



Passage to Eastern Europe - Bucharest thru Danube to Budapest Trip Notes
October 20 — November 8, 2017

Headlines:

Viking River Cruise - Passage to Eastern Europe - Bucharest to Budapest - 11 Days | 7 Guided Tours | 5 Countries - See *Bucharest's 3,000-room Palace of Parliament*. Make *banitsa* bread with a home cook in Vidin. Explore *Belgrade's Ottoman and European treasures, including 6th-century Kalemegdan Fortress*. View the Danube's towering *Iron Gate*. Visit a *Croatian family's Osijek home*. Witness *Hungary's daredevil Puszta horsemen*. Behold *Budapest's grandeur*. Once hidden behind the *Iron Curtain*, the eastern Danube still has secrets to reveal on our 11-day cruise tour from *Bucharest to Budapest*. End. Plus add four nights on either end for our own adventures.



Our 15 day Hawaiian cruise in 2004 caused me to say I would never get on a cruise ship again. My 15 day Budapest to Amsterdam river cruise in 2007 was precipitated by friend Ellen convincing me a river cruise would be quite different. It was. But I finished it with a declaration that I wouldn't do another one until I was wheelchair-bound. Oops.

Cruising pros and cons – starting with the pros:

- Packing up isn't needed.
- Wonderful and plentiful food.
- No planning needed.
- River cruising typically docks you in the morning at the town. (This one didn't. We were bused. Damn.)
- Socializing is encouraged and the name of the game. (Limited interest by us. It's like summer camp and you only think for a moment they'll be bosom buddies).
- Viking is outstanding and they never skimp and always come through with more than expected.

Cons:

- State rooms are quite small and even the suites are tight. (Our bathrooms on pre and post cruise were larger than the stateroom).
- Cruisers typically have enjoyed a lot of cruising and show the fact there's a lot of food offered. And obviously consumed. (What came first?).
- Old folks flock to cruising. Do we really want to hang around with all the old folks? Smile.
- These are really one day fly-overs that we've always disdained. We don't count seeing a town, let alone a country, if you're only there a day.
- Pretty pricey costs per day. I have the time to work out my own touring.



Picture: Tom and Diana on last day in the last big hurrah – the New York Palace Hotel elevator in Budapest, now known as the Boscolo and owned by the Marriott Autograph Collection (which tells you how much easier it is financially to stay in a 5-star with my family connection.)

Daily Notes:

On our way to Bucharest Romania - Where is that? You might know Romania better by its northern area called Transylvania or aka the home of Dracula. (More on the real Dracula tomorrow). Romania is bordered by the Black Sea and Bucharest is near the beginning of the Danube River where we start a Viking River cruise five days in.

On our way to Bucharest we had a three hour layover in Zurich. We were near salivating over being in clean efficient Switzerland and sorry it'll be eight months until we visit for a few days. (It will be for a Rhine River cruise out of Basel Switzerland but with a few days first in Zürich, Lucerne, and Grindelwald).

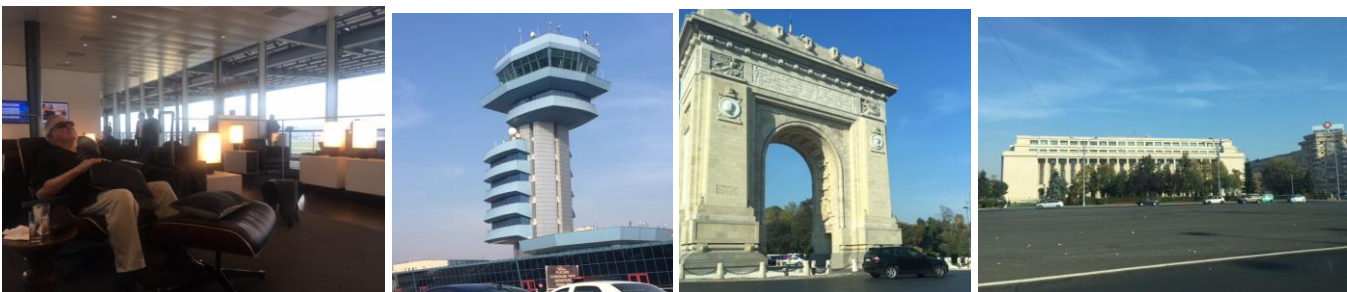
It's a gift. That is what Marie calls her and Tom's ability to nap anywhere and anytime. I will add a picture in the airline club as proof. Incidentally, the Swiss lounge in Zürich is one of the best we have seen with cooked to order food, all kinds of alcohol, and lovely lounge seating as you will see. It put Tom right to sleep — but not that he needed a lot of help.

In truth, I was also able to sleep for 2 to 3 hours on the flight into Zürich. I do not have their "gift" but it was overnight and I did have a lie-flat seat. And plenty of brandy.

Why a river cruise? Some of you know that I swore I'd never do another cruise unless I was wheelchair-bound. I said that after a 15-day ocean cruise to and through the Hawaiian Islands but relented somewhat five years later for a 15-day river cruise from Budapest to Amsterdam. Some River cruises dock immediately next to town so no need for tenders and long lines. Some River cruises only have about 120 passengers. One of us can run around town and the other can lounge on the ship. All of which precipitated the decision to try another river cruise after a ten year absence. These two seem to fit the bill.

We are in! Update from Tom: We got to Bucharest and checked into the Sheraton around 4:30 pm. Very nice junior suite with living room with a large half bath then a separate bedroom with a large bed and a large bath with two optional showers. The hotel is where we're picked up by Viking in five days to start our Danube trip to Budapest. They have a nice club on the 18th floor with lots of free booze/wine/beer/food etc. We're being picked up by a tour company this morning in a couple of hours and are off to see Frankenstein's castle (really its Dracula's alleged castle but it's in contention according to my recent Dracula textbook) in Transylvania. (Our room is on the 13th - good thing we're not superstitious). End.

Pictures from airport arrival, Mercedes ride to the hotel, the concierge's floor and an absolutely elegant generous dinner provided with a view.



To Dracula's castle on Sunday - first full day.

