

## Europe 2019 Travel Journal

Sunday, September 15, 2019 – We arrived in Amsterdam this morning to start our eighth trip so far with Andy and Debi Weisman. Our first trip with them was to Amsterdam in 2010, and we stayed at the same hotel as back then.



The hotel rooms weren't ready when we arrived there at 9am, so we dropped off our luggage, went out to eat breakfast and took a canal boat ride around Amsterdam to reacquaint ourselves with the city. Some of us were able to fall asleep during the ride due to the lack of sleep on our overnight flight. After a much-needed nap to reset our biological clocks, we had a formal tour of the famous Amsterdam Red Light District. While we walked around the area on our previous trip there, it's another thing to have a tour guide explain the ins and outs (no pun intended) of the district. We learned that the streets are actually organized so similar types of prostitutes are grouped together, making it easier to find what you're looking for. We started on "Big

Mama Alley" (large black women with big booties) and finally ended on "Discount Row" for those on a limited budget. There is often a surprise waiting in the panties of those prostitutes.

Monday, September 16 – Our daughter Julia, a flight attendant with Delta, was able to pick up a work flight to Amsterdam with a 26-hour layover, and she arrived this morning to join us for the day. The three of us started with a bike tour of Amsterdam. Andy and Debi didn't join us as Andy is recovering from shoulder surgery and wasn't cleared for biking in Amsterdam traffic. It was drizzling during the beginning of the tour, but cleared up and we were able to cover a lot of ground and see a



lot of sites on our bikes. Afterwards Andy and Debi joined us for lunch, then we went to the House of Bols, where we learned about how they make their 100+ flavors of liqueur and sampled several cocktails made with Bols products. After dinner at a local Dutch restaurant, we said our goodbyes to Julia and headed back to the hotel.



Tuesday, September 17 – After breakfast we headed to the Port of Amsterdam to board the Oceania Marina cruise ship to start a 12-day cruise from Amsterdam to Lisbon. Lori and Debi started with spa treatments, I took a run in the gym, and Andy started drinking early. The average age of the passengers on the cruise seems to be just under 100, so

we'll likely end the cruise with a lot fewer than the 1200 we're starting with.



Wednesday, September 18 – Our first port today was Dover, England. We met our tour guide Tanya who drove us around Dover to view the famous white cliffs and to Canterbury for a tour of the town and the Canterbury Cathedral, home of the Church of England and currently undergoing extensive renovations. Canterbury is a lovely town, in British parlance, dating back to Roman times and currently home to three universities. The area is also the source of numerous words and phrases in English, including “sandwich”, “eavesdropping”, “horse cantering”, and “monkey business”. We had lunch at a wonderful café overlooking the cliffs, which of course included tea with milk and fresh scones.

Back on the ship, Lori and Debi took a cooking class, I took a

run in the gym, and Andy started drinking early. A pattern is developing.

Tomorrow’s port is Le Havre on the Normandy coast of France, where we’re scheduled to tour the D-Day Landing Beaches. But that’s for the next journal.

Love,  
Lori and Stephen



## Europe 2019 Travel Journal – Issue #2

Thursday, September 19, 2019 – This morning we docked at Le Havre on the Normandy coast of France. Like most French words, the pronunciation of Le Havre is nothing like what it looks like. A scenic drive through the now peaceful countryside of Normandy is where 60 years ago the most pivotal battle on the Western Front of WWII



took place. We began in Arromanches, site of the artificial harbor which was prefabricated and towed here across the English Channel, helping the Allies bring supplies ashore. Remnants of the artificial port can still be seen on the beach today. Lunch comprised



a pate appetizer (which we didn't eat), turkey in French cream sauce (which we didn't eat), and an apple tort (which we did eat) with Bordeaux wine. We continued on to St. Laurent and the emotionally moving American Cemetery. Next we visited Pointe du Hoc, where a

heavily armed German battery was heroically destroyed by American troops on the first day of the D-Day invasion. It was a proud day to be an American and celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day.



