

# JEWELS OF THE RHINE

## AMSTERDAM TO BASIL, WITH EXTENSION IN LUCERNE AND ZURICH

### WENDY DUNHAM TRAVEL

Our journey to Europe is about to begin! We are setting off on another great adventure with Wendy Dunham Travel. We will sail on an Emerald star-ship, the Emerald Sun, from Amsterdam to Basil for seven nights, then coach to Lucerne and Zurich for three nights. The itinerary is packed with many historic places to visit, including a German fortress used in WWI.

### ITINERARY

Over the next 10 days, we will be hosted by the ship's crew as well as Emerald's land crew, bringing us to amazing destinations in Europe. We will visit four countries and twelve towns and cities. Here's the plan:

**Netherlands:**

Amsterdam

**Germany:**

Cologne, Koblenz, Mannheim, Heidelberg, Kehl, Breisach, the Black Forest

**France:**

Strasbourg

**Switzerland:**

Basil, Lucerne, Zurich



## Introducing The Emerald Sun

The Emerald Sun's itineraries include cruises on the Rhine, Main, Danube and Moselle rivers. The 135 metre ship has high end guest suites, a heated pool, a lounge, an elegant dining room, a spacious outdoor terrace and an expansive open-air sun deck. With the ratio of 180 guests to 51 crew members, we are in for some very special guest treatment.

Each day we will have the opportunity to participate in different styles and levels of activities. EmeraldPLUS offers extra special excursions designed for most abilities. EmeraldACTIVE excursions offer a more active experience for those looking for off-the-beaten track locations.

### Meeting the Group

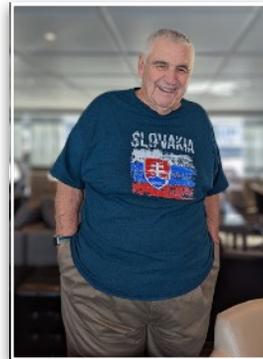


Many of the group travelled with Wendy from Halifax to Amsterdam, while some like myself visited other countries first. I flew to Paris, then took trains to Brugge and Ghent, Belgium for four days. On day one of the cruise, everyone arrived at the ship in Amsterdam, berthed on the North Sea Canal called the Noordzeekanaal.

## Day 1 - Amsterdam, Netherlands

### *Onboard the Emerald Sun*

After arriving at the ship mid-afternoon, it was time for travellers to relax and explore the ship. The main lounge has ceiling to floor windows, offering up fantastic views of the Amsterdam canal and the many other cruise boats near us. My good friends, **Brian, Merle, and Chris** were excited to be in Amsterdam and were looking forward to the cruise.



Suppertime is a very social time onboard and always fun to chat with other guests. **Sandra, Paul and Frank** enjoyed their fine dining meal, served by staff hailing from places around the world, including Slovenia, Belarus and Ukraine. Each evening, the chef gave a quick overview of his recommended meal choices, with many being regional dishes made with locally produced ingredients.

### *Amsterdam After Dark*



The most famous attraction in Amsterdam is the **Red Light District**. So, naturally, some of us took a walk to check it out.

It's important to know that prostitution is legal in Amsterdam, with prostitutes having access to medical care, standardized practices and monitored working conditions. They cannot solicit customers on the street though.

Prostitutes advertise by appearing in one of 300 windows with red neon lights with rooms in the back available for customer visits.



The history of the Red Light District goes back to the 14th century with many of its original charming buildings and cobblestone streets remaining. Prostitution started here because the district is close to the main harbour area where many sailors came looking for good booze and willing girls.



We didn't stay long in the district, but enjoyed the experience of walking amongst the crowd, being herded like sheep, and seeing a different way of life than what we have here in Canada. It was interesting seeing personal body guards watching for people taking pictures of the girls. **Ron, Bonnie, Chris, Sandra, Sharon, Karen and Don** found the red light!



