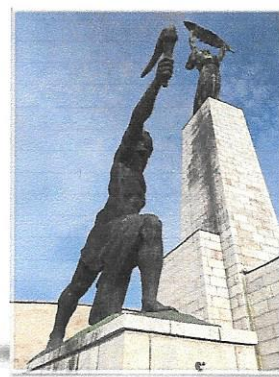
Budapest, Hungary

The morning was spent touring both sides of Budapest by coach with a local specialist.

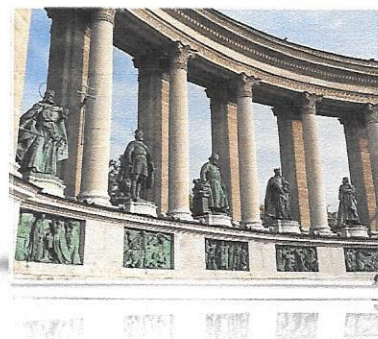
Our first stop was the *Liberty Statue* located on Gellert Hill on the Buda side. Known as the Freedom Statue, it honours those who sacrificed their lives for the independence, freedom and prosperity of Hungary.



Even on a foggy morning, the view of Pest from Gellert Hill is amazing.



Our next stop was *Heroes' Square* on the Pest side. It is a major square in Budapest where large gatherings are held to host sporting events, civil events and even protests. It contains statues of the seven chieftains of the Magyars and several national leaders. In the centre of the square is the Memorial Stone of Heroes.



Back on the Buda side, we visited *Buda Castle*. The original structure was completed in 1265, but the one we see now was built between 1749 and 1769. This massive complex now houses the Hungarian National Gallery and the Budapest History Museum.

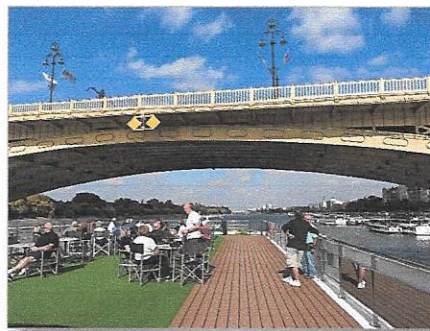
Located in the Buda Castle District is *Matthias Church*. This Roman Catholic church was originally built in 1015, however, today's structure dates back to the late 14th century. Two ruling parties were crowned within its walls; first was Franz Joseph I of Hungary and Empress Elisabeth, followed by Charles IV of Hungary and Zita of Bourbon-Parma.

The church was heavily damaged during WWII but repaired by 1984. In 1994, there was damage when an IED was detonated by an unidentified terrorist.



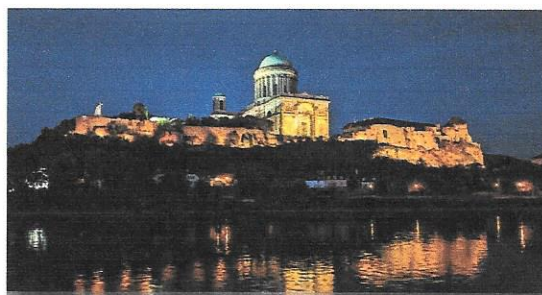
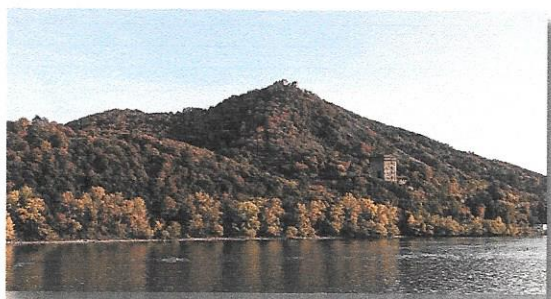
It's Time to Cruise

Farewell to Budapest



After our guided tour of Buda and Pest, it was time to sail north on the Danube. Wendy's groups are always FUN people and they know how to enjoy every moment of each trip. Lots of people enjoyed the sail away from the sun deck on this perfect weather day. This was to set the tone for the rest of the trip.

It wasn't long before the city landscape was behind us and we started seeing stunning countryside. Every turn seemed to have a beautiful castle nestled in amongst the trees or on rocky outcrops of land.



Local Entertainment

We were treated to a performance of Hungarian Folklore dancing and singing by local artists. They were extremely energetic and engaging. They even had passengers performing traditional dancing as well.



It is much appreciated that Emerald showcases local talent in the ports they visit. Learning about other cultures is part of the reason many of us travel.