It was not the most logical thing to do. Arrive in the evening jetlagged and get up at 6 AM for a 13 hour tour to Transylvania? Yet it was the most available day, included the royal palace which would be closed the following day, and Tom was surprisingly willing. It turned out to be a strenuous (though delightful) day for anybody even without jet lag.

In preparation for the trip, I read a large textbook on Dracula. Yes there really was such a prince in the 1400s and despite being known as the Impaler (rightly so) he was generally loved and would have been remembered even without Hollywood's Dracula. I knew that the Bran castle was only one of his residences. The true one exists across the canyon on a hill that takes a strenuous hike to get to and has very little of the walls remaining.

Our bus tour was well run and gave us a bit of overview of the city as we began our long drive. It would seem that part of the beauty of Bucharest is the French architectural influence. French is their second official language though English is more commonly used. We will learn more about the city on our second full day when we've booked a city tour.

From the itinerary: DAY TRIP TO DRACULA'S CASTLE - Visit at the Royal Peles Castle and Bran (Dracula's) Castle - Highlights

- Enjoy the fresh air and the beautiful landscapes in Transylvania
- Visit the stunning Peles Castle in Sinaia "the Pearl of the Carpathians"
- Visit Bran Castle, the legendary castle of Count Dracula
- Walking tour in the historical center of the medieval city of Brasov: The Black Church, The Council Square, The Old Walls of the fortress
- Free time in Brasov

Explore the fascinating region of Transylvania choosing one of the best Dracula's Castle tours. Transylvania will take your breath away with its beautiful mountain landscape, gothic architecture and picturesque medieval villages. You're bound to love this guided tour as it wends its way from Bucharest.

Up first on this day trip from Bucharest is a visit to the region of Valahia where you will discover Peles Castle situated in picturesque Sinaia, "The Pearl of the Carpathians". This former home of the Romanian Royal Family is a masterpiece of design, with stunning turrets and great attention to detail, as well as providing unbelievable views across the mountains. From here the tour will wend its way into Transylvania and towards Bran Castle, where the legend of Count Dracula is kept alive all year round. Built in the 13th century Bran Castle is an intriguing hilltop fortress, and one of the most famous landmarks in Romania. Tourists gather from every corner of the world to experience a guided tour of this majestic castle, which is famed to have belonged to Vlad the Impaler, the alleged inspiration for Count Dracula. Both of these names are steeped in mystery and myth, and you will delight in exploring the origin of both.

Next on this fantastic day trip, you will be treated to a Brasov walking tour, which is a guided tour around a most gorgeous medieval city that is surrounded by the towering Carpathian Mountains. This Brasov city tour will take in the historical center of this gem, including the Black Church, the Council Square, and the Old Walls, as well as leaving time to explore, shop, and dine.

Experience Transylvania's unique charm with Dracula's Castle tours and we promise you a day full of adventure you shall never forget! Delve a little deeper into Transylvania's past on this tour. End.

Pictures start in the concierge lounge for a full and generous breakfast and then give a small taste of the city which Fuller introduction will follow the next day.

The Hotel Intercontinental as are all the big chains here. We are in a Sheraton.

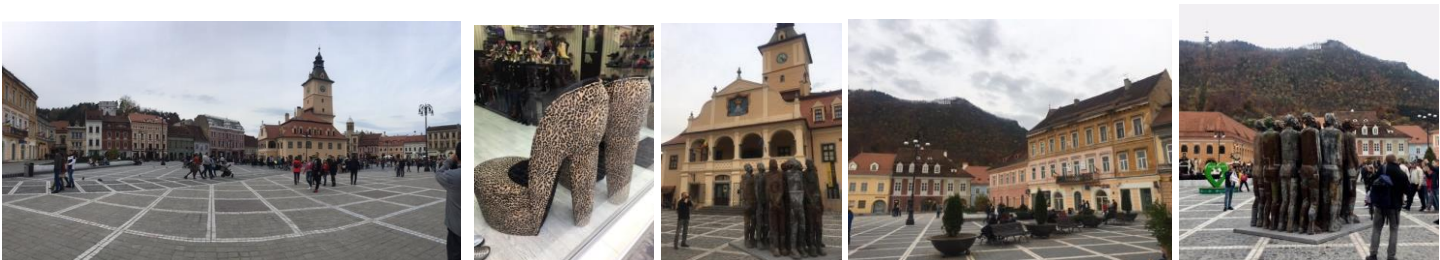
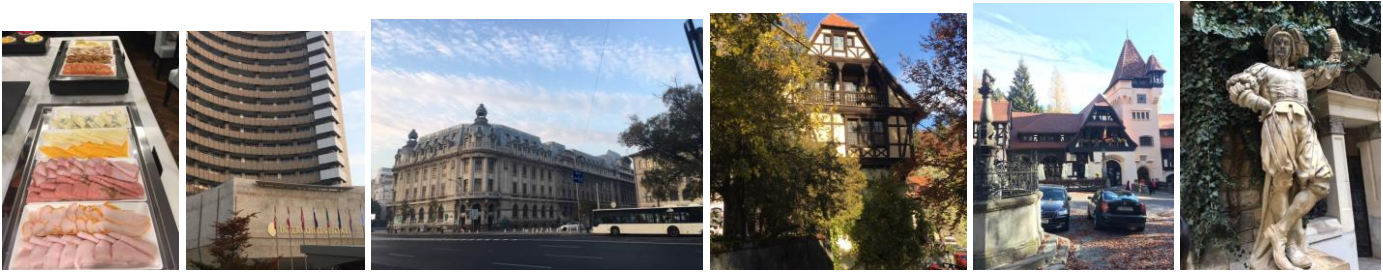
On the way to Peles Royal castle which is the former summer residence of King Carol I and Queen Elizabeth - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peles_Castle - Photos of the inside will come from Tom.

Onto Bran castle which is known as Dracula's castle - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bran_Castle

This little road is known as the Rope Road and is the second narrowest street in Europe. The ugly cathedral is known as the largest and still called the black church left over from fire damage.

The pair of animal print shoes? That is full size seating. Get a load of the name of the town high on the hill. They copied the Hollywood sign idea. The last picture truly is THE END.

By the time we got home it was near 10 PM and I was totally fried. We slept well.



Peleş Royal Castle - Inside pictures by Tom - Part two of our big day to Transylvania.