Friday, September 20 – After docking in St. Malo and being tendered ashore, we drove to Mont-Saint-Michel, a rocky islet off the coast of Normandy. Mont-Saint-Michel is on all the “Places You Must Visit in Your Lifetime” lists, and for good reason. Around its base are medieval walls and towers above which rise the clustered buildings of the village with the ancient abbey crowning the mount. The abbey is a magnificent edifice comprised of a pre-Romanesque church begun in the 8th century and a series of Romanesque and Gothic monastery buildings. Rising over 500 feet above sea level, Mont Saint-Michel

rests on sand banks where the daily tides can change as much as 6 feet. At high tide, the abbey and church seem to be floating in the sea. We toured the abbey and had lunch in the village in the shadow of the abbey, then headed back to the ship. Lori and Debi read on the deck, I took a run, and Andy started drinking early.

Saturday, September 21 – Brest, France. Today we woke up after 10am, catching up on some much-needed sleep. After a leisurely breakfast, we took the shuttle bus from the ship into the city center of Brest, a port city in Brittany in northwestern France. After walking around the town for one hour, we realized the only interesting thing about Brest is its name. We made our way back to the ship and relaxed the rest of the afternoon.



Sunday, September 22 - La Rochelle. This morning we docked in La Rochelle, France, which ended up far exceeding our low expectations. La Rochelle is a coastal city in southwestern France. It's been a center for fishing and trade since the 12th century. The old town has half-timbered medieval houses and



Renaissance architecture, including passageways covered by 17th-century arches. Since we didn't have an organized tour set up, Debi, with the aid of a Visitor Center map, acted as our tour guide. It was a nice town, but our tour guide needed more training.

We're in Bordeaux for the next two days touring wineries, so look for a journal in a few days.

Love,  
Lori and Stephen

### Europe 2019 Travel Journal – Issue #3

Monday and Tuesday, September 23 & 24 – Bordeaux, France. After a few hours of rough seas the night before, we turned into the Gironde River leading to Bordeaux and docked early in the morning for two days in this wine producing region of France. Andy was so excited he could hardly contain himself, being an avid collector and enthusiast of Bordeaux wines. Our guide Laëtitia was waiting for us on shore to take us to the Medoc area the first day and Saint Emilion the second day.



breaks down to 5 First Growths, 14 Second Growths, 14 Third Growths, 10 Fourth Growths and 18 Fifth Growth Bordeaux wines. These are the desirable wines that people seek out. The rest, not so much.

Andy was able to arrange visits to three Chateaux through his connections for the first day, and they were truly special,



Bordeaux wines follow a rating system from 1855 when Napoleon III requested a classification system for France's best Bordeaux wines. Wines were ranked according to a chateau's (a French vineyard's) reputation and trading price, which at that time was directly related to quality. The wines were ranked in importance from first to fifth growths, and the rankings haven't changed since then. Of the more than 8000 chateaux in the Bordeaux region, there are a total of only 61 included in the 1855 Bordeaux Classification. This



especially since it is harvest time and we were able to watch the grapes being picked and produced into wine. We visited three Second Growth chateaux: Chateau Ducru Beaucaillou, Chateau Montrose, and Chateau Pichon Longueville Comtesse De Lalande. We had lunch at Chateau Montrose, which was quite an affair. After tasting two wines in the tasting room, we joined the CEO of the company, which owns several chateaux in the region, for hors d'oeuvres, lunch and a lot more wine. We ended up spending about four hours there. He must have enjoyed our

company, as he brought out more wine than originally planned for, including a 1990 vintage Bordeaux and then followed that up with Cognac, all served in exquisite French style in the executive dining room.

On our second day in Bordeaux we headed to Saint Emilion, where we visited Chateau Tour Saint Christophe and Chateau Canon La Gaffeliere. We then had lunch in and walked around the village of Saint Emilion, a charming medieval village, before heading back to the ship for a 4pm departure.

