

2018 Europe River Cruise – Day 1 – Tuesday September 11 – Depart the USA

Today is the start of our fifteen-day European River Cruise. At 1 PM I fly from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia and then depart Philadelphia at 7 PM for an eight-hour overnight flight to Amsterdam in the Netherlands. There I will meet my dear wife Marcia, her sister Marie, and brother-in-law Kal who have been traveling around Germany for two weeks researching genealogy and visiting distant relatives.



We will be starting our river cruise in Amsterdam and will travel up the Rhine River, through the Main-Danube Canal, and then down the Danube River to Budapest, Hungary.

This will be the twenty-third International trip the four of us have taken together over the past fourteen years. We have not been back to Europe in a few years. We had always joked that we would go on a river cruise when “we got old and decrepit”. Figuring we were getting there, we booked a cruise with Scenic. We had traveled with this Australian owned company in 2010 on a great twenty-day tour coach tour of New Zealand. Scenic was also highly recommended by friends Peggy and Dick who enjoyed a European River cruise with them.



We knew that Scenic has some of the newest river cruising ships. We will be traveling on the Scenic Opal, built in The Netherlands in 2015. It is 440 feet long, 37 feet wide (just narrow enough to fit through the locks on the rivers and the canal, and the maximum dimensions allowed for river cruisers), has 2-1/2 decks with a sun deck on top, cabins for 169 guests, a 51-man crew and a top speed of 14 mph.

This will not be an inexpensive cruise, but it is “all inclusive”. All food, meals, beverages and tours while off the ship, when it’s docked, are free. Also, all tips and gratuities, even for local guides. Scenic also offers their “Scenic Free Choice” that typically give folks two or three options for on-shore activities to choose from at each stop.

2018 Europe River Cruise – Day 2 – Wednesday September 12 – Amsterdam

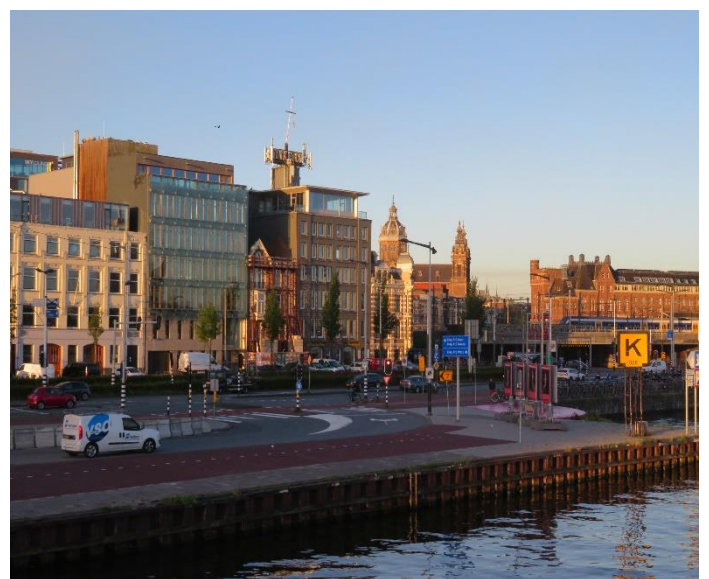
I land at the Amsterdam airport at 8:30 AM. Time in Europe is six hours ahead of USA East Coast time.



I clear Passport Control and Customs, grab my checked luggage and am met by a Scenic representative and then meet a driver who will take me to the ship. I am the only person being transported from this flight. A pleasant drive through Amsterdam with my driver. It seems like half of the local population is on bicycles!

At 10 AM I arrive at the dock and the Scenic Opal ship.

I am welcomed on board by the Tour Director, Beate, and escorted to the Opal Lounge to relax. Check-in to our rooms will not be until 3 PM. There are only a few people onboard; some new arrivals like myself and some folks waiting to depart from the last cruise. I go to the Sundeck for views of the city and to see what is up there.





The weather is nice. About 70 degrees and sunny. If this weather holds I can see myself spending a lot of time up on the spacious Sundeck.

The small "Vitality Pool" looks interesting. It is said to be heated to over 90 degrees.

I keep a watch for the arrival of Marcia, Marie and Kal. They arrive at 11:30 AM. They are not happy that while I received a free transfer from the airport, and all four of us will be transported to the airport at no charge

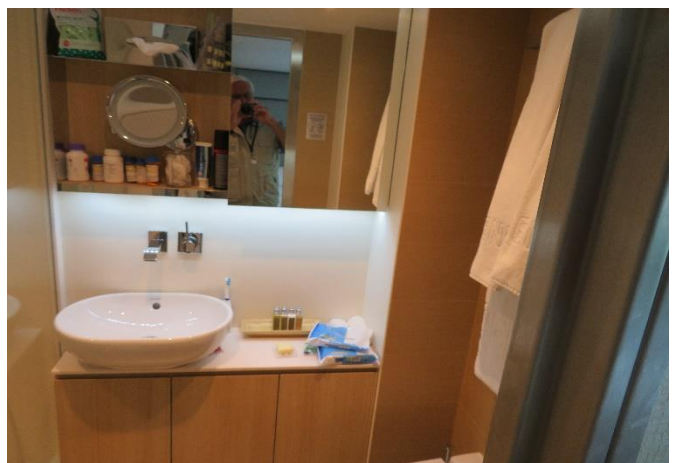


at the end of the trip, Scenic would not provide transfers from the Amsterdam Airport (where they had to turn in their rental car) even though they booked their air travel through them. They had to pay 70 Euros for a taxi (\$80+ USD).



We have a nice lunch in the Crystal Dining Room. We've learned that Breakfast and Lunch will be mainly buffet style, but there will be menus on each table if you want to order specials from the kitchen (like French Toast, Eggs Benedict, etc. for breakfast or a Hamburger, French Fries, or a special salad for lunch). There is a Chef manning an omelet station at breakfast and one at a pasta station at lunch. Dinner will always be off a set menu with multiple entre, appetizer, soup, and desert choices but again with the option of ordering something different from the kitchen.

At 3 PM we are quickly taken to our rooms, where our luggage is waiting. The check-in process is quick; they scan our Passport and give us room keys and a name tag with a computer chip imbedded to use when we exit and re-enter the ship. They don't even ask for a credit card, as everything is included!





Our cabins are roomy and beautiful. All the surfaces and construction materials are first class. There is a TV in the room that gives us a lot of information; weather, local and USA TV stations, movies, maps of where we are located and overviews of our next destinations. The bathroom is large and has a great "rainfall" shower. There is plenty of storage space and a safe and a free mini-bar restocked a couple of times a day. A real neat feature that we are looking forward to enjoying is the small balcony. The top glass can be easily lowered to give instant access to the outside. A sliding glass partition and/or drapes can be used to close the balcony off from the rest of the cabin. Much printed documentation and maps.



At 5:45 PM we all meet in the Opal Lounge for a Safety Briefing with Captain Miklos, Hotel Manager Djordje and Cruise Director Beate. Most all the crew is from Eastern Europe; Romania, Serbia, Latvia, Bosnia, Bulgaria or from Indonesia. Crew Director Beate tells us she was born in Germany but raised in South Africa. English is the official and only language on the Opal and all the crew speak it very well. We are told we have onboard 1 guest from New Zealand, 2 from Chile, 15 from the United Kingdom, 26 from Canada, 44 from the USA and 63 Aussies. Now we are off to our first dinner.

2018 Europe River Cruise – Day 3 – Thursday September 13 - Amsterdam



This morning we are still docked in Amsterdam and now have our first “Scenic Free Choice” option. One is an 8:30 AM departure for a three-hour excursion featuring a Canal Cruise on a small ship. The second one is an 8 AM departure for a four-hour visit to a scenic area called Zaanse Schans. The four of us all sign up for the excursion to Zaanse Schans as we have all taken a Canal Cruise on previous visits to Amsterdam. Four chartered Motor Coaches are lined up on the shore near our pier.

We secure our seats on a coach and find that we have an excellent Local Guide, Ed. We depart first for a motor tour of the city. Ed tells us Amsterdam has 830,000 residents and 1,000,000 bicycles. Folks will frequently have two or more bikes. One that they take to their trolley stop and another that they use at the end of their trip to ride to their destination, like their workplace. We have been warned to “look both ways” and be wary of bicycles; sometimes they do not obey traffic signals. We are told that The Netherlands is a small country of 17 million people and 1,750 square miles. We now head North to Zaanse Schans. This country appears most green and clean.



It is really an open-air museum and features several of the few remaining Windmills. These were used in the past to extract water and send it back to the sea, as 40% of Holland is land below sea level.

We have a nice demonstration on how the famous wooden shoes are made by a local craftsman in his workshop. We are glad we started early today, as this site has really filled up with tourists from around the world. The Japanese groups are a challenge!