## Day 2 - Amsterdam, Netherlands

### *Visiting Waterland*



Some of the group enjoyed a guided river boat canal tour. **Elaine** and I did an **EmeraldACTIVE bike ride** through the countryside with a local guide and our Activity Director, Lauren. We took the city's free ferry across the harbour to start the trail. We biked a 22 km loop style trail to Waterland, an area that has traditional Dutch farms, scenic windmills and expansive dyke systems. Many of the towns we rode through are centuries old, with houses maintaining the traditional Dutch style pyramid shaped roofs. Biking along the canals and on top of the dykes was an excellent way to feel immersed in the Dutch culture.

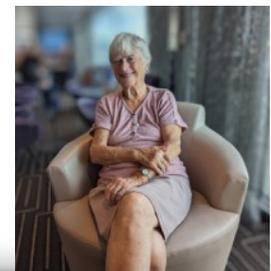


### *Sailing on the Amsterdam-Rhine Canal*



With everyone back onboard, we left Amsterdam, sailing on the Amsterdam-Rhine Canal before turning onto the Rhine River. It was a beautiful afternoon to have lunch outside with **Merle** and **Marlene**. It was very peaceful on the terrace as we passed through the industrial areas of Utrecht and Wijk bij Duurstedethen followed by the more rural areas of Tiel and Kesteren. It was surprising to see many modern bridges along this route, however, it made more sense when finding out that the canal was only built in 1952 to help with nautical navigation between Amsterdam and the busy shipping route on the Rhine.

**Rosemary** and **Ken** had an excellent viewing area in the lounge. Once we left all the harbour boats behind, they had an unobstructed view. Although the Amsterdam-Rhine Canal is only 72 km long, it would take several hours of sailing before reaching the Rhine in the late afternoon. During that time, we went through four locks, each taking at least 30 minutes to traverse.



## Day 3 - Cologne, Germany



The most recognizable building in Cologne is the **Cologne Cathedral**. The current cathedral's construction started in 1248 but was not completed until 1880. Due to its long and varied history, it is thought of as a powerful testimony to the strength and persistence of Christian belief in medieval and modern Europe. Its most famous art piece is the **Shrine of the Three Kings**, said to hold the remains of the Three Wise Men.

During WWII, the city of Cologne was heavily bombed by Allied forces. Almost every building was either destroyed or extensively damaged. The Cathedral, the tallest twin-spired church in the world, was largely untouched with only 14 bomb hits as it was used by the Allies as a navigational landmark. War damage repairs were completed in 1956.

After the war, Cologne was in rubble. Architects designed a new city that included modern roads to accommodate the anticipated post-war population growth and worked with leaders to maintain cultural and historical buildings, including the city's twelve Romanesque churches. Our guide showed us many examples of new buildings designed to look like the originals. Cologne is truly a very beautiful city.



### *Back Onboard*

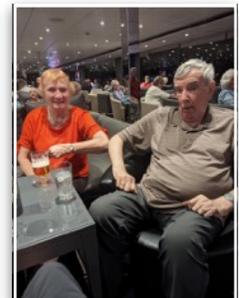
After an amazing day exploring Cologne, it was time to re-board the ship in time for dinner. Each evening on the Emerald Sun was such a great experience, in both the food and the company. Perusing the menu and choosing a main course was definitely a challenge.



Tonight, it was salmon fillet, beautifully presented in a cream dill sauce. For dessert, it was raspberry delice with raspberry jelly and sauce.



For this evening's entertainment, Lauren hosted a music trivia contest. Our team included **Cathy, Karen, Frank, Ron, Sandra, Paul** and myself. Having Frank on our team sealed our success with us winning the golden crown, oops, sorry I mean the chocolates.



## Day 4 - City of Koblenz, Germany



**Koblenz** is located at an intersection of the Rhine and Moselle rivers, aptly named Koblenz which means “confluence” in Latin. The Romans were the first to inhabit the area, building military posts as far back as 8 BC. Throughout the city are remnants of bridges and walls built from 8 BC through to the 2nd century.