Bratislava, Slovakia

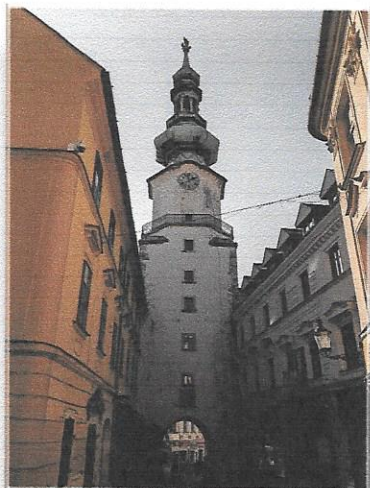


Slovakia is a country with an interesting past. Pre 1918, the country was controlled by Slovaks, then by Hungarians. In 1918, it became part of Czechoslovakia. Germany occupied the country during WWII and Czechoslovakia became part of the Eastern Bloc, falling under Communist rule. On January 1, 1993, the federal republic of Czechoslovakia split into independent countries of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, ending Communist rule.

Bratislava, once known as Pressburg, is now the capital of Slovakia. It is a vibrant hub for culture, art, music and theatre. Many notable composers visited or lived here, including Mozart and Beethoven.



Sitting high above the Danube and located in the old town is *Bratislava Castle*. This four towered structure was built in the 13th century and once housed the crown jewels of Hungary. It is now used to display exhibitions of the Slovak National Museum.



The old town area was once surrounded by medieval fortifications. The only remaining gate is *Michael's Gate*. Behind this gate, there are many beautiful palaces, cathedrals and one remaining synagogue. But Michael's Gate wasn't always a good place. *Interesting Fact:* Burning witches at the stake was a real event in Bratislava. Women who were thought to practice witchcraft were burned to death under the town's scaffold at Michael's Gate as early as 1574. This plaque on the sidewalk outside the gate commemorates a burning on March 24, 1602.



Home Hosted Coffee and Cake

Host Program

The Slovakian government initiated a seven year program to introduce tourists to locals and learn about their day-to-day lives in a former Communist country. The program will be evaluated next year to determine its go-forward, or not, status.

Host Family

Our host couple has been married for 50 years, and lived with their family for the first four years while they were building their home. They have two grown children, of whom they are very proud.

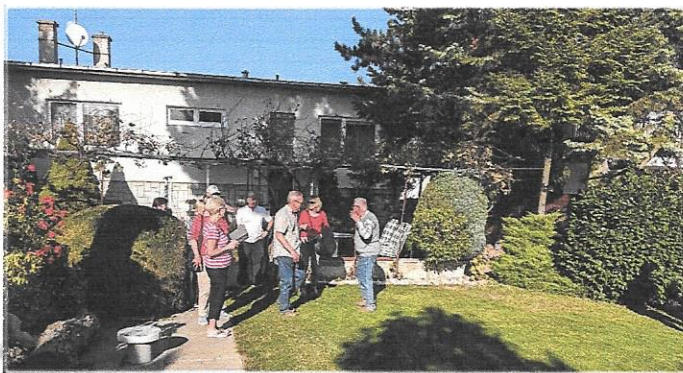
They couple has an amazing yard with lots of space for gardens and chickens.

Both the couple and their son are gifted artists. They have many of their creations on display in their home.



A Unique Experience

Our guides split us into groups of 10 to 12 people and brought us to the homes of our host families. Our host worked as an artist with the Opera, providing the background props and art work. He and his wife are also gardeners and grow a lot of their own vegetables.



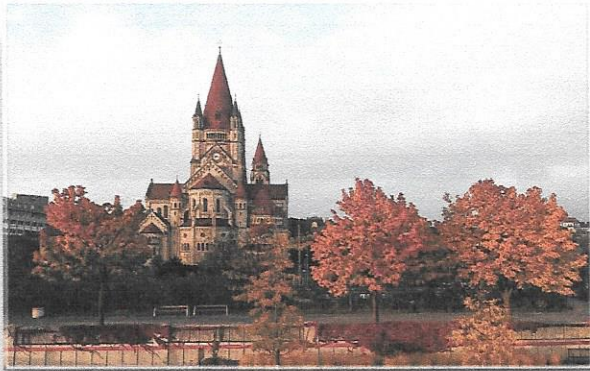
Our hosts did not speak English well, but our guide translated for us. Plus, hand signals are a universal way of communicating.

Our hostess served up a delicious home made apple cake with hot tea. We had a great tea party, followed by home made wine!

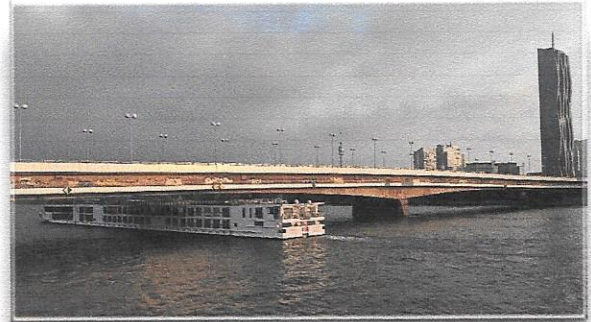


Many thanks to Emerald Waterways for participating in this pilot project. When the evaluation is completed next year, we hope the program will be continued so that others may have the opportunity to meet such fine people.