We now have a walking tour in the nearby towns of Edam and Beemster and have a chance to admire the old houses. The weather is perfect. High 60s and a clear sky with no wind.



We return to the Scenic Opal at noontime and enjoying watching the ship's nautical crew un-dock the ship and start our departure for Zons.

It is really great to sit on the open Sun Deck, in perfect weather, and watch our our ship cruise south of Amsterdam towards the Rhine River. We pass many commercial ships and see nice bridges.

I am surprised at how smooth and quiet the cruising is. There are no waves on these rivers or canals!



A String Quartet boarded the Scenic Opal prior to our departure from Amsterdam and gives a recital in the Opal Lounge at 2 PM.

At 3:30 PM we all go up to the Sun Deck for the mandatory Safety Drill.



Late this afternoon we go through our first set of locks at Utrecht. These locks, of course, allow us to handle the elevation changes on the rivers and canals. We are told we will be going through about 100 locks, many as we cruise at night. I always find these fascinating. Many of our fellow travelers, especially those from Australia, have never been on a ship going through locks. The String Quartet exits the ship.



Prior to dinner we have our daily “Port Talk” from Cruise Director Beate. She reviews the activities for the next day or two, mentions any choices to be made, and shows photos of what we will be seeing on the three large screen TVs in the Opal Lounge.

Next the Captain’s Cocktail Reception and then the Welcome Dinner in the Crystal Dining Room as we cruise. Dress code is casual on the ship, but everyone dresses up a little for this dinner.

2018 Europe River Cruise – Day 4 – Friday September 14 – Cologne

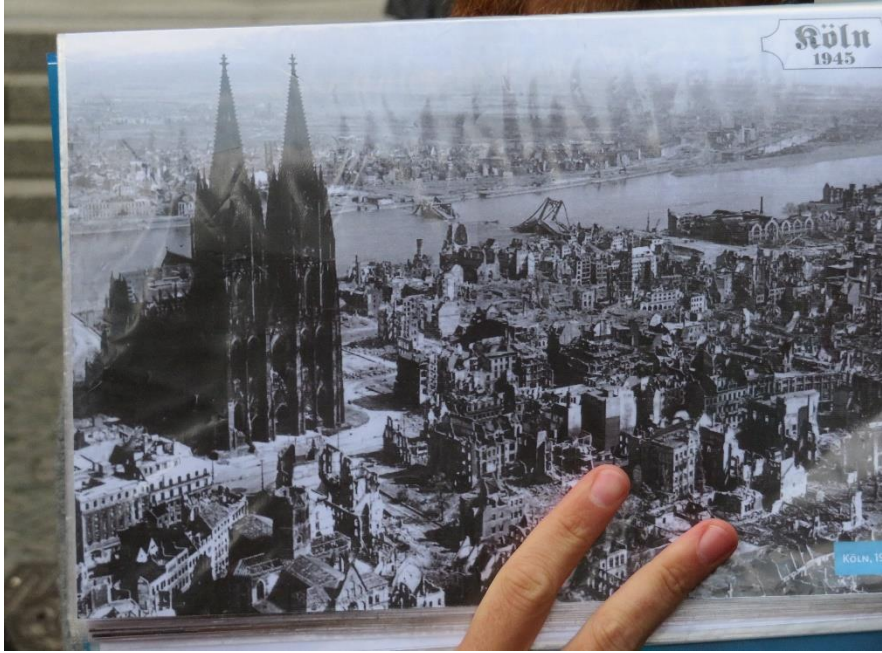
We cruise all night and enter the Rhine river. After breakfast we pass the large city of Dusseldorf. I enjoy sitting on our suite's small balcony, with the top window down, and checking our progress on maps.



There are two Scenic Free Choice options today, a walking tour of Cologne, Germany or a cooking demonstration on board our ship. Almost everyone opts for the first option. We have an early lunch today and at 11:45 AM the Scenic Opal stops briefly at Zons. We leave the ship and walk to the motor coaches. Our ship will continue up river, past Cologne, and pick us up in Bonn, Germany about 9:30 PM tonight.

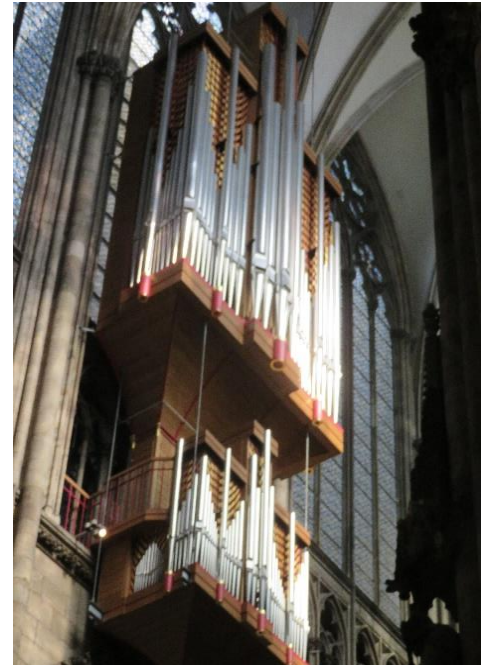
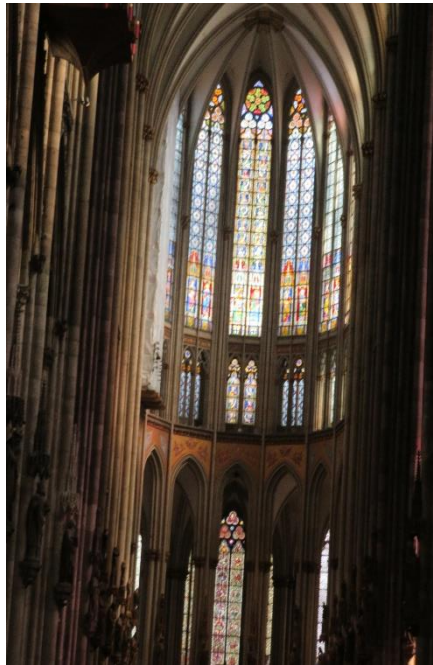
We have a half-hour drive on the Autobahn to Cologne. Our local guide is on the motor coach and tells us that Cologne is a city of 1 million people. The famous Cathedral is the most visited site in Germany with 20 thousand visitors a day. He tells us that construction was started in the year 1150 and the Cathedral was not completed until 1880 due to many suspensions of construction due to lack of funds. Its famous towers stand 515 feet high.





We are divided into six groups of 20 to 25 folks, each with our own local guide.

Our guide shows us interesting drawings and photos documenting the Cathedral's construction. I was really taken by the photo from 1945 showing the city of Cologne destroyed by Allied bombing but the Cathedral still standing. I was always told that the bombers intentionally avoided bombing the Cathedral as it's spires always poked through the clouds and acted as landmarks for the bombers. I did not hear this explanation from our German



guides. They say that the Cathedral was bombed once but the structure was saved as the windows were removed so if a bomb penetrated the roof the walls would not be blown out. The interior is beautiful, as is the exterior. We now have free time to walk all around the Cathedral and for some shopping in the area around the square. (Note from Marcia: The exterior

structure is amazing, but pollution blackens the sandstone, so it always looks dirty. Without pollution it would be light beige; because of the pollution the sandstone constantly blackens).