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476, Koblenz was taken over by the Franks, Germanic peoples from the Lower Rhine. They fought the French and Russians through the Middle Ages, the French Revolution and into modern times, with power switching several times between the three nationalities. In the early 1820’s, it was returned to German rule where it remains today.



There are many beautiful statues commemorating different time periods in Koblenz’s history. As evidenced in many other German towns, much of Koblenz’s inner city was destroyed during WWII so many of the ones we saw were more modern. Each square had beautiful architecture, pretty fountains and historic monuments.

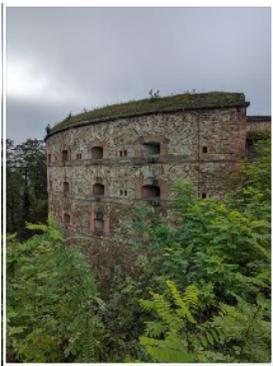
The most notable statue in the city is located in Deutsches Eck, the **German Corner**. Originally erected in 1897, the statue depicts William I, German Emperor, sitting on a horse. It was commissioned to show the city’s appreciation for William’s role in the unification of Germany. In 1945, the statue was damaged by American artillery and was eventually demolished. In 1949 Germany was once again in need of unification. The German Corner itself was designated as a monument, with the equestrian statue of William I being rebuilt and inaugurated in 1993. The National flag, along with the flags of 16 partly sovereign federated states, flies at the German Corner as a sign of unity. Since 2001, the flags of the European Union and the United States are also flown as a show of support of the September 11 attacks. To round out the “victims of the division”, three pieces of the Berlin Wall are on display at the German Corner.



## Day 4 - Ehrenbreitstein Fortress, Koblenz, Germany



We accessed the **Ehrenbreitstein Fortress** by cable car, 118 meters above the East bank of the Rhine River. Built as part of the Prussian fortress system in 1817, this current day fortification was high priority for Germany due to its close proximity to France and the fact that Koblenz was the center confluence of ships, railways and all land transportation.



Interesting Fact: The current day fortress has never been attacked.



The fortress was Europe's second largest military fortress (after Gibraltar), built to house 1200 soldiers. Today, part of the barracks area is a hostel for 150 youths.

The walls throughout the complex are thick, with an extensive corridor system linking various bastions, towers and parapets.

During WWI, Ehrenbreitstein was used as a German military headquarters. After the war, the fortress was slated to be destroyed, however, an American General convinced Germany to keep it due to its historical value. The US Army used the fortress from the end of WWI to 1923 as their headquarters during the Occupation of the Rhineland.



During WWII, the fortress was used by Germany to store not only valuable artefacts, but also anti-aircraft warfare weapons such as the Flak gun and this Griffin cannon which dates back to the 16th century.



Since 2002, Ehrenbreitstein Fortress has belonged to the UNESCO World Heritage Upper Middle Rhine Valley.

## Day 4 - Rhine Gorge

The **Rhine Gorge**, also known as the **Upper Middle Rhine Valley**, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site because of its cultural landscape and terrific scenery. The valley has walls up to 200 meters high, with the main rock being slate.

The valley has its own microclimate, excellent for the many agricultural terraces and vineyards, especially on the south facing slopes. Several world class wineries come from this area of Germany.

Throughout the area are 40 hilltop castles built during the Holy Roman Empire, quite the sites to behold.



**Pfalzgrafenstein Castle** (left), shaped like a ship, sits in the middle of the river and was once a toll station.



**Stolzenfels Castle** (right) has been turned into a hotel.



The **Marksburg Castle** in Braubach was originally built as a fortification used to enforce customs in the town, then was expanded to offer protection of royal families. In the 1800's it was used as a prison and a home for disabled soldiers. This castle was only one of two in the area that was never destroyed.

There are many beautiful towns along the 65 km Rhine Gorge, each with brightly coloured houses and steepled churches. Sail along with us.