Vienna, Austria



We were greeted on our arrival in Vienna to the beautiful site of *St. Francis of Assisi church*. Fall is a great time to visit with the color changing of the leaves. On the other side of our ship was the more modern side of Vienna, the financial district, highlighted by the tallest building in the city.



Biking Vienna

A great way to see the city is by bike. Our guide took us through the heart of the city to *Prater Park*, famous for its Wiener Riesenrad ferris wheel dating back to 1897. We crossed four Danube Rivers or canals.



Historic Center of Vienna

St. Stephen's Cathedral is Vienna's most famous landmark. This impressive Gothic structure dates back to 1147. There are 23 bells in its towers and 18 alters in the main part of the church.

Interesting note: The remains of Elisabeth of Austria, Queen of France (and wife of Charles IX of France) are in the Cathedral's crypt.



Viennese Concert

In the evening of our visit, many of our group attended a private classical concert at *Lobkowitz Palace*. They enjoyed pieces arranged by legendary composers Strauss, Mozart and Beethoven.

Durnstein, Austria

Durnstein the Town

Durnstein is a beautiful small town on the Danube, located in the Wachau region of Austria. It is the type of town you picture when you think of cobble stoned roads in a quaint village setting. The town is named after *Durnstein Castle*, whose ruins remain high above the town.

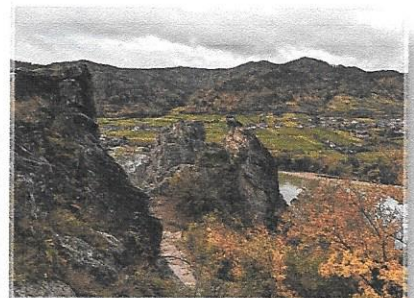
There was a slight rain for the first hour of our visit, but that certainly didn't dampen our spirits. Many people walked the few minutes into town and strolled through the alleyways to see several churches, a museum, a few government buildings and several tourist shops.