Wednesday, September 25. Our planned stop for Biarritz (Saint-Jean-de-Luz), France was canceled due to bad weather. This is a



for our first day in Bilbao, we rode around town on the Hop On Hop Off Bus, hopping off only for lunch but seeing all the sights from the bus. On our second day we did a food tour that visited several local restaurants serving favorite Basque dishes. it was a lot of fun sampling foods that we would never have found on our own, including pig cheeks in tomato sauce and local wine, beer and cider.

Our next port tomorrow is Ferrol, Spain, then on to Portugal. Miss you all.

Love,  
Lori and Stephen

port where we would need to tender ashore, but with forecasted 6-9 foot seas in the tendering area, that would be quite dangerous. We could potentially end up with half the passengers on the ship with broken hips, either from falling out of bed or trying to walk down the hall for the next meal. So instead we arrived at our next scheduled port, Bilbao, Spain one day early and stayed there two days instead of one.

Bilbao is a port city in northern Spain containing beautiful architecture and surrounded by green mountains. It's the de facto capital of Basque Country, famed for the Frank Gehry–designed Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.

Since we didn't have anything prearranged



## Europe 2019 Travel Journal – Issue #4

Friday, September 27 – Ferrol, Spain. Today we docked in Ferrol in the Galician Province of Spain. Our tour du jour took us to two historical waterfront towns and a graceful country house surrounded by flowering gardens.



Pontedeume, a traditional Galician town on the Eume River estuary, has 12th-century churches in Old Town and the remains of a medieval castle that rises above the waterfront. Pazo de Marinan, an 18th-century country house known for its spectacular gardens, features towering walnut trees from India, eucalyptus trees and camellias that weren't flowering this time of year. Betanzos, a gorgeous city at the confluence of the Mendo and Mandeo rivers features an abundance of buildings with glass-enclosed balconies or "galerias." The protective glass allows the balconies to be enjoyed on windy days and in cooler weather. It also adds an attractive design element. The town has medieval churches, the original town gates and a maze of narrow streets leading into the well-preserved Old Town, where we had

a delicious lunch of octopus, salad and Galician beer and wine.

Saturday, September 27 - Oporto, Portugal. This morning we arrived in Oporto after a night of rough seas. They announced over the P.A. system that there would be 4-meter swells, probably because that sounds less intimidating than saying 13-foot seas. The ship was tossed around like the Minnow on Gilligan's Island, but we all took sea sickness pills and survived the night. The crew of the ship was obviously concerned, as there was an abundance of motion sickness bags scattered liberally around the ship.

Oporto, also called Porto (the explanation for both names is beyond the scope of this journal) is located along the Douro River estuary in northern Portugal and is one of the oldest European cities. Its settlement dates

back many centuries, when it was an outpost of the Roman Empire.



Port wine, one of Portugal's most famous exports, is named after Porto, since the area was responsible for the packaging, transport, and export of fortified wine produced with distilled grape spirits exclusively in the Douro Valley. We sampled 10- and 40-year old port wines in a pop-up bar after lunch, where we had a Francesinha. This is a Portuguese sandwich originally from Porto, made with bread, wet-cured ham, linguiça (smoke-cured pork sausage seasoned with garlic and paprika), fresh sausage like chipolata, rump steak, hamburger and grilled onions, then covered with melted cheese, bacon, and a fried egg, then smothered in a hot thick tomato and beer sauce. Andy and I split one, which was plenty. I'm not sure how my body is going to react to such a

monstrosity. It will either clean me out completely or constipate me for days. Details to follow upon request only. That explains the port after lunch, which is supposed to be a digestive.

In 2014 and 2017, Porto was elected The Best European Destination. The combination of those honors and me mentioning it in my travel journal means that it will be completely overrun by tourists in the next year or so.