## Day 5 - Mannheim - Heidelberg



We docked in Mannheim and took a coach to the town of Heidelberg. Our first stop was a visit to the **Heidelberg Castle**. Originally built in 1214, the ruins we see today were built mostly from 1764 onwards. The castle has had many leaders, including Prince Elector Ruprecht III and Ludwig V, and has seen destruction through many wars.



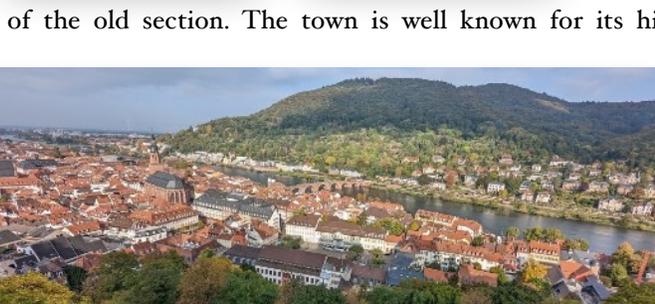
The **van het Schloss Ottheinrichsbau** is an example of German Renaissance architecture. Biblical and mythological figures decorate the facade, immortalizing the sculptor's self image and political agenda. The building connects to the balcony, known as the **Hall of Glass** (left picture, note the arches on the right). The second floor once held a grand hall adorned with Venetian mirror glass. Its roof was destroyed in 1764 and, as with most of the castle buildings, was never completely rebuilt.



Located next to the Hall of Glass is the **Bell Tower**. It was originally constructed in the 15th century for gun turrets but was eventually repurposed as a bell and lookout tower. The walls are currently being preserved and restored.



The castle was well known for its winemaking and lively parties. The **Barrel Room** always contained a "great barrel", with the current one dating to the mid 1700's. It holds 220,000 litres. The platform above the barrel may have once been a dance floor. Our group was treated to a wine tasting event, with their *Adam Muller* red and *Karl Theodore* white being highlighted. **Sandra** choose a quiet spot to sip her wine and enjoy the surroundings.



We drove down into the **town of Heidelberg** and did a walking tour of the old section. The town is well known for its higher education and research facilities, including the Heidelberg University and Library. The city was not heavily damaged during the war so many of its original buildings remain.



## Day 6 - Kehl - Strasbourg

We docked in Kehl, Germany then drove by coach to the nearby town of Strasbourg, France. The old town of Strasbourg is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, designated in 1988.



At the entrance of the old town is the **Barrage Vauban**, the Great Lock, and the **Ponts Couverts**, which are 3 bridges and 4 towers, all built between the 13th and 17th centuries as defence for the town.



Strasbourg is known for the preservation of its **half-timbered buildings**. Many tanners, millers and fishermen built their homes on the River Ill in the district of La Petite France. Four channels go through this area, with three of them having weirs set up to work the mills.

The **Strasbourg Cathedral** was built in the 11th century and contains many important symbolic statues, portals, stained glass and its grand organ. Most notable is its **astronomical clock**.

The original clock was built in 1352, with the current one being built in 1547. The 18 meter high clock shows the official time, solar time, the day, month and year, the sign of the zodiac, and the phase of the moon and several planets. The structure is ornately decorated with statues of figures representing Greece, Assyria, Persia and Rome. The most interesting are characters that represent the ages of life who parade in front of Death.



## Life Onboard



All of the guests enjoyed spending time together in the lounge and at dinner. There were always stories to be told, pictures to be shown and a lot of conversations about the current day's adventures. Many evenings we had cocktail parties before dinner, and, if not, we made our own party.

We thought Emerald was so thoughtful to have Canadian flags on the corner dinner table, that is until a waiter quickly removed them and put them on an empty table nearby. Apparently people were "saving" the table for themselves but were too slow in getting to the dining room. So we had a few moments of enjoyment with the flags anyway. Any excuse for a party!