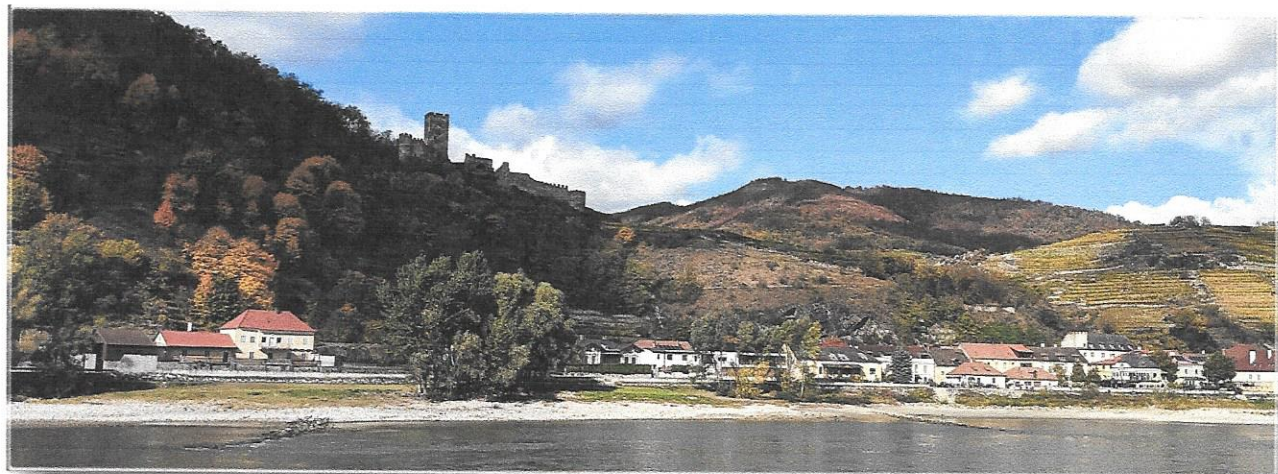
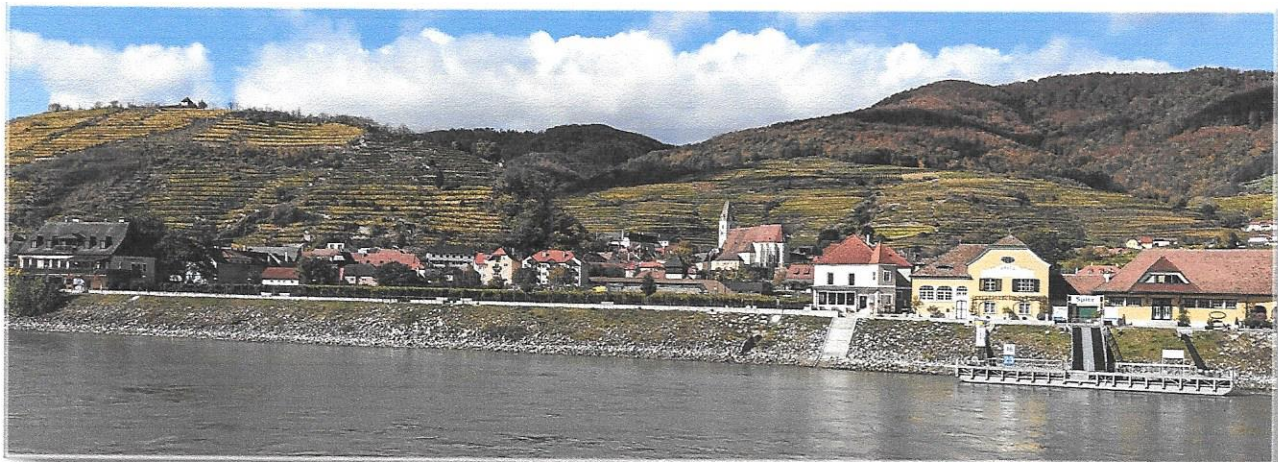
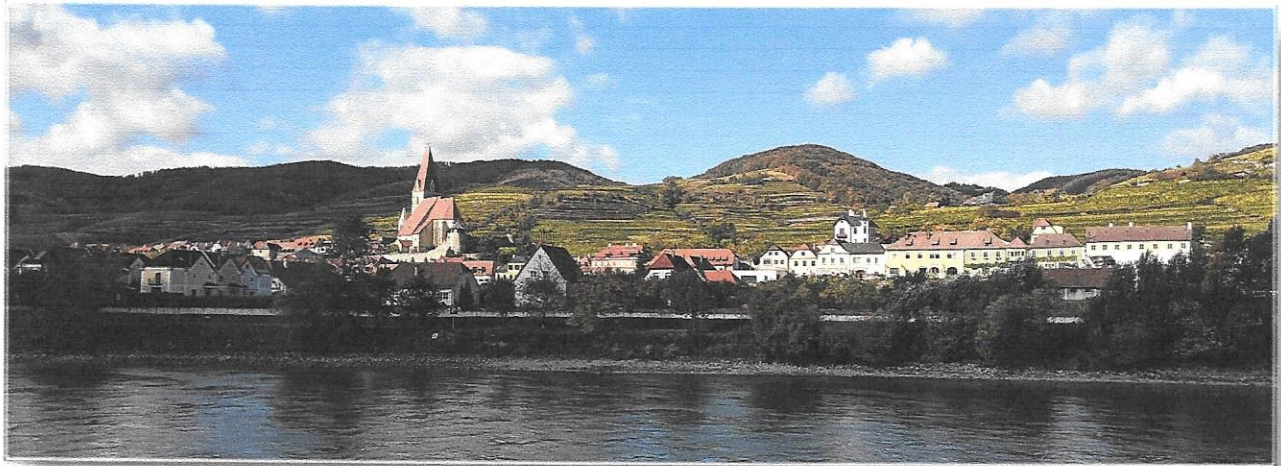
Durnstein Castle

Many of us took a guided walk up to the castle ruins. Our guide gave us a lot of information on the Wachau region, the town and the castle itself.

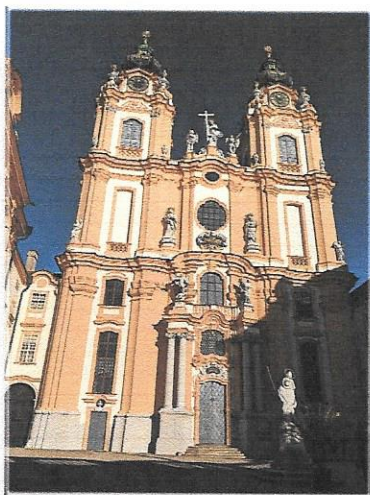
The castle was made famous in 1192 when King Richard I of England, known as Richard the Lionheart, was held captive by Leopold V, Duke of Austria, during the Third Crusade. The castle was destroyed by the troops of the Swedish Empire in 1645.



Wachau Valley, Austria



Melk, Austria

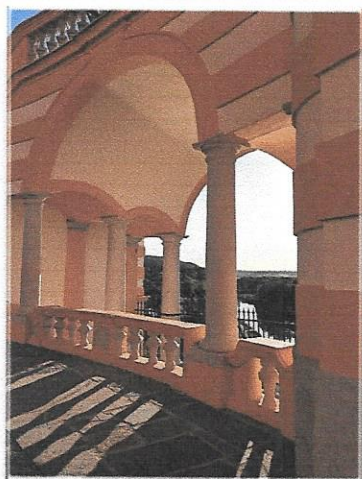


Melk Abbey

The beautiful Benedictine *Melk Abbey* sits high above the Danube River. The building was once a castle owned by Leopold II of Austria who gave it to the monks in 1089. Today's buildings contain a school, the Abbey's church and a library that houses a large collection of medieval manuscripts.