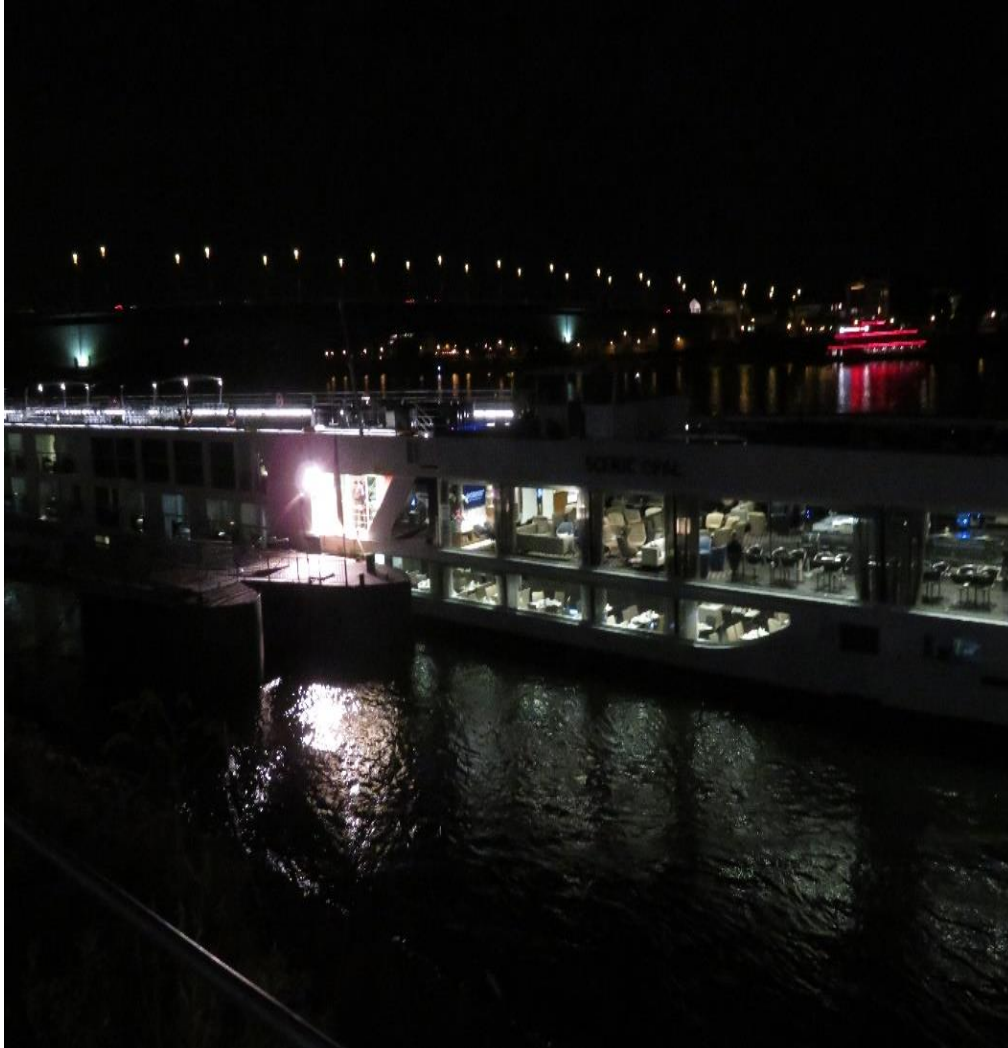
At 3:30 PM we re-board our motor coaches for a one-hour drive to a Castle. We were originally scheduled to go to the famous Marksburg Castle. Scenic informed us many months ago that the Marksburg Castle would not be available for us today, so they have changed our visit to the Schloss Burg Castle.



When we arrive at Schloss Burg we are welcomed by entertainers. We have local guides for a tour of the interior. Everything here is just for our Scenic tour group. We learn that the castle was built in the year 1166 but was neglected for years and rebuilt in the 1880s in the Baroque style, so it is not really like an old castle. The tour was OK but we are getting hungry and thirsty and are happy when they direct us to the dining room, where we grab the last seats at the dining tables. Apparently, everyone else in our Scenic group



split from the other groups to start relaxing! The three entertainers were good. The food was just OK. The room was very noisy!



At 8 PM we depart from the castle for a one-and-a-half hour motor coach ride to Bonn.

When we arrive, we learn that the Scenic Opal has just arrived and there is a little bit of a delay as they lower the gangway from the Sun Deck so that we can board.

A long day but interesting.

As always, pianist Antonio is in the Opal Lounge playing tunes after dinner.

Europe River Cruise – Day 5 – Friday September 15 – Cruising the Rhine Gorge



We cruise all night and enter the Rhine Gorge at 8 AM. We expect today to be one of the highlights of our trip as we will motor past many ancient castles, ruins, and river towns this morning.

We have each been given a "Tailor Made Device" that includes an earphone. We have used these devices during the earlier land tours, as it allows us to easily listen to the commentary of our local guides. Now, we find that they give us excellent automatic audio information and detailed maps as we pass by Castles and Towns.





We past the Loreley Rock which marks a narrow and shallow area of the Rhine. In the Middle Ages it was said a beautiful girl, Loreley, would sing from the rock and lure sailors towards her resulting in the destruction of their boats.

Now, this tale starts to have real meaning for us! The Scenic Opal slows to a crawl. We hear a passing commercial ship's hull scraping the bottom of the river and its propeller digging into the mud. Later we

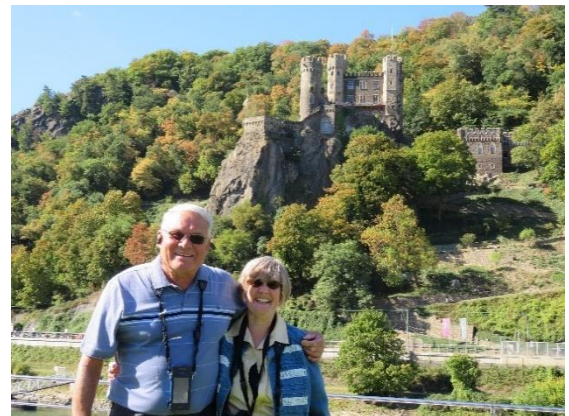


learn that there has been no real rain in this area since July. When we passed through this shallow area,

using the deepest part of the channel, our ship's sonar indicated only 3 centimeters (1-1/4 inches) clearance between our hull and the river bottom. Thanks to the skill of our Captain we were able to continue and enjoy this unique area.

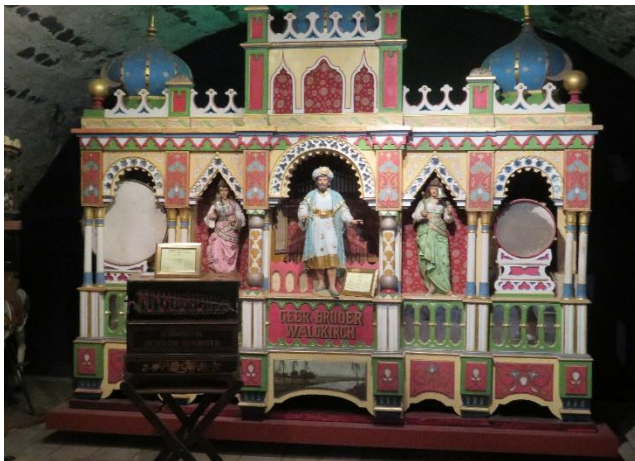
It is a beautiful and warm, sunny day. We sit on the Sundeck and enjoy the views and take many photos. In these photos it is still mid-morning and there is a bit of a breeze, from the movement of the ship, so we have on windbreakers. The scenic Castle, Town and Vineyard views just keep coming.



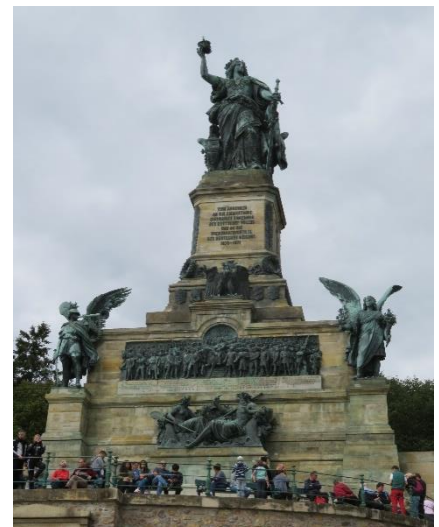


Wow; this has been better than I expected.

We dock at Rudesheim at 1:30 PM. We take a miniature train up the hillside to "Siegfried's Mechanical Musical Instrument Museum". Here we have a tour and get to listen to several mechanical devices from the 18th Century playing some pretty good music.



We next take a chair lift up the mountain to the Niederwald Monument for some great views.





We travel back down the mountain and have some time for shopping before returning to our ship.

At 4:45 PM the Scenic Opal heads up river towards Wurtzburg.

This was a great day!



As on most nights, after Cruise Director Beate's (on the right) "Port Presentation" covering tomorrow's activities she brings up the Head Chef to describe tonight's entre, soup, appetizer, and desert choices. Next, the Head Wine Steward (on the left) details what he is recommending for tonight as the house

red and white wine. Of course, folks can order other wines off their extensive listing, or any other type of drink that they might like.



Two widowed Australian ladies, traveling together, were unfortunate enough to sit next to us tonight. Actually, we all had a great time as we described to each other traveling mishaps we had experienced on other trips.

Europe River Cruise – Day 6 – Sunday September 16 – Cruising The Main River



Today we will stay on board as we cruise the Main River and the Main Canal to connect with the Danube River. Unfortunately, Scenic has temporarily closed off our access to the upper or Sundeck due to low bridges. They have also removed the sun awnings and collapsed the chairs and tables. We can still get some good views from the area in front of the Opal Lounge and of course from our room balconies.

At 11 AM we have an entertaining presentation from “Germany’s most famous Zither player”, Tomy Temmersen.



He plays some great songs, including *Edelweiss* and *Lara’s Theme* as well as other German standards and some of his own compositions on the unique 42 sting instrument. He also tells us many humorous stories about his training and career.

