

2018

CELEBRATING OUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY FROM

THE 15TH DECEMBER 2017

3 PARTS

Danube River Cruise – Part 1

In the afternoon Sunday the 8th July, we departed from Durban to Bucharest in Romania via Dubai and arrived the following afternoon to be received and transported by the staff of the 5 star Hotel Intercontinental. Overlooking the town from the 10th floor balcony, we noticed that most buildings were in need of some sort of renovation with paint and plaster peeling off. In the distance we noticed the drab looking block of flats from the communist era.



The following morning, day2, we were taken for a city tour of Bucharest



which included a lunch in a Restaurant. The city centre was well kept with a lot of pedestrian malls.

Even the storm water manholes had the city's crest on it. We were shown a bust of Count Dracula also called the Impaler.

The tour guide refused to go into the gory details of impaling. We were shown quite a few churches.

Eighty or ninety percent of Romania's population belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. The Parliament Palace shown in the picture is actually mirrored on the other side, and it is claimed to be the biggest building, after the Pentagon in the US, in the world, with more than a thousand rooms. It was built under the communist era by Nicolae Ceausesco. The



building was designed by Romanians and all the material and labour was procured within Romania as proof of “We don’t need outside help.” Mid-afternoon the bus took us to Fetesti, a small town about 150 km away, to embark onto our river boat the ‘Amadeus’. Late afternoon the boat cruised downstream to arrive the next morning, day 3, Wednesday the 11th at Saint George (Sfantu Gheorghe). Saint George also represents 0 km of the Danube, i.e., the start of our upstream cruise. We had the option to explore the delta in small boats but we decided to explore Saint George instead. People coming back from the delta trip reported a rich birdlife and having seen storks. We didn’t miss much since we have our own resident storks at



home.



This was St. George, a very impoverished fishing village, on the delta of the Danube at the Black Sea.



Day 4 we docked in Hirsova (Harsova) a Roman settlement in ancient times. The morning was spent with an excursion to Constanta at the Black Sea founded by the Greeks during the 6th century BC. Constanta is also the harbour to serve the Danube linked with a canal built to bypass the Delta. Below are a few pictures of places we visited. The neglected building was a Casino in the style of the Monte Carlo Casino in Monaco and was frequently visited by the Russian Tsar. In the background one can see the Harbour. The other pictures show a famous mosque, the beach and the Hotel where we had a drink.





Day 5, Friday the 13th in the morning we arrived at Giogurgio. The day was spent with an excursion visiting the medieval town of Veliko

Tarnovo in Bulgaria to join the boat again upstream at Svistov in the afternoon.





Fortress Zaravez, where 22 tsars made history in the second Bulgarian empire.

Veliko Tarnovo was the capital of the Bulgarian Kingdom (1187-1393) which was preceded by 200 years of Byzantine rulers and succeeded by 500 years of the Ottoman Empire.

King Ferdinand 1 declared Bulgaria's independence in September 1908.



Day six was a cruising day from Svistov to the Iron Gate. Unfortunately the boat was delayed at Svistov and by the time we reached the Iron Gate it was too dark to take pictures. The Iron Gate is a gorge and was very dangerous to the shipping industry. Between 1964 and 1972 three locks and dams were built to overcome a height difference of 35 m the highest of which is 21 m



Day seven saw us in Belgrade the capital of Serbia.

Just as an in between I would like to describe life on board the Amadeus.

The boat is 135m long and 35m wide with 90 cabins for guests and 30 cabins for staff. There are three levels for accommodation plus the sundeck. The lowest level (the dungeons) is below the water level and one has to tip toe to look out the porthole. The middle deck is at embarkation level. That's where our cabin was on the left hand side. The top deck cabins comprised a balcony; needless to say it was also the most expensive units. The restaurant was at our level and the lounge on the upper level, both catering for 180 people, not to forget the library and gym at the rear of the boat. The food, the service and the organisation was 5 star treatment. The menu catered for every taste and was printed in English, German, Japanese, and in Israeli. The tour director, fluent in German and English, and his staff, grouped the same nationalities together when it came to the seating arrangements in the dining room. So we found ourselves seated with a Swiss couple. They actually were from Bremen in Germany but are living in Switzerland in Fribourg for the last 35 years and carry a Swiss passport. He used to be a captain on merchant boats but later was involved with a sea freight company in Canada for a few years. And so we spoke mainly English with each other. We never ran out of conversation material. The average age of the people on board, I would say was between 65 and 70 years. In the lounge we had conversations with people from Hongkong, with a retired jeweller from Malta, an Afrikaans couple from Pretoria, etc. The boat even had its own in-house newspaper to keep us up to date with world affairs.