The Abbey survived many ancient wars, however, in 1938 it was confiscated by the state. After WWII, the school was returned to the Abbey and it now caters to 900 students, both male and female.

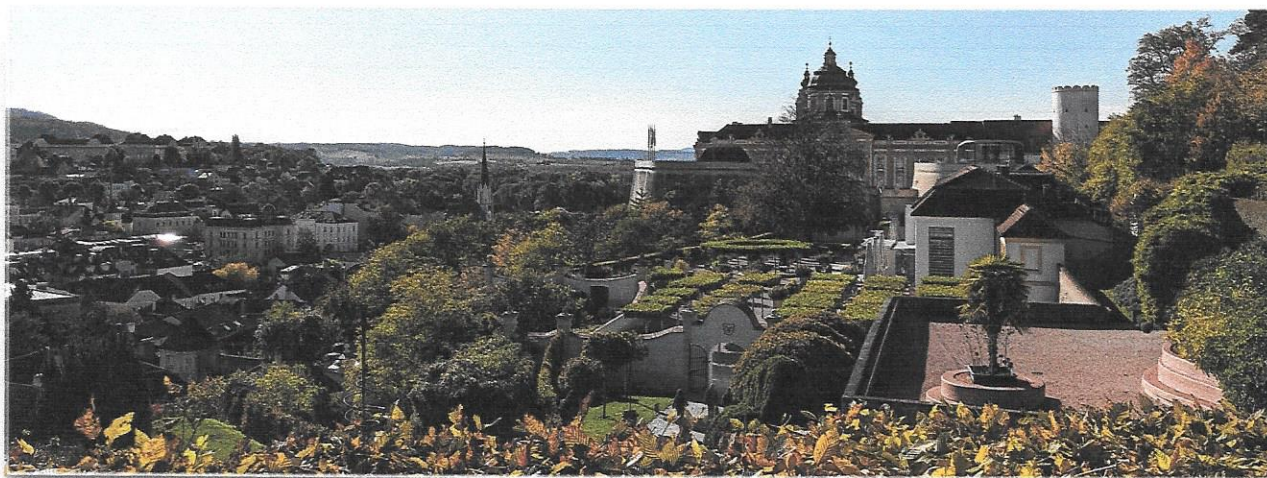
We were not permitted to take photos once past this stairwell. This picture shows you the beautiful baroque features of the time.



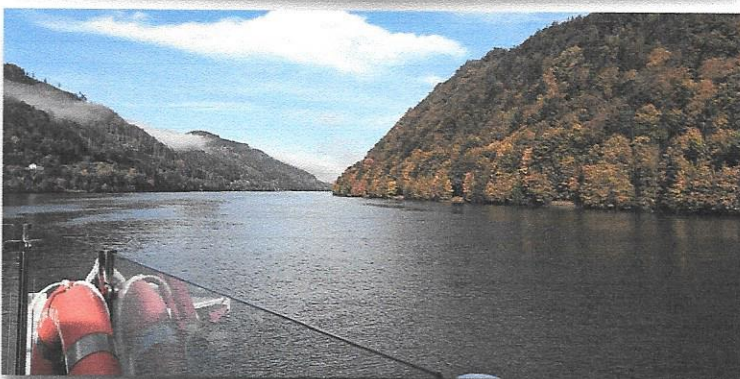
Inside the Abbey, the rooms were set up as a museum. There were 11 rooms signifying various religious personas. These were followed by the beautiful marble hall with its ceiling fresco of a chariot drawn by lions as a symbol of wisdom and moderation, then the terrace connecting the marble hall and the library, and finally the Abbey Church.



ABSIT GLORIARI NISI IN CRUCE - Glory is found only in the cross



Cruising to Passau



Passau, Germany

Passau is known as the City of Three Rivers because the Danube is joined there by the Inn River from the south and the Ilz River from the north. It has many beautiful buildings, mostly switched from the Gothic style to the Baroque style due to a fire wiping out the city in 1662.