Ha ha ha. Tom had the only photo permit. The first picture was of the queen and her daughter who died at age 4 years old. It was by an American artist that I thought almost like a John Singer Sargent with the precision and the light effect.



The rooms were rather extravagant and yet show the personality of King Carlos and his queen. She was especially talented and gifted; one room showed her tatting craft, another her music ability with various instruments, another her artistic endeavors, followed by her poetry and hundreds of books published.

The last music or theater room was decorated with original artwork by Gustaf Klimt.



Bucharest day tour on Monday

Highlights from itinerary:

- Visit Village Museum - one of the largest and most charming open-air museums in Europe
- Visit The Romanian Patriarchal Cathedral - the center of the Romanian Orthodox Church
- Learn about the history and culture in a walking tour through the Historical Center of Bucharest
- Stop in the Constitution Square with a excellent view of The Palace of Parliament - the world's largest, heaviest and most expensive administrative building
- Stop in the Revolution Square, the place which marked the end of the communist period in December 1989
- Pass by and admire Bucharest's major tourist attractions

During this spectacular Bucharest city tour you will discover some of the most intriguing things to do in Bucharest, experience the culture of the city, and learn about some of its most important moments throughout history.

We will transport you into the heart of the city for this Bucharest city tour. The first stop will allow you to witness traditional Romanian village life in the Village Museum, one of the biggest and most impressive open-air museums in Europe. Next up you will wander past the Romanian Patriarchal Cathedral, which is the center of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

You should take a moment to gaze upon Constitution Square, which has an excellent view of the Palace of Parliament – the world's largest, heaviest, and most expensive administrative building – and stand in Revolution Square, where the end of communist rule was declared in December 1989. Your short walking tour will take you around the many twists and turns of the historical center of Bucharest and introduce you to its charm and elegance, as well as some of its major attractions. Keep an eye out for University Square, the House of the Free Press, Romana Square, Victory Square, the Arch of Triumph, and the Romanian Athenaeum, all of which can be admired. End.

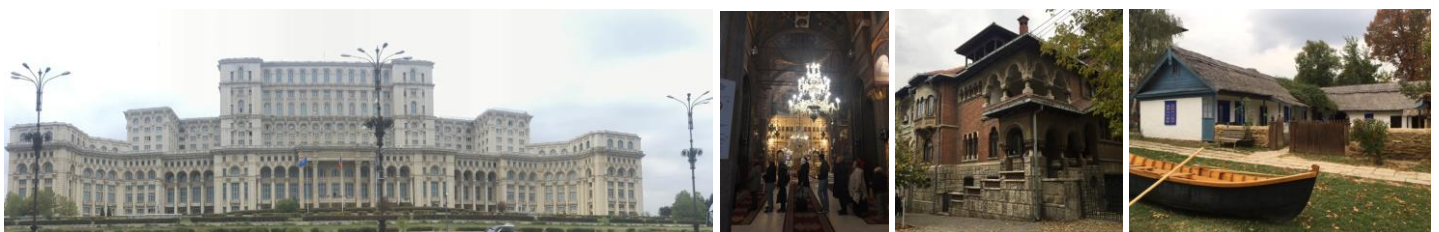
Europe's Fastest-Growing Economy Could Be Headed for Trouble - [NYTimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com)

https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/10/18/business/europe-economy-romania.html?emc=edit_th_20171019&nl=todaysheadlines&nlid=22982744&referer=

We saw CaruCuBare restaurant in historical center so headed back there for dinner. Per Tom: Spectacular, historical, traditional food, crowded, noisy but gorgeous restaurant with great atmosphere. For some history with pictures of architecture and art work at Caru cu Bere check out:

https://www.carucubere.ro/en/?gclid=EAlalQobChMIqoWnk7eL1wIv3LbACh1K8AKNEAAYASAAEgltT_D_BwE

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caru%27_cu_Bere





Food Tour on Tuesday

From Tom: Today - heavy rain and wind. We started out at about 10:00 in a weather mess and met up with two guides and eight participants for a food/walking tour. By the time we started walking I was having so much fun I just couldn't stand it so I bailed and got a taxi back to the hotel. Diana of course stayed on and wrote that they'd gotten into a cafe and were drying out and warming up and I haven't heard from her since (it's now 3 o'clock!). Stay tuned.

From the itinerary: Bohemian Bucharest Markets and Mahallas Small Group Food Walking Tour.

Starting Point: On the stairs of the National Theatre in front of the main entrance

Overview: From the heart of the city to the tastes of the country, this tour takes you on a historical, architectural, and culinary adventure through the many faces (and tastes) of Bucharest! Journey deep into the neighborhoods of La Belle Époque Bucharest, while sampling the traditional peasant foods that define Romanian cuisine.

What to Expect: Your Bucharest tour begins in University Square. Absorb all that sociopolitical history before taking a short walk to Strada Batistei, formerly known as the 'St Germain' of Bucharest and the site of the old American embassy, now an overgrown testament to different times. Our first stop will be an exquisite turn-of-the-century townhouse, lovingly restored but with the sense of elegant decay so typical of Bucharest. Under trees and vines, with grapes dangling overhead, you'll sample a selection of Romanian entrees (gustari), including goat cheese, cured meat, spring onions, homemade bread, and locally brewed craft beers, and you can relax and absorb the atmosphere of this recherché little hideaway. To help us digest all those treats, we'll then make our way to the Armenian quarter. The Armenians were a vibrant and successful merchant community in the 18th and 19th centuries, thanks to their valuable role as 'middlemen' for the Ottomans. Based around the Armenian church, their mahalla (neighborhood) features a spectacular variety of architectural styles from all over Europe and the Ottoman empire, as the wealthy merchants strove to out-do each other in taste and elegance. Classical, Belle Époque, Modernist, New-Romanian, Balkanic, eclectic — this quarter boasts all these styles, including the oldest documented house in Bucharest, which you will visit.

Crossing into the old Jewish quarter, we'll then stop for the most famous street-food, covrigi, before heading on further on our Bucharest tour to discover one of the most beautiful and peaceful areas of the city: Mantuleasa.