At lunch time I get a photo of the kitchen crew at work in their tight quarters.

At 1:45 PM Scenic opens for us the front Sundeck, which is slightly lower than the larger rear Sundeck, and we go up top on what is another perfect weather day. However, we are ordered to stay seated, always, as we will be going under low bridges. The Nautical Crew is on watch as we go under these bridges. Midway, in the picture to the left, below, is the Steering Bridge. It can retract all the way down into the ship. The Captain has a hatch he can open and look out of if he is not satisfied with just monitoring the radar, sonar, and GPS.! We see more Castles.



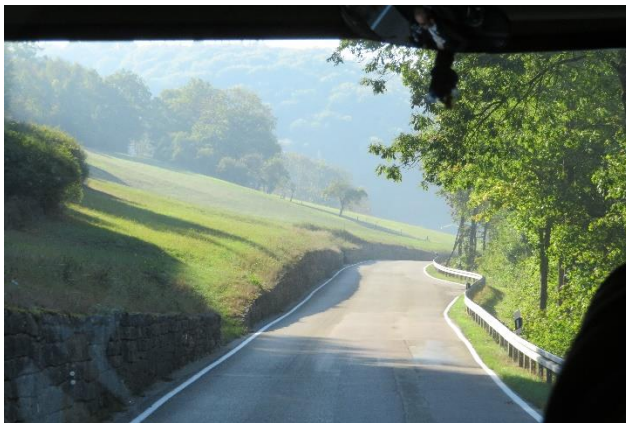
One time on each cruise folks in Suites (which is just about everybody) are invited to have dinner at "Portobellos" which a twenty-seat dining area in the bow of the ship. It features Italian cuisine. Tonight, it's our turn and we enjoy an excellent dinner. I am not a "foodie" but, in my opinion, all our meals have been excellent; variety, preparation and presentation.

Europe River Cruise – Day 7 – Monday September 17 – Wurzburg & Rothenburg

We cruise all night on the Main River, docking at the town of Wurzburg, in Bavaria at 7 AM. We have nice views of Wurzburg from our docked ship.



We are offered two Scenic Freechoices today; a guided tour of the old walled town of Rothenburg or a tour of the Bishops Residence including wine tasting. The four of us pick the first choice and at 8:30 AM we board motor coaches for a 1-1/2 scenic drive, on narrow roads, to Rothenburg. We arrive at the



beautiful town of Rothenburg and have a great walking tour with our local guide, who also accompanied us on the motor coach ride. As we walk through town we stop at shops where she has arranged food sampling of pastries, breads and sausage. Yes, it's another perfect weather day.





Now I must mention something that has us quite concerned. When our tour started we noticed that a couple of folks had bad coughs. As we passed an Apotheke (Drug Store in German) today, many tour members asked to go in. Yes, many more folks on our tour are now obviously sick. This is not the gastro-intestinal infections you hear about on large cruise ships but apparently a nasty head/throat/lung infection. At times, you can't hear what the tour guide is saying on the motor coach PA system as folks are coughing non-stop. We continue to be careful, using hand sanitizer all the time and the sanitizer dispensers as we enter the eating

facilities on board our ship. However, it's tough when the folks sitting behind you on the motor coach are coughing or sneezing every ten seconds and stuff is flying by you!



Our guided tour now ends, and we have free time to explore. Marcia heads off to shop in the many souvenir and "Christmas Shops". She is looking specifically for beer steins. Marie, Kal and I head off to explore the Botanical Gardens and the old City Walls and Towers.

After the gardens we walk back into town, see the town hall, and climb up to the top of the town walls.



We find one tower on the wall that is open and lets folks climb to the top for great views.



This is a most beautiful Bavarian town. I find a small Beer Garden and relax, chatting with fellow tour members.

We drive back to the Scenic Opal, arriving at 3:15 PM for a late lunch.



Frequently, river cruise boats have to “tie up” next to each other on the canals and rivers. To get to shore the folks on the outer ship walk through the lobby of the inner ship and then on to their gangplack to shore. It’s interesting to check out the interior outfitting and appearance of the other cruise ships

When we left this morning for Rothenburg we were tied up on the outside of another ship. The view from our balcony (below, left) was of the other ship’s laundry room. When we return from

Rothenburg the other ship has departed, but our view from our balcony is not better!



We depart for an overnight cruise to Bamberg, on the Main-Danube Canal at 3:15 PM. We should arrive around noon tomorrow and will be passing through thirty-six locks. A Violinist entertains us at 4 PM.



Europe River Cruise – Day 8 – Tuesday September 18 – Bamberg

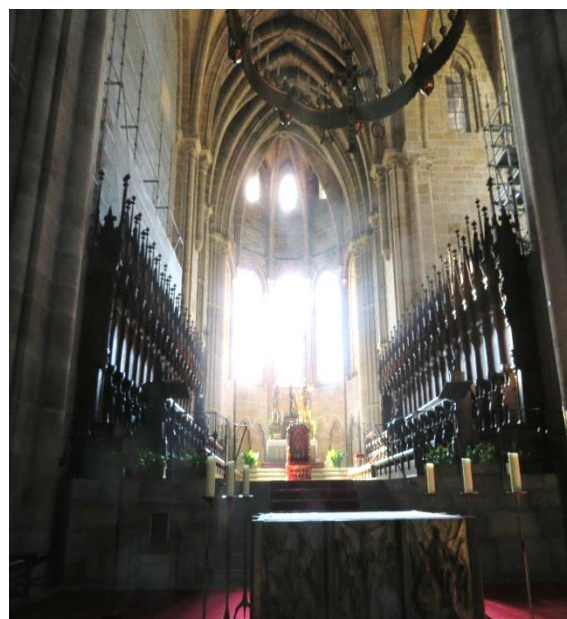
We wake up this morning still cruising on the canal towards Bamberg. Now I must say that the Scenic Opal does not seem as crowded as I expected it to be. We never have a problem getting a seat on the Sundeck, in the Opal Lounge or in the Crystal Dining Room. On the other hand, I wonder if it is because folks are staying in their room due to the expanding respiratory illness that I first mentioned yesterday; I do see a lot of “room service” plates left outside of rooms. Distressingly, Kal appears to have come down with the first signs of illness.

We dock at Bamberg at 1 PM. It is another great weather day; perhaps 80 degrees now. The crew sets up umbrellas on the Sundeck for some relief from the sun.

At 2:30 PM we depart for our three-hour guided tour of the town of Bamberg. It is another nice one.



We walk through the town and next tour the Cathedral.



Now, we walk through the pretty town center.



Another interesting (and most horrifying) thing that we have seen throughout Germany in these old towns is the 4 "x 4" small commemorative plaques (called tripping stones) that have been placed in the walks in front of homes of Jewish German citizens who were taken from their homes in the late 1930s and early 1940s and sent to Concentration and Extermination Camps. These plaques show the person's name, birth date and date of expulsion.



We return to the Scenic Opal at 5:15 PM and depart our dock at 5:45 PM for Nuremberg. It is fun traveling through the towns and under the bridges and see local folks wave as we wave back.



Europe River Cruise – Day 9 – Wednesday September 19 – Nuremberg

At 6:30 AM the Scenic Opal docks at Nuremberg after cruising all night from Bamberg.

There are three Scenic Freechoices today. A tour of the Old Town of Nuremberg, a Nuremberg World War II tour, and a Gingerbread Cooking class. Marcia, Marie and Kal choose the town tour along with about half of our fellow travelers. I pick the WWII tour, along with most of the rest of the travelers. Very few pick the third option.



I depart at 9 AM on one of the four Scenic Motor Coaches waiting for us on shore.

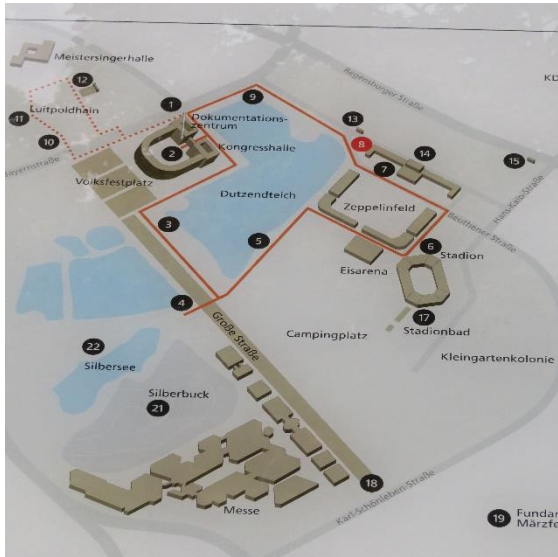
I grab a seat towards the front of the bus, but the gentleman in the seat in front of me is coughing uncontrollably.

I move to an empty seat in the rear of the bus but am immediately surrounded by new arrivals, all coughing!