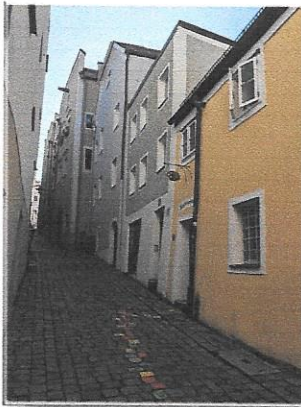


St. Stephen's Cathedral

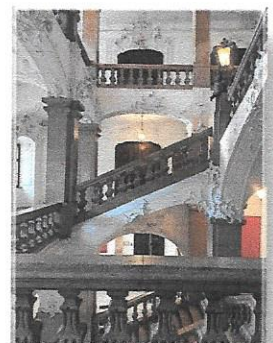
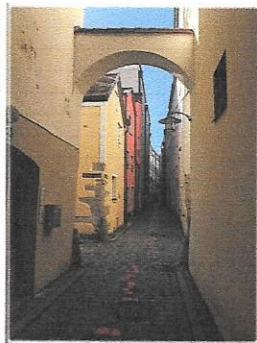
The current baroque style church was built between 1668 and 1693 after the original one was destroyed by fire in 1662. It is the seat of the Catholic Bishop of Passau and the main church of his diocese. St. Stephen's houses what was once the largest pipe organ in the world. It has 17,774 pipes and 233 registers that can be played with a five-manual general console located in the gallery.



Old Town Views



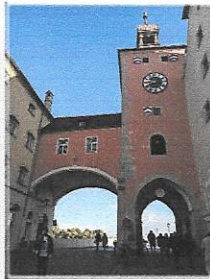
The best way to see Passau is by foot. When you wander through the side streets, you find pastel coloured houses, cobble stoned streets, wonderful cafes and plenty of shops. Our guide on the walking tour explained how the city was laid out between the three rivers and its strategically placed castle high above the old town. A definite highlight was visiting the Bishop's Palace, with its grand entrance, stucco walls, black marble statues and ornate staircase.



Interesting, But Sad, Fact:

As with many of the places we visited, this city was not untouched by war. Hitler lived here from 1892 to 1894 and visited in the 1920's. During World War II, the town housed three sub-camps of the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp.

Regensburg, Germany



The stone-aged medieval centre of Regensburg is now a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The *Stone Bridge* was built between 1135 and 1146, linking the Old Town with Stadtamhof. This bridge allowed for international trade routes between northern Europe and Venice, bringing an era of wealthy trade families residing in Regensburg.



The *Porta Praetoria* is Germany's most ancient stone building. Dating to 179 AD, these Roman stones are the cornerstone of the northern wall gate of a Roman military camp.

Regensburg continues to maintain their heritage buildings, including the old town hall, its museum and iconic clock tower.



During our visit, students from the University of Regensburg held a climate change protest. Since it was a Friday, it was in keeping with the city's "protest on Friday" theme. All kidding aside, the students were well prepared, non-confrontational and spoke with passion. Organizers arranged for police escorts, ensuring a peaceful demonstration.



Regensburg has many inviting cafes with both indoor and outdoor sitting areas. It was so relaxing to sit outside, facing the sun, enjoying a cup of tea with a pastry. We were lucky to have such great weather during our visit. October is a good time to visit Europe without the large summer crowds.

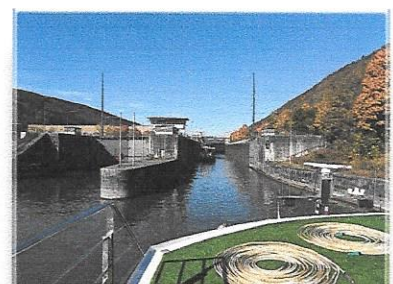
Life on Board the Emerald Dawn



There was always something going on around the ship. You could choose to participate in any of the events, or just relax with friends in the Horizon Bar and Lounge, out on the terrace or on the sun deck.

When leaving Regensburg, Emerald brought onboard a traditional Bavarian Band. They entertained us with stories, music and song. We enjoyed the local vibe and the band's musical talents and enthusiasm.

A great feature onboard is the relaxed dining options. While cruising, one could enjoy breakfast or lunch at the front of the Horizon Bar and Lounge or out on the front terrace.



The sun deck was a favourite spot for many of the passengers. Our weather was perfect for doing the walking track, playing mini golf, enjoying a rowdy game of X's and O's, or hanging out on the sun loungers. When going through locks, the sun deck was a perfect place to check out the lock process from start to finish. For both fun and fitness, passengers participated in a walk-a-thon while going through a lock.



Before starting the river cruise, Cathy had been travelling through Europe for over five weeks. Of course that meant suitcase space was at a premium. Only draw back was that she didn't have a purse to use during the Captain's farewell dinner. No worries, the bag she purchased in Budapest worked just fine! She might have just started a new trend.

Prague, Czech Republic



Before we knew it, the river portion of our adventure was over, but more vacationing was still to come. We were transferred by coach from Nuremberg, Germany to Prague, Czech Republic for a three day stay. Emerald Waterways provided our group with a guide for the duration of our stay. On day 1, he gave us a tour of the area around the hotel so that we could get our bearings. Pearl and I ventured down to the Vltava River to check out the historical centre.