Our first call of the Belgrade city tour was the St. Sava Cathedral, the largest Orthodox Church in the world, still under construction. The



scaffolding inside the church can clearly be seen.

Our next stop was a refreshment stop at the Hotel Majestic in a pedestrian mall like we have seen in other city centres.



Belgrade, one of the oldest cities in Europe, is dominated by the Kalemegdan Fortress overlooking the confluence of the Danube and the Sava rivers.



War museum within the fortress



Parliament building

Interestingly, the Cyrillic writing was created/developed by two Serbian brothers in the year+- 800 AD combining Greek and Latin letters, contrary to my believe that Cyrillic originated from Russia.

We talked about the Gypsies. Apparently the word Gypsy is a derogatory word, they are Romas and the politically correct expression is, 'a Democratic Mobile Minority.'

Day 8, Monday 16th July 2018 the morning we arrived in Mohacs, where we had to go through a border control, since Hungary is part of the European Union. After a lunch on board we left by bus for



Kalocsa where we would later rejoin the boat again. Just a short history of Kalocsa. Kalocsa is situated 6 km away from the river and is the main centre for paprika producers. The area is called the Puszta a very fertile flat land and its people are also known for their horsemanship. In 1602 it was burnt to the ground by the Ottoman Empire and was rebuilt 150 years later after the expulsion of the Turks.

The following are a few pictures of the local museum. The pictures of the Horsemanship demonstration, unfortunately, didn't come out well.





Reception at the museum



Demonstrating Hungarian embroidery



Hungarian folk dance and music



Drying of Paprika has become an art and decoration



Lucille with the museum's tour guide





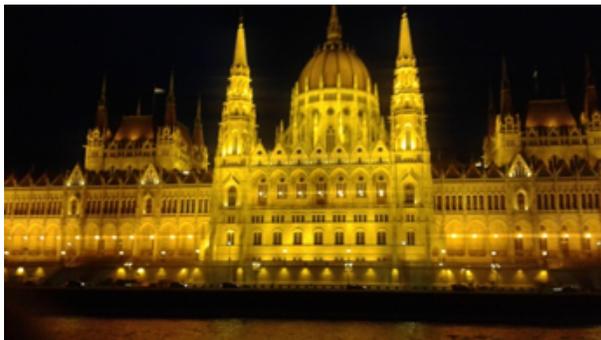
The following morning, day 9, we woke up in Budapest, the capital of Hungary. We decided not to take part with the excursions on offer.

We visited Budapest in 1992 with a two day excursion starting in Vienna, and the plan was to reach Budapest by boat and the return trip to Vienna would be by bus. Would you believe it, the water level in the Danube was too low for shipping! So it was both ways by bus and we also missed out on the stopover in Bratislava the capital of Slovakia.

We spent that day on the sundeck reading books from the library and just relaxed. In the evening a Hungarian Folklore group entertained us on board. Later the evening the boat left for Bratislava, which was quite spectacular, with the various bridges and buildings all lit up. Budapest is known as the 'Pearl of the Danube.'



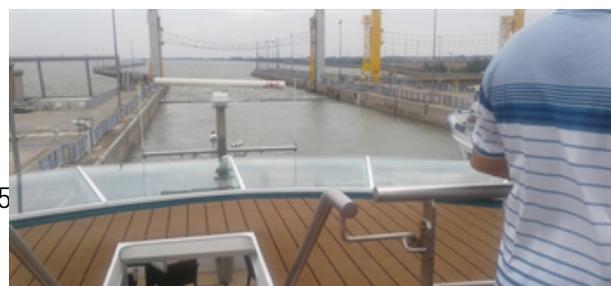
We saw quite a few Swiss Basel registered touring boats along the Danube



Day 10 Wednesday the 18th July afternoon we arrived in Bratislava in Slovakia. But not before a 21 m high lock lifted the boat to the higher



Lock gates closing behind us



Continuing our journey at the higher level

level. Unfortunately the rain shortened our Bratislava City Tour somewhat. This was the only rainy day we had on the whole journey, except the day we landed in Bucharest. So we can't complain. In the evening the Farewell Gala Dinner took place with the captain introducing the staff of the boat who had ensured our safety and wellbeing.

Bratislava Castle in the distance



Entrance gate to castle



An elegant bridge approaching Bratislava

The following morning we arrived in Vienna for disembarkation.