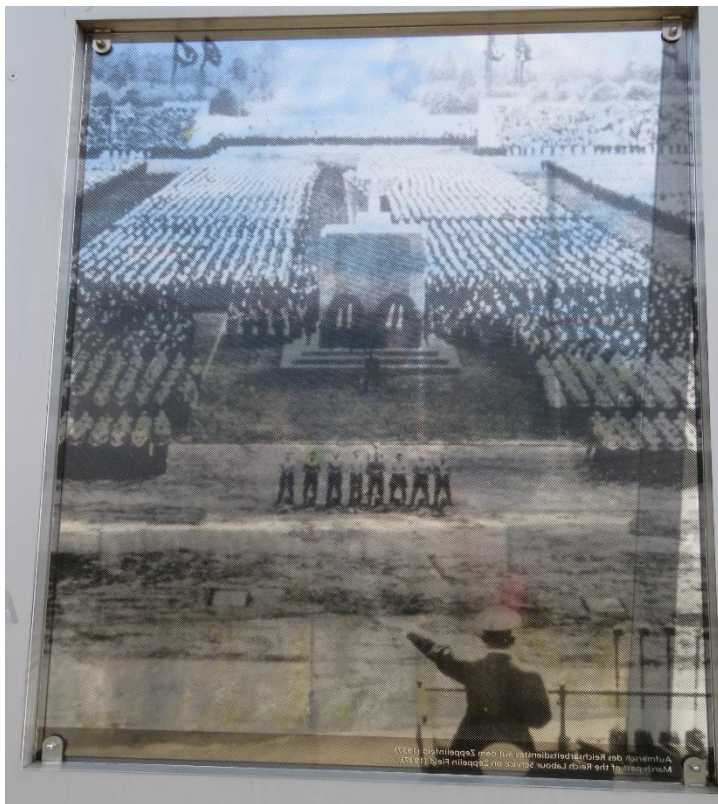
Our excellent local guide takes us on a driving tour of this city of 500K people. We see the Opera House, The Hall of Justice (where the Nazi leaders were tried by the Allies after WWII), and the Old Town.



We now drive to the old Zeppelin Field where Adolf Hitler held huge rallies attracting 320,000 people.



We view a drawing of what the completed complex was to look like. We look across the lake and see what is left of the never completed Congress Hall. Today it is the “Documents Center” containing displays of the rise of Nazism, the Holocaust, World War II and the aftermath. It is really a museum, but the Germans do not want to call it that and lend the Nazis any stature. We walk to the Zeppelin Field. Here is what it looked like in the 1930s and early 40s during Hitler’s massive rallies.



It is a moving time for me as I walk through the complex that I have seen so many times in newsreels.



On the left, above, we are facing the area from which Hitler addressed the rallies. The US Army tore down the huge swastika that capped the central building when they captured Nuremberg in 1945. In the photo on the right some of our folks are standing on the presentation stand that Hitler used. The area in front of them is where the rally participants stood. After the war this area became a US Army Base. The green areas shown were our army's athletic fields. All this time our truly excellent local guide is giving us insightful information (even for me...a history buff) on not only the rise of the Nazis but how they were able to convince so many Germans to support them. Also, the horror and shame of the Holocaust. He impressed on us the importance of the Nuremberg Trials of the Nazi leaders to the German people. They were not expecting the fair and honest trials, mostly orchestrated by the Americans, and this went a long way in convincing them that their country would not be "persecuted" like it was after WWI.



We now drive to the Documentation Center, shown above on the left, built from the partially completed Congress Hall. Above, right is a drawing of how the interior of the 50,000-person hall would have looked if completed by Hitler.

We now start on a self-guided tour (with audio devices informing us about each of the exhibits) in this excellent museum. There are many newsreels and documentaries that we can sit down and watch.

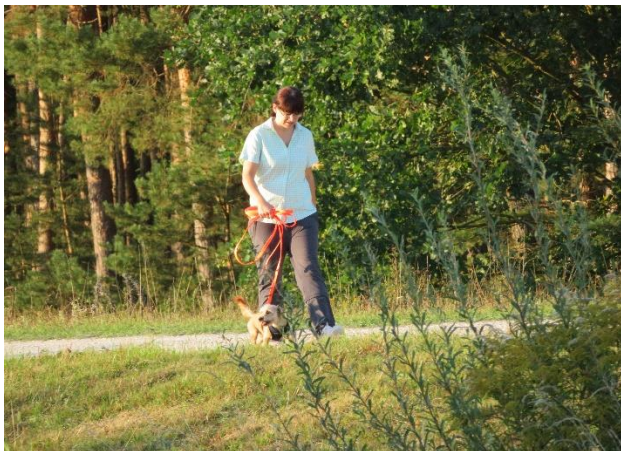
Pictures of Hitler's rise, Propaganda Posters, detailed information about the Holocaust and the Nuremberg Trials. I loved the photo of US Army troops on top of the Zeppelin presentation building.



The Documents Center was a very moving experience and a real reminder of the evils of Hitler and Nazism. As we exit a very light rain is falling. The first rain we have experienced. We board our Motor Coach and by the time we are back to the Scenic Opal, at 12:30 PM, the sun is out.

Marcia, Marie and Kal reported that they had a great city tour.

Scenic runs shuttle buses back and forth to the old town, every half hour, after lunch. At 4 PM our ship departs for Regensburg. We enjoy watching the locals exercising and relaxing in the river along the walking paths; scullers, girls sunbathing, dog walkers, and recreational boaters.

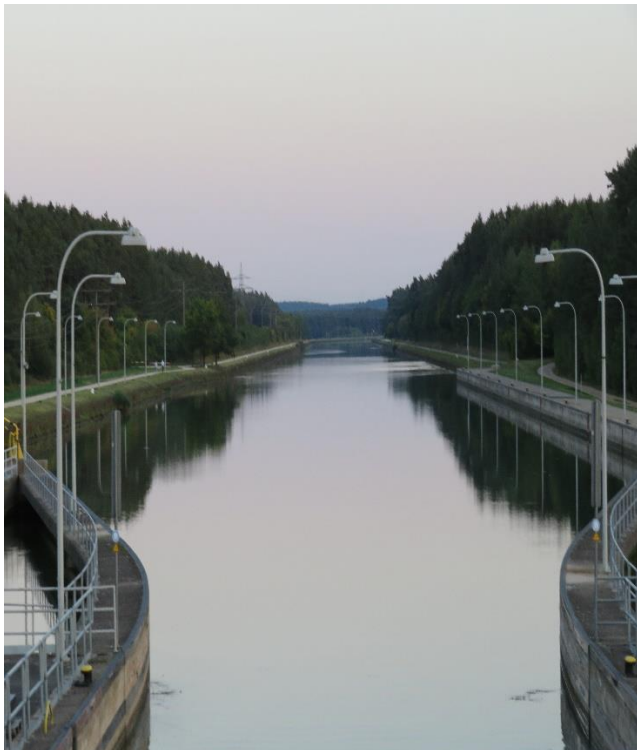


At 5 PM Tour Director Beate gives us a good presentation of the history of the Main-Danube Canal and an overall history of major and historic canals and their lock systems.

She also gives us our daily "Port Talk" Now, we have been very concerned about the balance of our cruise. We have heard rumors that no river cruiser has been able to complete the route through the upper Danube since mid-July due to the "historic" lack of rain and the resulting low water levels. We fear that our cruise might be terminated, and we could be sent home early or that the rest of our tour would be by motor coach with one-night stays in hotels. She confirms that we cannot cruise past our next destination, Regensburg, due to low water. We will dock, now, at Regensburg for two nights rather than one. She will give us more information after she hears from the main office. She tells us that the excursion we had signed up for tomorrow, the small boat trip up the Danube George to the Waltenburg

Abbey is cancelled due to low water in the gorge. We are also told that the 25-mile bike ride from Melk to Durstein on Saturday the 22nd is cancelled as the ship cannot get to Melk or Durstein.

We all now go up to the top deck for a "Lock Experience" as we are now going to traverse the highest lock on the route, 81 feet high. We see a nice sunset and then the moon.



2018 Europe River Cruise – Day 10 – Thursday September 20 – Regensburg

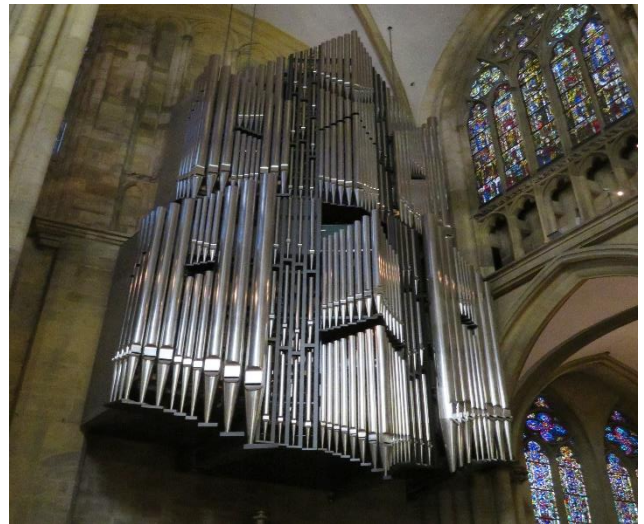


At 10 AM we enter the Danube river and at noon we dock at the 150,000 person town of Regensburg. We've been told this town received very little damage during World War II.