## Day 7 - Breisach and the Black Forest



After arriving in Breisach, Germany, we drove through the countryside to the Black Forest. We spent the day at the **Vogtsbauernhof Museum**. All of the buildings are from the region and date back to 1407.

The museum has many displays both inside and out that give visitors insight to the past way of life in rural Germany. There are interactive displays for children so that they can experience what farming life was like before modern machinery and technology.



Germany, as well as the Black Forest, is known for its **Black Forest cake**. We were treated to a demonstration of how the cake is assembled, using three layers of sponge, Morello cherries and Kirschwasser.

Kirschwasser, also known as Kirsch, is a clear brandy made from double distilled Morello cherries. The lady who assembled the cake was very generous when applying the Kirschwasser on each level of sponge. The cream is also applied to each layer, followed by cherries on top, then topped with shaved chocolate.



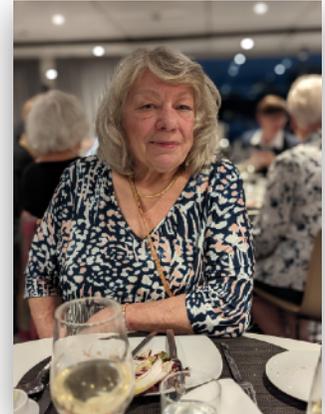
We had coffee and cake right after the demonstration and were so surprised at how light the cake was. We were expecting a lot of heaviness with the large volume of cream on each piece, but it was so fluffy. What a treat!

## More of the Good Life Onboard

I started travelling with Wendy in 2015, with this river cruise being the 9th trip with her and the ever growing group of travel mates. As evident in the pictures, we all love to hang out, swap stories, share a meal and have a drink together. It doesn't matter which country we are visiting, we always have a great time.



When we aren't travelling, many of us keep in touch via email and social media, with an occasional lunch or special occasion get together. Good friends are typically hard to find, and harder to hang onto. However, with the friends I've made on these trips, I find it's easy to maintain the friendships because of our common interests in travel, culture, history and genuine kindness to each other.



Reflecting on our adventures during this river cruise, the one thing that jumps out the most is how much everyone enjoyed each port of call. Emerald took us to great cities in the Netherlands, Germany, France and then into Switzerland. The itineraries gave us insight into each location's history, both the good and the bad aspects of it. Photography is important to me, and Emerald certainly gave me a lot of scenery and architecture to shoot. I'm glad my fellow travellers allowed me to take their pictures as keepsakes.

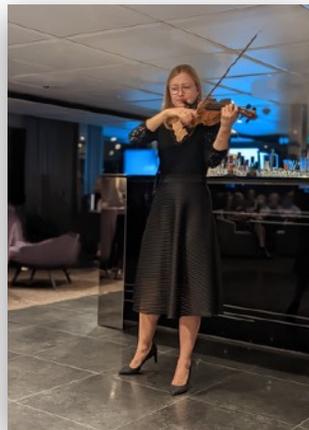


## Emerald Staff and Special Guests



We enjoyed our cruise so much, all due to the staff of Emerald Sun. They worked tirelessly to ensure we enjoyed the ship, the meals, the excursions and the ports of call. One evening, Lauren, our **Cruise Activities Director**, put on a great concert for us in the lounge. She's a very talented singer and entertainer.

One of the things we looked forward to several times a day was the food! The head chef put together great daily menus, all hand made by **chefs** under his watchful eye. Emerald employees hail from all over the world, bringing with them their flare for local cuisine.



In addition to Lauren's concert, Emerald hired **local violinists** to entertain us on two separate evenings. These extremely talented ladies told stories through their music, choosing songs from each of their cultures that gave us insight into the rich history of their respective regions. Each song was played with true heart and soul.

The **waiters** and **bartenders** were very interactive with all guests and provided excellent customer service. You could tell they enjoyed their jobs as there were lots of smiles and questions like "how was your day" and "did you enjoy today's port?" Many of the staff members have been with Emerald since they launched in 2014 and have served on several of the nine star ships. Although the pandemic has affected the service industry worldwide, the staff worked extra hard to give us an excellent and stress free vacation.