After exploring 19th-century and inter-war Bucharest, we'll stop for an ice-cold Romanian weissbier, in a space that can only be described as art-gallery-meets-bookstore-meets-summer garden, before experiencing the quintessential Bucharest public transport: a short ride on a tram. Rattling along the famous Mosilor Street, you'll enter into Communist Bucharest, with its regimented blocks and housing projects, as you make your way to the famous Obor Market. Since you'll be on the trail of the sights, scents, and tastes of Romanian cuisine, we'll stop for a drink of traditional Romanian palinca (brandy) to prepare the palate. Next, we'll enter the indoor market to sample a range of Romanian cheeses: cow, sheep, and goat. After that, it's on to the vegetable market, amid a riot of colours and textures, to taste and photograph the fresh local produce.

Probably the most famous and typical of Romanian foods — at least for Romanians — is called mici, which translates as 'little.' A kind of skinless sausage, these are served with mustard and cold beer, and here you will get to try them for yourself! And finally, because your gastronomic adventure would not be complete without a dessert, we'll grab a sweet Wallachian doughnut, served piping hot, before sending you happily on your way home.

Return Details: Saint George Square/ Unirea Square

End? Not until I was sopping wet and still had a 20 minute walk home in wind and rain that I thought was going to pick me up off my feet. It was near 5 PM by then - a much longer than expected day. Tom might have expected me home by 2 PM so he was rightly concerned.

First stop: Dianeji 4 restaurant is a large 19th century house in the University area. Looked like its gardens would be the beauty spot but of course in the pouring rain we went inside. If we had more days in Bucharest, we would return because their signature dish is goulash. Yet as Tom says, we will soon be in Budapest where goulash is well known.

<http://www.dianeji4.translucid.ro/>

Hare Cafe - historically preserved from 1893. Grandson explained its history and movies that were filmed there. For the timeframe of grandfather, who was a doctor, it was an OB/GYN facility. Even in Romanian we could read the outplaque.

On the subject of traditional cafés in Bucharest, here is a link found by Tom which led him to last night's restaurant.

<http://www.worldette.com/ignite-your-travel-life/travel/2011/where-to-eat-in-bucharest/>

Churches on every street corner like cocktail lounges in Kansas City! They are a religious people's with by far the majority are Greek Orthodox. This is so unlike the Czech Republic where in Prague they claim to be 99% atheist. I had thought communist regime had cost them their religion but here that was not the case.

Did you know that there is next to no seating in an orthodox church. Some of the older people still come in to kneel and pray.

In between food, with our walk in the Armenian quarter, the Jewish quarter, etc., we stopped at far too many churches with enough info for a religious tour. I told the food guide that they need to have a religious journey and separately have a food tour. Four out of eight participants were not comfortable with the heavy emphasis on church. My discomfort at being a tourist in a religious house was cause for much reflection.

Why so much in disrepair? Apparently in communist times people had to leave the country and/or their property was confiscated. In the 1989 revolution, people came back to find their property since sold to others. Thus we have property owned by two people and litigation follows with some litigation lasting 20 years. In between some properties are totally left to rot because which property owner is going to do the maintenance? Like I said about Budapest, some day Bucharest is going to be a lovely city. Its majestic buildings and French architecture will serve them well.

Going to the concierge lounge for dinner is something like a secondary food tour. One night it's a lot of sushi (maybe leftovers from the hotel's Benihana restaurant), another night it's a number of different sandwiches or little quiche. Always there is wine and champagne and plenty of varieties of hard liquor. We get our money's worth.

Pictures include -the major (almost half a block long) sculpture in front of the national theatre shows the comedy of one of their famous authors.

- The telephone pole with wires galore was not unique and yet the guide was very proud of their city being on high-speed Internet. They do however share those cables.

-Some houses are cared for, and some are not. It is clear that there has been a lot of wealth, French architecture, and equally plenty of poverty. Romania once had 800,000 Jewish people with 200,000 in Bucharest. World War II reduced them to about 2,000.

-The last four pictures are from dinner the night before with the fish-eye one obviously coming from the web. I could have taken dozens of pictures of the artwork, or the people, or the musical entertainment.

-All the sushi pics were from the Concierge's floor where we were offered an extravagant trick-or-treat but typically chose the sushi.



A day off on Wednesday

Jet leg is alive and well. Thank you to those of you who call me superwoman for surviving the seven hours time difference but in truth it caught up with me. Until a couple years ago we would play the game that "the time is what the time is" and we would not allow ourself a 4 o'clock syndrome: 4 PM you feel like you're going to die without a nap and at 4 AM you're wide-awake.

So. After spending about three hours up in the middle of the night unable to sleep, I turned the alarm clock off and gave up breakfast and slept in a long time.

There were simply no tours on the schedule anyway. I had been waitlisted for a few to include my choice of a monastery but all were canceled and I wasn't up to paying for the minimum four people and Tom didn't want to go anyway. This is another indication that Bucharest is new to tourists. They have a long ways to go in accommodating the tourists and in cleanup.