As the boat trip to the Abby has been canceled, most everyone decides to go on a guided tour of the old town of Regensburg.

Again, a perfect weather day. We enjoy our town tour, especially the Cathedral and the "stone arch" bridge, built in the year 1145. At the end of our tour we relax in a nice Beer Garten.





Back on the Scenic Opal we relax up on the Sundeck and enjoy views of the town. We are anxiously awaiting information on if or how our tour will continue.

Europe River Cruise – Day 11 – Friday September 21 – Regensburg

Great news; we learn that we will travel, tomorrow, by motor coach down the Danube River and board the Scenic Amber, a sister ship of the Scenic Opal, and continue the cruise to Budapest, Hungary. This is wonderful news as we will not have to terminate our trip or endure long motor coach rides and one-night stays in probably 3rd rate hotels (hey, all the good hotel rooms are booked this time of year).

The four of us had signed up for the all-day trip to Salzburg, Austria, consisting of a tour of the city and then lunch and the “Sound of Music and Salzburg Show” featuring famous tunes from the movie and dancers. Now, this was originally supposed to entail a 1-1/2-hour motor coach ride from Passau to Salzburg. Because we are stuck up river in Regensburg we are told the trip will be 3-1/2 hours each way. As Marcia and I have been to Salzburg in the past, and maybe because we did not want to be confined on a motor coach with many coughing folks, we decide not to go. Marie and Kal do go on the trip to Salzburg, departing the ship at 7:30 AM.



After a leisurely breakfast Marcia and I leave our ship and check out the battery-assisted bicycles that the Scenic Opal has brought along. They are powered by an electric motor, but you do need to pedal occasionally to keep the battery charged. Marcia does great on them, but I find them challenging maybe due to the small wheel diameter, high seating position, and maybe the fact I have not ridden a bike in 40 years. I have a hard time trying to maintain my balance and go straight!



Above, left, is the bike/pedestrian path along the river that we ride on. It goes right to the old town area. To the right, above, is my bike after they haul me out of the canal (Ha!).



I take a picture, from the dock, of our cozy balcony. The top half of the glass is closed and the drape is closed, obscuring the interior of the cabin.

Marcia and I walk into town and find it a lot less crowded than it was during our tour, yesterday. Yes, it is another great weather day.

As in all these German towns, folks use bicycles to get around and there are always masses of

them parked at transit places.



There is a flea market/farmers market set up in the town square.



Marcia and I spend the afternoon packing for tomorrow's ship move and then relaxing and reading. I go up on the Sundeck and get a tour of the Captain's control room and a picture of his view.



The three coach loads of folks that traveled today to Salzburg, including Marie and Kal, return to our ship at 7:30 PM. They report the drive down was 4 hours and it was 3-1/2 hours coming back. They had a great experience.

The scheduled late dinner starts at 8 PM tonight.

2018 Europe River Cruise – Day 12 – Saturday September 22 – Melk

Today we will be transferring ships, leaving the Scenic Opal at Regensburg and traveling down river by motor coach to Melk where we will be boarding the Scenic Amber. We believe the folks that are now on the Scenic Amber will be driving up river to the Scenic Opal to continue their tour from Budapest to Amsterdam. We will miss the great crew of the Scenic Opal. Only Beate, our Cruise Director, will be transferring along with us.

We vacate our cabins, leaving our packed bags outside our doors, at 9:30 AM. At 11:30 AM we board the motor coaches for a 4-hour drive to Melk.



We drive mostly on the Autobahn, the freeway with no speed limit for cars. We cross the Danube River several times. At 1 PM we leave Germany and enter Austria. A little while later we stop at a nice rest stop. I enjoy looking at some of the old pictures of rural Austria that are displayed.



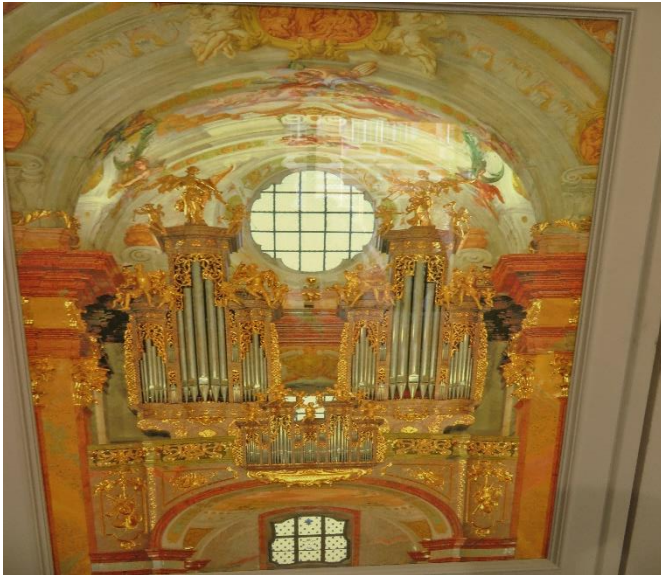


We arrive at Melk Abbey at 3:30 PM for a tour. We have half an hour of free time to tour the outer buildings and garden before our guided tour begins at 4 PM. Our motor coaches go ahead to the Scenic Amber and deliver our luggage.

The weather is a little cooler today; only about 60 degrees.

No pictures are allowed inside the Abby. I take a shots of the Chapel and the Library from photos in their gift shop. Nice views of Melk

from the Abby.





At 5:30 PM we leave the Abby and arrive at the Scenic Amber fifteen minutes later. They have welcome snacks and beverages ready for us.

What an easy embarkation! We have all been assigned the identical room numbers as we had on the Opal and are told to go right to our rooms. Our door is open, key cards on the dresser, and luggage in the room. We don't even have to have our Passports scanned, as Beate has brought along the scanned documents from the Opal.

The Amber was built in 2016 so is one year newer than the Opal. We notice a few minor

design enhancements, like a retractable screen on the balcony, in addition to the retractable glass, a larger safe, and a bed that lets you raise or lower the upper and knee portion of each side.



We meet Captain Yuriy and Hotel Manager Murphy.

Dinner is at 6:30 PM. We really liked all of the staff and crew of the Opal but first impressions of the folks hosting us on the Scenic Amber is that they will be just as friendly and professional!

At 8:15 PM our ship starts cruising down the Danube River towards Vienna, the beautiful capital of Austria. At 8:30 PM Beate gives us her daily Port Talk covering tomorrow's activities.

2018 Europe River Cruise – Day 13 – Sunday September 23 – Vienna



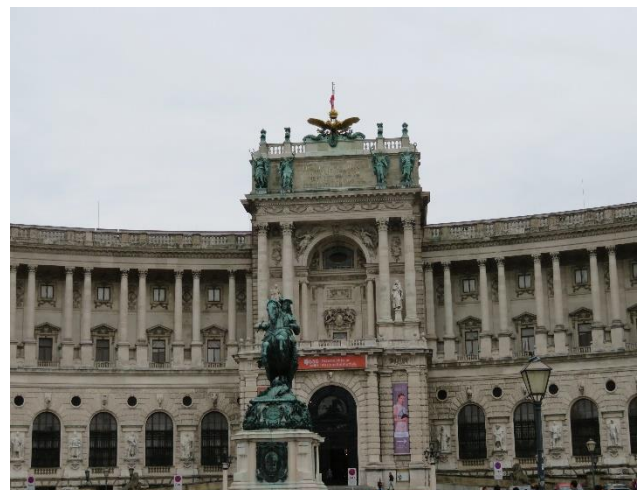
Overnight we have cruised down the Danube River from Melk and when we wake up the Scenic Amber is docked at Vienna, Austria.

The weather has changed; it is overcast and the temperatures will probably only be in the 50s today.

This is going to be a special day, with a tour of the city and then a special concert tonight.