## Day 8 - Basel and Lucerne



We arrived in Basel, Switzerland and transferred by coach to Lucerne where we would spend the next two nights.

Lucerne has to be the most scenic place I've ever been in. It is located on Lake Lucerne, with Mount Pilatus on one side and the Swiss Alps on the other. The River Reuss runs through Old Town Lucerne, with several historic bridges crossing between the banks. The Chapel Bridge dates to 1333 and is the oldest covered wooden bridge in Europe. Parts of it were rebuilt in 1993 after a fire. The adjoining water tower was built in 1303 and was used for water storage, then a prison and torture chamber.



The buildings along the river were used in the trading industry due to their location. They were also used as political offices with some still in use today. You will find lots of outdoor restaurants along the walkway with great views to have coffee, a meal or a glass of wine.

Switzerland has never been at war (thanks Ron for the information on this), so their buildings remain intact and have not had major restorations done on them. The architecture is mainly the Renaissance style of the 1600's.



The Jesuit Order was founded in 1534, formed to fight against Protestantism. The Lucerne City Council called the Jesuits to Lucerne in 1573 to build a college in aid of stopping the Protestant movement. The Jesuit Church (Jesuitenkirche St. Francis Xavier) pictured here on the left is the first large Baroque temple in Switzerland and was consecrated in 1677. The structure was designed by Italian, German and Jesuit architects and its inside decor is simple compared to most Catholic churches.



Lake Lucerne is a tourist's dream location. In summer, people visit for the boating and diving opportunities, in addition to enjoying the many available spa facilities. In winter, people come to ski at the many close-by resorts. The area has an excellent transportation network, whether by train, bus or boat. Shopping is a favourite pastime for many, indulging in Swiss made products, including chocolate. It's fair to say, everyone on our tour really enjoyed Lucerne.

## Day 9 - Mount Rigi



We took an excursion to Mount Rigi, the “Queen of the Mountains”, a place I would consider the most beautiful place on earth. Located in the Schwyz Alps, the highest peak, Rigi Kulm, at 1,798 meters is easily accessible by cable car from the Kräbel station to Rigi-Scheidegg, then by a cogwheel train to Rigi-Kulm station. You could get on and off at other stations along the route as well.



The peninsula where Mount Rigi is located is surrounded by three lakes: Lake Lucerne, Lake Zug and Lake Lauerz. From the peak you can see ten additional lakes plus countless mountain peaks.

The area has many walking and biking trails, as well as picnic and observation areas. In winter, many visitors come to ski.

The 200 year old Hotel Rigi Kulm sits at the very peak and has an outdoor terrace offering stunning panoramic views. Many of our group enjoyed sitting with a hot or cold beverage, soaking up the sun and marvelling at the majestic scenery. We truly had a wonderful visit.



## Day 10 - Zurich

Our last day of the trip was spent in the beautiful city of Zurich. Our guide toured us through the old town center along the Limmat River with its many churches, trade and bank buildings.



Zurich was founded by the Romans over 2000 years ago. Today it is densely populated and is Switzerland's busiest city for road, rail and air travel. The official language in Zurich is Standard German, one of the four recognized languages in Switzerland (the others being French, Italian and Romansh).



One of the four main churches in Zurich is the Fraumünster. It was founded in 853 by Louis the German for his daughter and was built on the grounds of a former Abbey for aristocratic women. In this picture, the Abbey's stainless windows depict the biblical story of various prophets, Jacob, Christ, Zion and Law.

Zurich is a rich city, known for its financial institutions and political holdings, however, beauty is found throughout with its parks, squares and quaint shops.



Strolling along the cobblestone streets was a great way to end a great trip. All of the countries we visited on this trip were special. From medieval to modern, we saw it all! Until the next time, farewell.