Prague Astronomical Clock

Prague's *astronomical clock* was installed in 1410 and is the third oldest clock in the world. It is now the oldest clock still in operation. The clock is located on the Old Town Hall in the Old Town Square. The clock comes to life every hour, with the "Walk of the Apostles" rotating through a dance while the skeleton of death strikes the time.

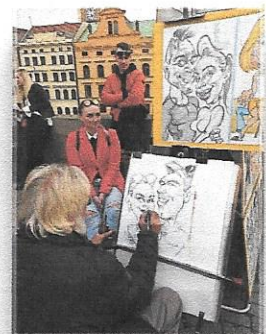
The Orloj (front facing) part of the clock has the original mechanical clock and an astronomical dial dated 1410 and a calendar dial added in 1490.



Charles Bridge

The *Charles Bridge* was started in 1357 under the reign of King Charles IV. It connects Prague Castle with the city's old town. It was constructed as a bow bridge, held up by 16 arches with ice guards. It has 30 statues mounted to the balustrade, all of them saints or patron saints.

The Charles Bridge is for pedestrians only, with service vehicles the only vehicles permitted. Prague is known for its artistic communities, so the bridge is a perfect place to have one's portrait done.



Prague, Czech Republic



Prague Castle

Our Emerald Waterways guide brought us to see several highlights of Prague, starting with the beautiful *Prague Castle*. The President of the Czech Republic has his office here. During the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia in World War II, the castle became the headquarters of Reinhard Heydrich.

St. Vitus Cathedral

Located within the castle complex is *St. Vitus Cathedral*. This is the Czech Republic's largest and most important church. The original cathedral was built in 930. To accommodate growth of its members, the structure was replaced with a larger one in 1060. Today's Gothic style structure dates back to 1344.



Prague's Statues

Noted as one of Prague's top 10 strangest statues is "*Piss*". Two bronze, naked men standing on a map of the Czech Republic have mechanical parts that make them pee on the country. The creator, David Černý, was known to create some pretty weird art.

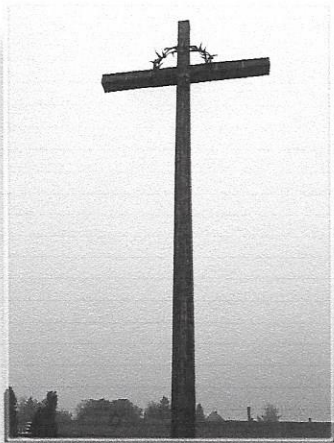
Lobkowicz Palace



Emerald Waterways hosted a very nice farewell dinner for us at the *Lobkowicz Palace*, located within the Prague Castle complex. We were entertained by two local musicians who played and sang so beautifully. The outside terrace dining area gave us great views of Prague lit up at night.



Terezin Concentration Camp



The town of Terezin is the home of the 18th century fortress of *Theresienstadt*. It was here in 1940 that Nazi Germany turned the fortress into a Jewish ghetto and concentration camp. More than 150,000 Jews were temporarily imprisoned here before being transported to extermination camps, including Treblinka and Auschwitz.

On our last day in Prague, a foggy, cold day, a group of us visited the *Terezin Memorial*. Our guide educated us on Germany's plans for the *Final Solution to the Jewish Question* and Terezin's role in this horrific genocide.



Small Fortress

The small fortress of Terezin served as the Gestapo prison. Between 1940 and liberation in 1945, 90,000 Jews were held here, of which 2,600 died.

Administration Area

When the fortress was built in the 18th century, it was built as a planned garrison town. This ended up to be a perfect layout for the Nazis to keep prisoners separate from the SS guards and their families.

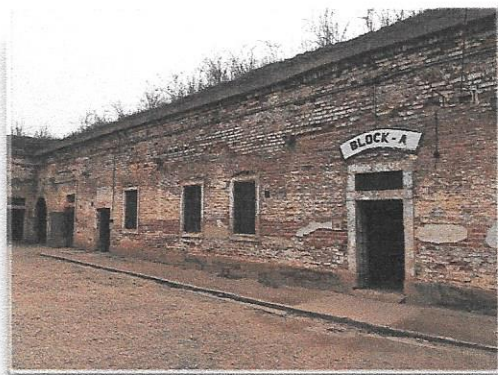
The SS Administration offices ran along a large corridor separated from the prison yard. Over the gate is written "ARBEIT MACHT FREI", meaning "WORK SETS YOU FREE".