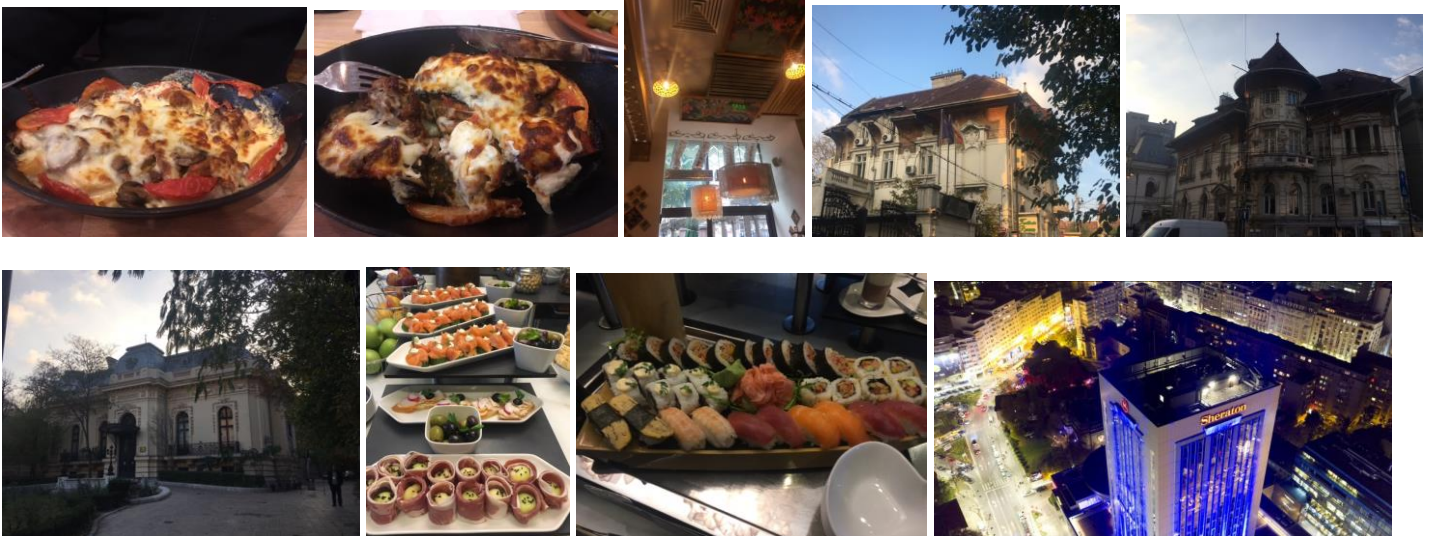
Today was considered "day one" of the Viking cruise so we had to resettle our room as an upgrade, and check in with Viking for tomorrow's arrangements.

The weather was delightful today. Yesterday it poured rain and blew like hell and today would have been super for a walking tour. Such is life and I didn't melt anyway.

We walked some of the neighborhood of the hotel which is pretty central. There are big old elegant buildings that look like embassies but have been converted to Restaurants.

We had a simple meal in the neighborhood at a place known for regional specialties. La Placinte with framed artwork on the ceiling and lace lampshades. Odd decor but ok and food we both liked. As indication of how inexpensive life can be in Bucharest, our two main courses, a side dish and two wines totaled \$21 US.

I still found myself in the Concierge's floor for a little added dinner. The Benihana famous restaurant located in the hotel serves up some beautiful platters.



Day 2 of tour

Thursday - Day 2 of tour but first full day. Bucharest to the Viking ship via a day tour of the city and parliament. Off we go on a Viking River cruise. Here's the sales pitch: *See Bucharest's 3,000-room Palace of Parliament. Make banitsa bread with a home cook in Vidin. Explore Belgrade's Ottoman and European treasures, including 6th-century Kalemegdan Fortress. View the Danube's towering Iron Gate. Visit a Croatian family's Osijek home. Witness Hungary's daredevil Puszta horsemen. Behold Budapest's grandeur. Once hidden behind the Iron Curtain, the eastern Danube still has secrets to reveal on our 11-day cruise tour from Bucharest to Budapest.*

Where we started: The Sheraton Bucharest Hotel for five nights. We were almost sorry to leave because it had been such a delightful stay in our lovely and well-appointed suite. We will be even sorrier when we check into our little room on the ship which is expected to be about the size of our Sheraton bathroom and it certainly won't have two bathrooms. We are spoiled. We are old. We need more space. We like more space. Smile.

From the itinerary: *After breakfast, check out of your hotel and take a morning tour of the city. See the city's wide boulevards, the Romanian Athenaeum, the Arch of Triumph and the Palace of Parliament. Visit the outdoor Muzeul Satului, otherwise known as the Village Museum, where authentic dwellings from all regions of the country have been relocated and reassembled, including rural cottages, farmhouses and water mills. During lunch at a local restaurant, enjoy a lively folkloric performance that recalls the simple pleasures of rural life. You then proceed to Giurgiu to board your ship and enjoy a welcome dinner.*

Bucharest City and Village Museum Tour for 8 ½ hours - *From Modest Rural Dwellings to the World's Largest Building. Explore Romania's fascinating capital, an impressive collection of unique architecture and grand monuments. Founded in the 14th century, Bucharest became Romania's capital in 1859 with the merging of Moldavia and Wallachia. See the city's wide boulevards, the Romanian Athenaeum, the Arch of Triumph and other highlights. Ceaușescu's expansive Palace of Parliament is the largest civilian building in the world, with 3,000 rooms and 24-carat gold ceilings. Visit the outdoor Muzeul Satului, otherwise known as the Village Museum, where authentic dwellings from*



*all regions of the country have been relocated and reassembled, including rural cottages, farmhouses and water mills.
End.*

Downtown I saw but missed a picture of the Umbrella Street. Found online later.

Most beautiful bookstore was on our list but missed too. We drove by it. An old multi story library with notable spiral stairs.