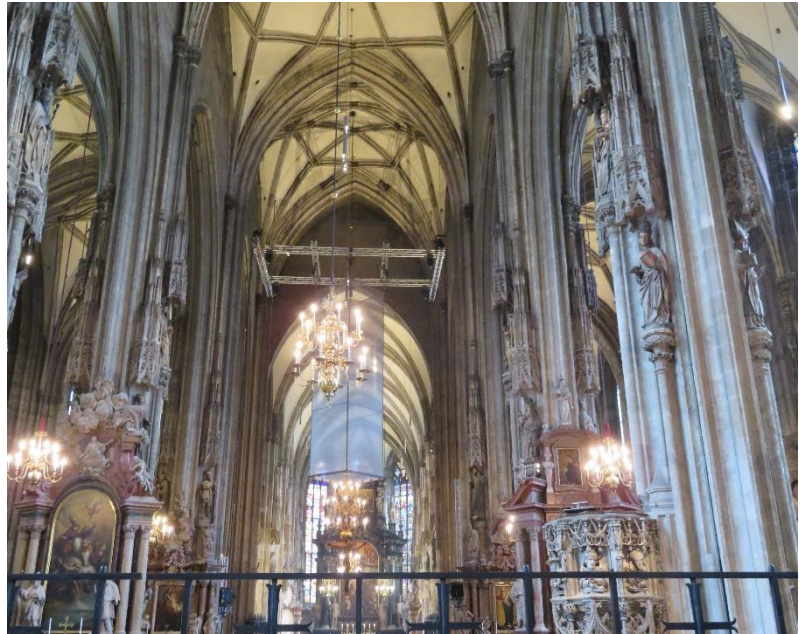
We all leave the ship at 9 AM for a four hour guided tour of Vienna. It is Sunday so traffic is light.

We drive by the Opera House and then start our walking tour, first viewing the statue of Maria Theresa, the famous leader of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for many years in the 1800s when they ruled a huge area of central and southern Europe. Next we view the Halderplatz (Imperial Palace) and museums





We also see the remains of Roman ruins, Saint Stephen's Cathedral and the Plague Monument. We have seen one of these "Plague Memorials" in most of the cities we have toured. They are in remembrance of the Black Plague in the 1500s that killed 40% of the population of Europe.



Our guided tour now ends, and we have some free time to shop and relax. Although the sun has now come out, it remains cool, so we decide to find a pastry shop and indulge ourselves in the Sunday Germanic tradition of pastries and a fancy coffee. Marie thinks she is coming down with “the illness”.



We return to the Scenic Amber at 1 PM. All afternoon Scenic runs shuttle buses back and forth, on the half hour, from the ship to the old town area. Marcia and I spend the afternoon reading and watching the swans outside of our balcony. We have a nice view, from our ship, of modern Vienna.



At 5 PM we all meet in the lounge for the daily Port Talk with Beate where she covers tonight’s and tomorrow’s activities. Then the Wine Stewart and Chef brief us on tonight menu for our early dinner. The Chef on this ship really likes to talk!

At 7:15 PM we all board the motor coaches for the drive to the Palais Lichtensein, a former home of royalty, and our Classical Music Concert.



Everyone gets dressed up a little bit tonight. The program indicates the music to be featured tonight will be from Strauss, Mozart, and Beethoven. We enjoy a drink of Austrian Sekt in the lobby area and then at 8 PM we are ushered into a beautiful concert hall. This performance is just for our Scenic tour group!



A ten-piece ensemble from the Austrian Imperial Orchestra comes on stage and the concert starts. The acoustics in the hall are outstanding. Later pieces feature a talented Soprano, a Baritone, both singing together, and even two Ballet Dancers. We give these talented folks a standing ovation in appreciation of a unique experience. Thanks, Scenic!



At 9:30 PM we are back at the Scenic Amber where they have late night snacks and beverages ready for us.

Europe River Cruise – Day 14 – Monday September 24 – Bratislava, Slovakia

We are still docked in Vienna, Austria this morning. The weather is windy and cool; the high temperature today is predicted to be only 57 degrees.

There are four “Scenic Freechoices” today:

-A coach trip to, and then a guided tour of Bratislava, Slovakia. This is the choice the four of us have signed up for.

-A tour of the famous Schonbrunn Palace. We have all visited this great sight on previous trips to Vienna.

-A visit to the Spanish Riding School. We’ve been told they will not be performing or practicing today, so the tour will be of the stables and viewing the big white horses in their stalls.

-A three-hour bike tour.



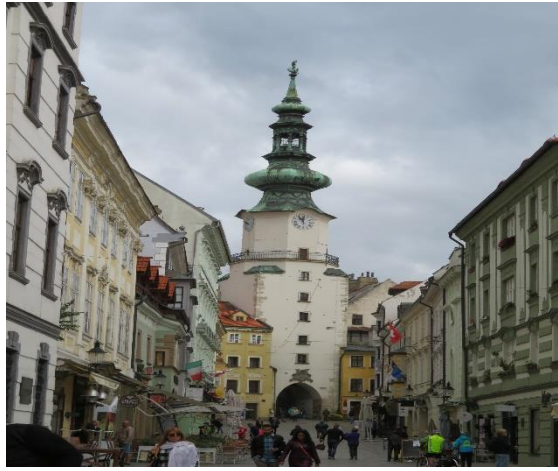
There will be one motor coach traveling to Bratislava today and we board it at 8 AM for the 90-minute ride.

We ride on the Autobahn through some nice scenery. We see hundreds of wind turbines. We also get good commentary from our “local guide” who joined us at the start of the trip. We are told that Slovakia is a country of 5 million people. Bratislava is its Capital and has about half a million people. It is a member of the European Union. It was a Communist country, as part of Czechoslovakia, until the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. In the early 1990s that country had an amiable separation into two countries that are

today Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

We arrive in Bratislava and have a nice walking tour but in windy and cool weather. We see a unique bridge, the Plague Memorial, the Jewish Monument (Hitler and the Nazis annexed Czechoslovakia in 1938; during WWII they destroyed the Jewish Synagogues and deported large numbers of Jews to the Concentration and Extermination Camps), and many pretty buildings.





At 1:30 PM we are back at our ship in Vienna. At 4 PM we have a “Vienna Waltz Dance Course” in the lounge.



At 5 PM the Scenic Amber leaves Vienna and starts cruising down the Danube for Budapest. We enjoy our Farewell Gala Dinner (yes, it's one day early) at 7 PM and later a nice full moon.

Europe River Cruise – Day 15 – Tuesday September 25 – Budapest, Hungary



The Scenic Amber cruises all night down the Danube River towards Budapest, Hungary, said to be one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. Our River Cruise will end there! Now, Hungary is the first country that we have encountered that is not a member of the European Union. Our Euro currency will probably not be accepted here. Hungary has applied for membership in the EU, but their current President is anti-immigrant and considered too right-wing by some of the more left-wing governments in the EU and their admission has been delayed.

We see another Scenic ship docked, the Pearl, so are not surprised when the Amber ties-up next to it at about 9 AM. It is a beautiful weather day with a clear sky. Highs are predicted to be in the mid-70s.



At 9:30 AM the four of us leave the ship for a 45-minute walk to a shopping area that has been recommended to us by Cruise Director Beate. She always has good maps of the cities that she hands out so that we can make it back! We cross the old suspension bridge and find the nice shopping area. Boy, the folks here really like to smoke their cigarettes. After some shopping we stop at a restaurant for snacks and beverages, then walk back to our ship, arriving at 11:40 AM.

When we return I get a photo of our ships tied up together. We also see some great views of Budapest from the ship.



Now, we are probably about the average age of the folks on this ship. There are no youngsters; there are a few in their early or mid-50s. Yes, many folks are a little older than us.

There are three “Scenic Freechoices” this afternoon. A “Budapest in Depth City Tour”, a “Hospital in the Rock” tour (the hospital was built by the Nazis to treat wounded soldiers from the Eastern Front during WWII but was later expanded and used to treat civilians wounded in the Allied bombing raids), and the “Spa and Bath Szechenyi” featuring Budapest’s famous indoor and outdoor mineral baths. Most of the folks on the tour, including us, opt for the first choice.

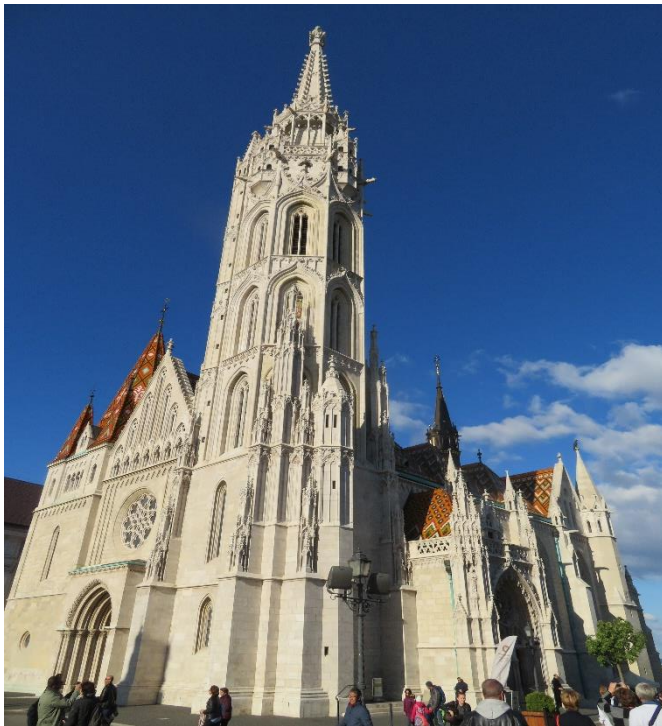
The four of us depart at 1:30 PM on one of three motor coaches for the four-hour city tour. We have an excellent local guide that starts out with us on the motor coach. Our first stop is Hero Square.