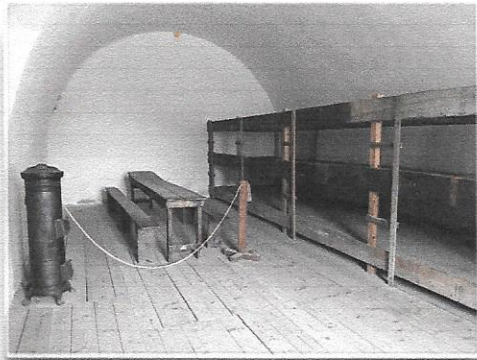
Prisoner Common Areas

The prisoners were divided into various confinement areas, including Block A, Block B and both group and individual holding cells. Also located in this area was the hospital, laundry room, showers and the women's hall. Prisoner transports to extermination camps were organized in the courtyard.

On the backside of Block A is another area for prisoner cells, these ones seemingly worse than the others.



Terezin Concentration Camp

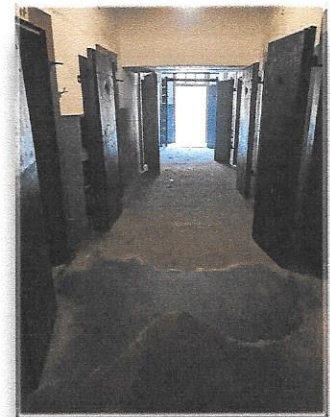


Blocks A and B

Blocks A and B had bunkbeds designed to hold 30 people, but often held 100 people. There was a small stove for heat, but often no wood. Most of the rooms had no windows. Some rooms had a communal toilet in the corner. Conditions were poor, food was scarce and disease was rampant. Many Jews died in these rooms, and were always replaced with more.

Prisoner Cells

Prisoner cells were located in one long building. There were no windows, beds or toilets. There also didn't appear to be any heating source. Small openings were located near the door that allowed guards to watch the prisoners. Prisoners were not treated well by the guards with many being tortured and murdered. It is interesting to note that the Terezin Ghetto and Concentration Camp was never labeled as a "death" camp.



The Ghetto

Jews not confined to the prison were housed in the Ghetto. The Ghetto was run by Jewish self-administration, which helped the conditions for children and young people. These vulnerable children were given education in the arts and music, as well as regular learnings. We visited the children's former school that has since been turned into a museum. Their drawings are on display, showing mostly the innocence of the young. Unfortunately, very few of the children and their educators survived the Ghetto or the transports to the east.



The museum had many placards on display that outlined the history and timeline of Terezin from the time it was taken over by the Gestapo to when it was liberated in 1945. Along with pictures, there were also personal effects of the Jews. A museum of this nature is one that speaks to the soul.

Terezin Concentration Camp



**PAMÁTNÍK TEREZÍN
KREMATORIUM
TEREZÍN MEMORIAL
CREMATORIUM
GEDENKSTÄTTE THERESIENSTADT
KREMATORIUM**

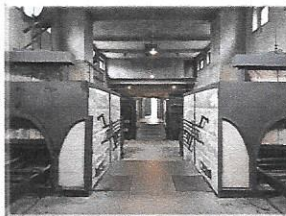
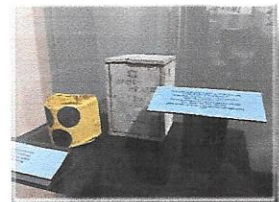
Terezin Memorial Crematorium

Although Terezin was not a “death” camp, 33,000 people died here. Disease and starvation was responsible for many deaths, but not all.

Blood seeping from the coffins and sacks holding the bodies was clear evidence of the fact that the victims died a violent death.

The crematorium was built in 1942. Thirty thousand of the 33,000 dead were cremated here. The building was supervised by SS-Scharführer Heindl, a feared top officer. The crematorium was operated by up to 18 prisoners, working in shifts throughout the day and night in order to keep up with the deaths from the Ghetto as well as the prison.

Cremation records were kept in logs, recording the person’s name, transport number and cremation number. Ashes were placed in either a canvas bag or simple wooden box. Thousands of boxes containing ashes were kept in a back section of the building. Some were destroyed by the Nazi’s before the end of the war, however, many were salvaged and buried in the National Cemetery.



The crematorium operated four oil-powered incinerators. Some bodies were brought to the autopsy room first to give Jewish doctors the chance to determine cause of death if it was not readily apparent. Then the bodies were brought into the central incineration area on wooden stretchers before being placed on a tracked conveyor. The steel doors of the incinerator were on a pulley system attached to the roof. After incineration, the Jewish prisoners operating the incinerators had to carefully sift through the ashes to retrieve any gold fillings or dentures and give them to the SS officers on guard.

It is our duty to never forget the tragedies that fell upon the Jews of Europe during WWII

Farewell

Through Wendy's hard work, our group of 68 enjoyed a most spectacular adventure of cruising to four countries in eight days then visiting Prague for three days. Below are a few pictures of our group having a ton of fun. Thanks to Wendy and Emerald Waterways for putting together a great itinerary.

As they say in Hungary, *A következő alkalomig* (until next time).