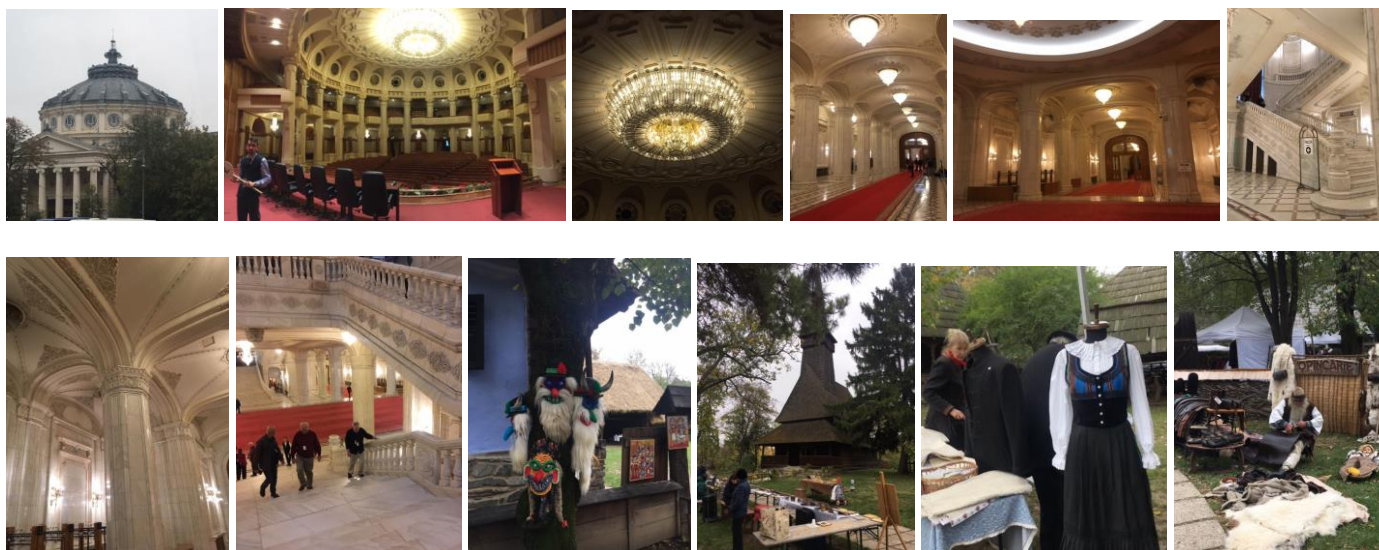
Pictures include: - The round Opera Theatre in old Bucharest. It is on revolutionary square.
-Inside of parliament where it took us 45 minutes just to get inside due to security but where we were wowed even though we only saw 2 1/2% of the entire building. At one time an area the size of Venice was demolished in order to build this and adjoining buildings. Reminded me of the Vatican where the poor folks suffered and money was spent on the riches.
-Though we were at the outdoor Village Museum on Monday, today it was filled with craft vendors costumed in country garb. -Lunch of regional dishes included a show of dancers and music.
-It was nearly a 2 hour drive to the river boat and on the way we saw a lot of gypsy communities and a really ritzy house where you could have your fortune told. My food tour guide on Tuesday had great respect for the gypsies who live their own life and can't be changed by need for possessions. She said they have a unique and special music ability and a good outlook on life.
-By the time we arrived at the ship, I thought Tom would be too exhausted for dinner. Surprise. He went to thru all courses.
-The last picture was an unusual notebook of parchment paper covered with two forms of wood and a laser cut. It was hand made in Romania.

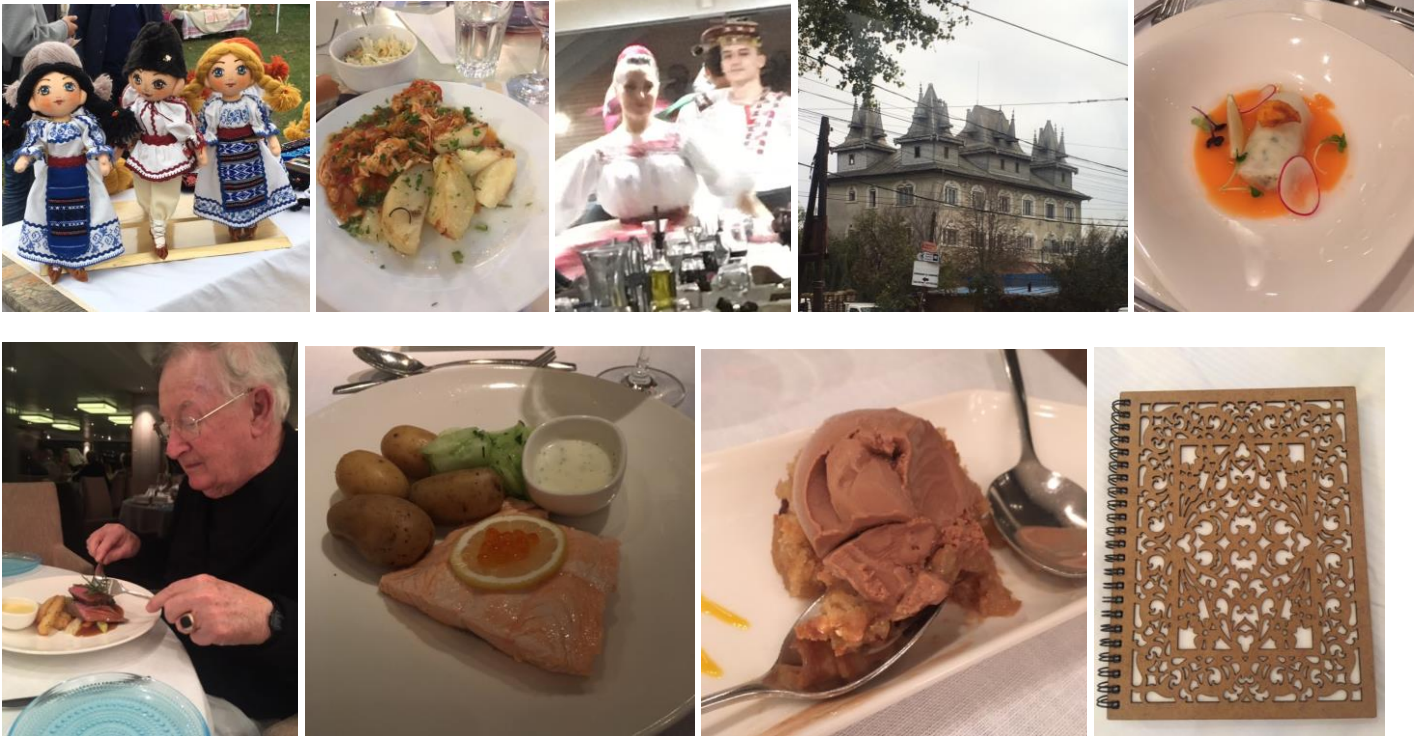


As expected, our stateroom was well appointed but incredibly small. Yes we were spoiled. We spent a bit of time trying to hide everything under the bed or in the drawers and we can probably survive but would much rather have the suite that we booked for next June's cruise.

Currency - darn but it keeps changing by country and we have five countries! Easier to use plastic which is typically accepted. We have sure been spoiled by the use of the common Euro in most of Europe. This is like the old days in the 70s when we lived in Europe and carried a different envelope of money for every country.

Internet: it is either down or as slow as a dial-up. I never could send a trip report while on board.