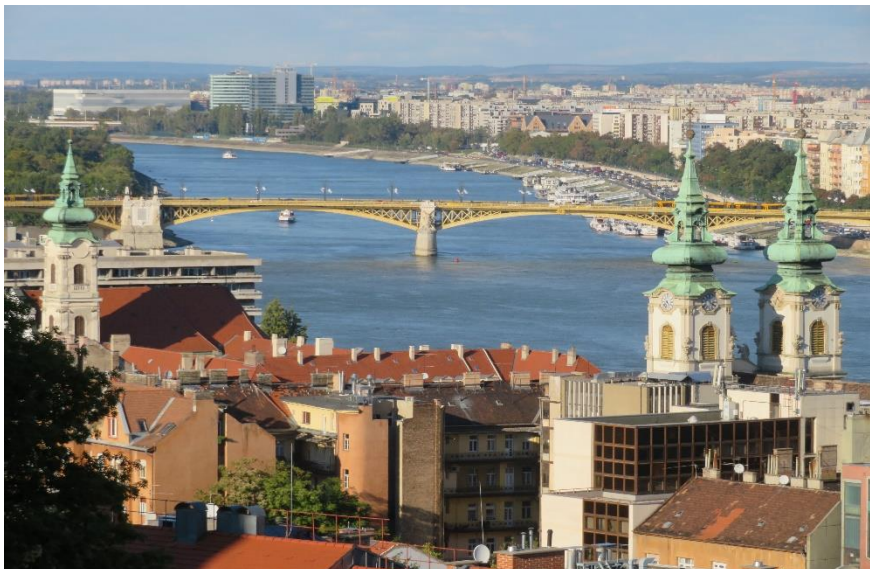




We next drive to a small local concert hall where we have a piano and organ recital from a talented professor.

Next, we cross the river and travel to Castle Hill where we see the Plague Monument, visit the Matthias Church and get some nice views of the city below us.





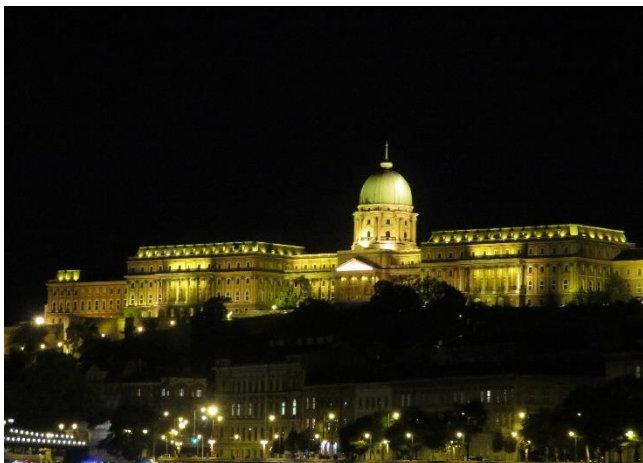
We all return to the ship at 5:30 PM and have an unannounced surprise. We are directed into the lounge where we are given snacks and drinks and sit down for a great Hungarian Folk Show. The three-man talented band plays harpsicord, base and violin. The dancers are great.



We sit down at 7 PM in the dining room for our last dinner onboard and it is excellent.



At 8 PM we are in for a special treat. Our ship departs the dock and starts traveling up and down the Danube River, past all the bridges and historic buildings of Budapest, which are now illuminated. We all go up on the Sundeck on a beautiful night with a full moon out. Amazing sights!





At 10 PM the Scenic Amber returns to the dock. Our talented musician David, above right, continues to play great songs for us in the lounge. Here he is performing an excellent version of Lionel Richie's *All Night Long*.

What a great way to end our tour! Everyone goes to bed tonight with a smile on their face.

Europe River Cruise – Day 16 – Wednesday September 26 – Going Home

At 8 AM we place our packed bags outside our cabin door. We leave the ship at 8:20 AM for a 45-minute drive to the Budapest Airport. Marie and Kal have access to special Airport Lounges through a credit card they have and get us into the lounge as their guests.

Our American Airlines 767-300 takes off on time at 11:20 AM. All four of us have been able to acquire, for no extra charge, “exit row” seats on the Economy section. We have great legroom! I can stretch my legs all the way out without touching the seat in front of me.

We arrive in Philadelphia about half an hour before the scheduled 4:00 PM time. This flight was just under ten hours long but really most comfortable. We have “lost” six hours due to the time change.

Marcia and my flight to Pittsburgh takes off on time at 5:45 PM. We arrive at Pittsburgh at 7 PM. We are picked up by daughter Jaime and are home by 8 PM. Pepper is glad to see Marcia.

Unfortunately, Marie and Kal’s flight to Cincinnati is delayed by two hours. They do not arrive at their home in Centerville, southeast of Dayton, Ohio, until about 11 PM.

Post Trip Comment – “Death Ship on the Danube?”

As mentioned earlier, there appeared to be a couple of people with upper respiratory infections when our tour started. By the end of the tour probably 75% of our folks exhibited systems; sneezing and coughing.

About half the way through the tour Kal came down with the cold. A few days before the end of the tour Marie started to show systems. Marcia felt she was starting to get sick on the day of our departure from Budapest. I was fine until a few days after I returned home when I came down with it (and I can’t even remember when I was last ill; it was years ago). We even managed to give it to daughter Jaime.

It’s a nasty bug; ear issues, sore throat, and lung and sinus congestion along with general fatigue. We all acquired antibiotics which have seemed to clear up most of the systems in about a weeks’ time.

I mention this unfortunate occurrence as it will always be a “memorable” part of this trip.

Opinions (mostly mine) of the Highlights and Lowlights

Pluses:

The Scenic Ships, Opal and Amber: Beautifully designed and built. I cannot think of a significant thing that I would change on them. They must be the best ships cruising the European Rivers. Our cabins were great, especially the balconies.

The Ships Staff: Everyone was friendly and professional. Our Cruise Director, Beate, was outstanding.

Food: I am not a "foodie" but thought everything was great; choice, quality, variety, quantity, and presentation.

Itinerary: Very well designed and implemented. All the musical and cultural events were a treat.

The Locale: A truly beautiful, unique area with a lot of variety.

Local Guides: These were the folks that guided us when we were off the ship. They were all good or excellent. It was great that they always joined us as we departed the ship and gave us good information, on the motor coach, as we drove to our destination.

Weather: Our weather was excellent; clear and moderately warm except for a couple of cool days towards the end of the trip.

All Inclusive: We been on some "All Inclusive" tours but this one was the real deal. All food, beverages and local tours at no extra charge. Absolutely no tips required for anyone.

Information/Documentation: We received good information from Scenic prior to the tour. While on tour the daily information always available from Cruise Director Beate was excellent. Mini USA, Canada, UK and Australia newspapers available each morning in the lounge. Information available in the cabin (maps, booklets and tour information from the Television were most complete).

Changing Ships: Unfortunate that we had to, but very smoothly and well handled by Scenic.

Pace: Marcia and I liked the pace of the tour. Lots of stuff to do but also plenty of time to relax, view scenery, or read.

Minuses:

Low Water Levels: Obviously unavoidable when there had not been any rain since July. Scenic minimized our inconvenience by arranging for our transfer from the Opal to the Amber. We only missed the part of the river between Regensburg and Melk. I think the time we cruised would normally be ideal; we have heard of issues in the spring and early summer when high water levels prevent river ships from passing below the low bridges! This is one reason be picked the early fall.

Illness: This was a big one. This was one nasty infection. Even for me, who was fine for the duration, only coming down with it a few days after returning home...it was no fun being that ill for a week or so.

Sundeck Restrictions: We were surprised at how often we could not to up on top due to low bridges. The crew did try to let us up there whenever it was safe.

Castle Change: Although Scenic had advised us months ahead, it was disappointing that our evening at a castle was not at the Marksburg Castle.

Pace: Marie and Kal felt that the pace was a little slow and that there were not enough activities offered.

Here Are Some of the Souvenirs Marcia Purchased