Sunday, September 29 - Lisbon. Today we ended our cruise and started a three-day stay in Lisbon. Our scheduled Jeep tour around the city today was a bit of a comedy of errors. Today was the Lisbon Half Ironman, and traffic was a mess due to all the road closures, so we started about an hour after the scheduled time. Our guide's regular "jeep," which could have accommodated all of us, was broken, so he showed up with two cars and we split up, playing follow the leader. We visited all the different sections of Lisbon, which is too big for a walking tour and too hilly for a bike tour. The seafood restaurant that he selected for us for lunch typically has a 90-minute wait, so he sent his girlfriend early to



secure a table for us. In the meantime, we stopped at an old palace converted

into a shopping building with a bar called "Gin Lovers", aka Lori's and Andy's favorite place in the world. During our consumption of gin drinks and Vinho Verde wine (literally 'green wine', a Portuguese wine that originated in the historic Minho province in the far north of the country) we learned our table at the restaurant was ready for us. The gin drinks went into to-go cups and we headed for the restaurant, which should have been only about a ten-minute drive. The problem is

that we encountered not one but two road closures due to ambulances responding to calls and completely blocking the one-lane roads we were on. At one point after sitting still for twenty minutes our guide jumped from the car and told the policeman how to divert traffic to get us moving. At the second traffic standstill we got out of the cars, walked around the ambulance and got in a taxi on the other side to go to the restaurant. By the time we arrived our food had already been ordered, served and was



waiting 30 minutes for us. Fortunately, it was seafood which didn't need to be piping hot to be delicious. More touring after lunch took us to Belem, a city next to Lisbon. Belem is home to the bakery that developed in 1837 the Pastéis de Belem, a sweet pastry. They're popular throughout Portugal, but simply called "natas" everywhere else. The line was literally down the street, but our guide waited in line while we walked around the area on our own, even getting to see the ship we were on sail away without us. Dinner was at one of the popular restaurants in Lisbon with a famous Portuguese chef, whom we watched from our table next to the kitchen. We have two more days in Lisbon, so watch for one more journal.

Love,  
Lori and Stephen



## Europe 2019 Travel Journal – Issue #5

Monday, September 30 - Lisbon. It was nice to sleep in a bed planted on solid ground last night, even though we still feel like we're on a boat when standing still. Today we had a food tour around Lisbon with stops at five different restaurants. At our first stop we had "jew sausage" (Alheira) which was invented by the Jews of Portugal, who in 1497 were given the choice of either being expelled from the country or converting to Christianity. Those *conversos* who remained and secretly retained their beliefs avoided eating pork, putting them at risk of being noticed not to hang sausages, traditionally made of pork, in their smokehouses. As a way to avoid attracting the attention of the Portuguese Inquisition, they began to make sausages from other meats such as poultry and game, mixed with bread for texture. With time, the dish spread to the remaining population and became part of typical Portuguese cuisine. We also sampled Bifana (pork sandwich), octopus salad, codfish cakes, more natas and other foods, along with Portuguese wines and beer. Lori and I were so full from all the eating we decided to skip dinner and take it easy for the night. Debi and Andy didn't want to miss a meal, so they went for dinner on their own.

Tuesday, October 1 – Lisbon. Today's tour du jour was a day trip to Sintra with a stop at a vineyard in the area for a local wine tasting. Our first stop was in the town of Cascais, where signs from the Ironman were still hanging from the race this past Sunday. This former fishing village used to be a royal getaway. Nowadays it still is a popular destination for the Portuguese and foreign elite thanks to all that it has to offer: boutiques, restaurants, hotels, and beaches. We then went to the most westerly point of continental Europe. From the cliff tops there were fantastic views of the beaches and the sea. Then a stop in Colares at the vineyards and cellars of Adega regional de Colares to have a tasting of the regional wines.

We then visited the beautiful and historic town of Sintra, a UNESCO world heritage site. After lunch at the Paris Café and walking around the picturesque streets, we drove to Pena Palace, constructed with a mix of architectural styles. Pena Palace is one of the best examples of Romanticism from the 19th century. Our last stop on the way back to Lisbon was at the Palace of Queluz, built in the 18th Century, which was the official royal residence of the king D. Pedro IV of Portugal.

At night we went to a trendy Lisbon restaurant and celebrated Andy's birthday. Then back to the hotel to pack for the flight home tomorrow morning.

Love,  
Lori and Stephen