Friday - Day 3 of Tour - Veliko Tarnovo, Russe, Bulgaria

From the itinerary: *After breakfast, disembark at Russe for a full-day excursion to Bulgaria's former capital, Veliko Tarnovo. There you will see Tsaravets Hill and the ruins of the royal castle. During free time, shop for local crafts along Samovodska Charshia. Continue your venture to Arbanasi for lunch in a local restaurant and a guided tour of the Nativity Church with its intricate floor-to-ceiling murals and icons.*

The most integral Danube city in Bulgaria, Russe enjoys a setting amidst rolling countryside blanketed in sunflower and wheat fields. Once an outpost of the Roman Empire, it was known as Sexaginta Prista, or "Sixty Ships," for the fleet that once docked here. Today, it is more known for its colorful atmosphere and as a gateway to Romania's fabled Transylvania region. Perhaps its most imposing feature is the 7,300-foot Danube Bridge spanning the river. In 1866, the Ottoman Empire's first railway was inaugurated here. It is the longest span over the river and the only link between Bulgaria and Romania.

Witness True Bulgarian Character - Veliko Tarnovo & Arbanasi Shore Excursion for 8 ½ hours. Tour two cultural gems rich in Bulgarian heritage during this full-day excursion into the heart of the country. You will begin with a drive through Russe. Then continue to Veliko Tarnovo, a fascinating medieval town built around Tsarevets Hill and its hilltop royal castle. After a coffee break overlooking the Old Town, stop at the Yantra River Bridge for a nice view of the majestic Assenev Brothers monument, a towering obelisk flanked by horses. Next, explore Samovodska Charshia, a traditional street teeming with handicrafts, or visit the castle ruins and enjoy vistas of the Old Town and countryside. Afterward, proceed to Arbanasi, rich in history and Greek influence. After lunch at a local restaurant, sample the Damascus Rose products, locally made from the essence of roses. After, you will visit a local merchant house and see the intricate frescoes of the Nativity Church with a local guide.
 End.

Bulgarian Rose oil is said to be the best in world and came from the Damascus rose. The amount of rose petals it takes to make a little dram of Rose oil was amazing. Bogarsha Rosa is the only official product for export and thought to be authentic versus artificial fragrance. I purchase some soaps for the lovely scent and because they are not liquid which falls under the control of airport security.

Dennis was our guide, a Brit who fell in love with both their beer and a lovely gal and has stayed for 20 to 30 years. Tom thought Dennis was one of the best guides we've had ever had and tipped accordingly. I had to agree that Dennis was wonderful especially when compared to the following day and a gal I didn't like at all.

Pictures include: - The outside of an orthodox church which is very plain and yet inside this 400 year old structure is full of Sistine Chapel type of artwork though primitive looking.

-Orthodox church is quite interesting to me in that they don't go around proselytizing and they don't have seating and they aren't looking to impress anyone. Just as importantly is how they have not changed over time.

- Yes that little triangular hole in the floor is what you guessed. Fortunately not for us but in a house that was considered ritzy in its time.
- You will see the Ottoman influence such as in the birthing room where mama and baby did not come out for 40 days.
- It was then onto a traditional restaurant with more music and folk dancing. One breaks a piece of bread on their way in.
- The white blob is a wonderful yogurt with honey.
- Then onto their little village that is one of the richest in the country and gave us a little bit of shopping.

It was a very long day and we were not back until 5:45 PM so the 6:15 PM mandatory safety lesson was hard to accommodate. But there was no doubt it was required; we were in our life vests and had to sign off. Meals are so special and with so many choices that we rather quickly started skipping meals and going to the casual lounge for lesser fare. Sunrises and sunsets are always requiring a wow and a camera. Our balcony is small but helps add to the feeling of space in our teeny tiny stateroom.



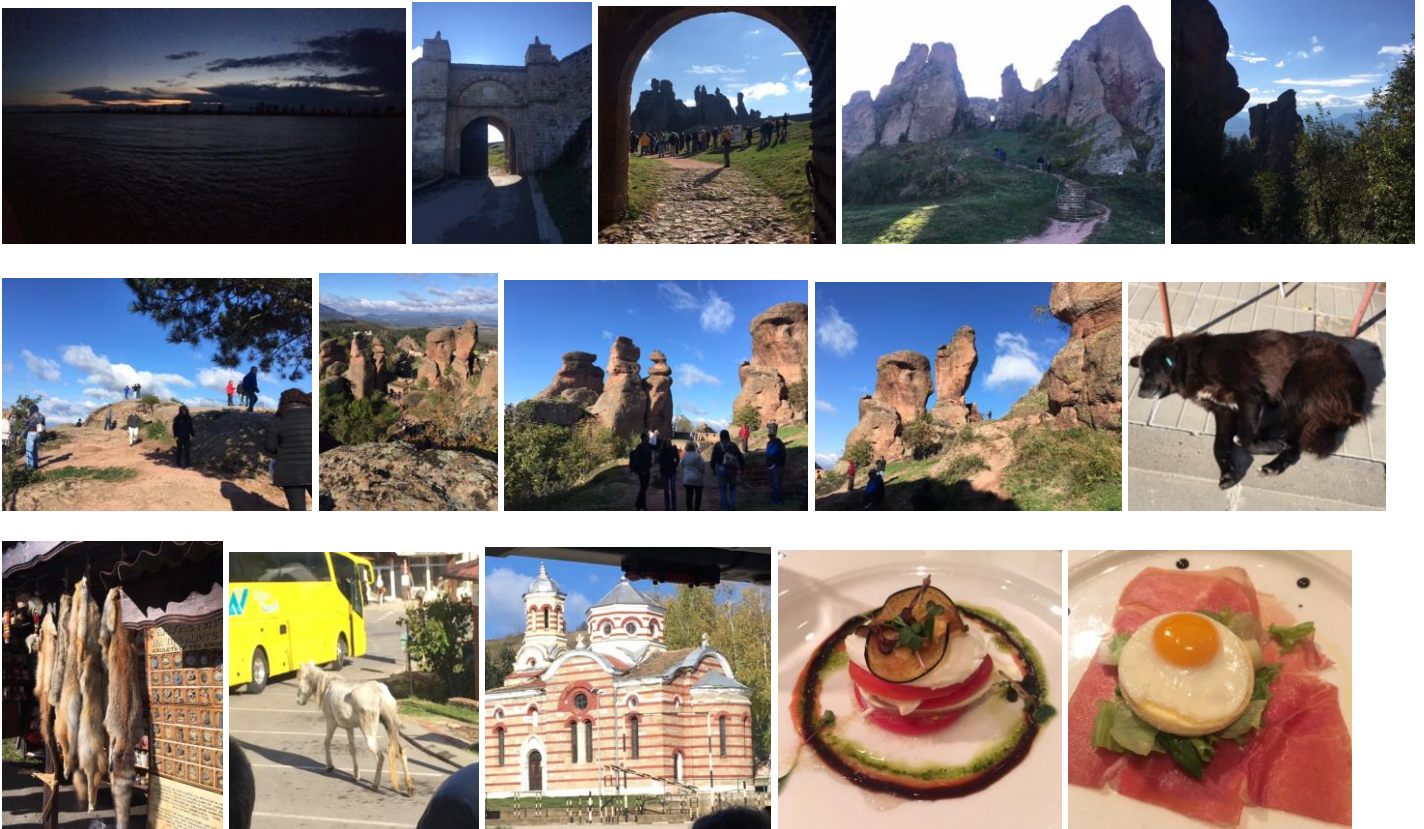
Saturday - Day 9 and Day 4 of tour - Vidin, Bulgaria

From itinerary: *Arrive in the picturesque Bulgarian port of Vidin, and take an excursion to see Belogradchik Fortress, built right into the striking Belogradchik Rocks. See the fortress's amazing construction, begun in Roman times and greatly extended by Bulgarian tsars and the Ottomans, and enjoy breathtaking views. Enjoy lunch aboard your ship; then you have free time to explore Vidin's city center, Orthodox churches and the ruins of the city's once-grand synagogue. We depart during dinner.*

One of Bulgaria's oldest riverside towns, Vidin is home to the only entirely preserved medieval Bulgarian castle. It perches impressively on the riverbank as you approach. Because of its striking pose, thick ring walls, stout towers and solid gates, the fortress is known as Babini Vidini Kuli, which means Granny Vida's Towers. Around the castle rose a fairy-tale town of 25 minarets, many domes and other charming architecture of the period. Though many of these features have been shadowed by today's city, Vidin retains its charms. Today it is largely an agricultural and trade center renowned for its wines.

AM tour Diana only: Belogradchik Rocks & Fortress Excursion for 4 hours. Strenuous. Spectacular Rock Formations and the Defensive Structure They Helped Shape - Journey into one of the most scenic regions of Bulgaria for a unique glimpse of how geography helped create an architectural treasure. Join your guide for a drive from Vidin to the Belogradchik Rocks. With their strange, red-hued cliffs and massifs, these breathtaking mountains strike a dramatic pose. The result of millennia of weathering, river erosion, freezing, and countless other factors, these formations are more than Bulgaria's great natural wonder. They are also a curiosity for the multitude of fantastic figures and profiles that emerge when you catch them at just the right angle. Silhouettes of people, towers, ships, mushrooms, palaces and animals populate the cliffs. You will also see the fascinating Belogradchik Fortress, built by Ottoman conquerors in a maze of rock columns and pillars. You will have time to walk around the compound and enjoy superior views of the caves and rock shapes from its many terraced courtyards.

PM Tom only: Vidin Home-Hosted Cooking Demonstration. Easy. See how everyday Bulgarians live; learn how to prepare the nation's beloved banitsa, and how the diet here helps some locals live to 100 years. Drive with your guide to a home near Vidin, where your gracious hosts greet you with freshly baked traditional round bread. Relax, get comfortable and look around the house and garden. Then, head to the kitchen to see how Bulgaria's banitsa is prepared, and try preparing it for yourself. This phyllo pastry, a central part of family celebrations, may be prepared with spinach, cheese, grated pumpkin or whatever ingredient is on hand. Often, the baker inserts a lucky charm into the dough before cooking so it can be discovered with much surprise later.



Sunday – Day 10 and Day 5 of tour— Scenic Cruising: The Iron Gate, Serbia

The Iron Gate is one of Europe's most dramatic natural wonders, a spectacular narrow gorge with enormous white limestone cliffs. From the itinerary: *Sail through one of Europe's most dramatic natural wonders, the picturesque stretch famously known as the Iron Gate. As you cruise through these spectacular narrow gorges that slice through the Carpathian Mountains to the north and the Balkan Mountains to the south, marvel at the towering white limestone cliffs draped with forest. Be on the lookout for ancient remains as you gaze upon the dramatic walls. On the Bulgarian side, Trajan's Tablet was laid to mark the construction of a Roman military road; on the Romanian side, marvel at the enormous rock sculpture of Dacian King Decebalus. Your Cruise Director will provide commentary about the region and scenic points of interest as you sail toward the next port.*

From the web: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Gates -



Monday - Day 11 and Day 6 of tour in Belgrade, Serbia

From the itinerary: *Wake up in Belgrade, capital of Serbia. Take a guided walk through the grounds of Kalemegdan Fortress, now a stately park; also see the Orthodox cathedral and stop at the Square of the Republic. Enjoy lunch aboard your ship before you have free time to explore Belgrade's gracious architecture or visit one of its many museums, like the Nikola Tesla Museum. Dine aboard your ship or experience some of Belgrade's nightlife. We depart very late this evening.*

The former capital of the state of Yugoslavia, and today's Serbian capital, Belgrade is one of the oldest cities in Europe. Its location at the confluence of the Sava and Danube Rivers and at the intersection of Eastern and Western Europe has long made it a contested region. Throughout its history, the "White City," as its Serbian name translates, has been destroyed and rebuilt 20 times. Fortunately, the wide-reaching citadel remains, housing the Kalemegdan Fortress, Orthodox churches, Turkish baths and green parkland. Its Cathedral of St. Sava is one of the largest Orthodox buildings in the world.

Panoramic Belgrade City Tour for both – Tour the "White City" at the Scenic Confluence of Two Rivers. See Belgrade's many fine monuments and architectural splendor during this enlightening tour of Europe's most resilient city. The Serbian capital of Belgrade overlooks the confluence of the Danube and Sava Rivers. Ravaged and rebuilt 20 times in its history, many of the city's finest buildings have been gloriously restored. Begin with a guided walk around the famed Kalemegdan Fortress. Its stalwart walls loom over the Old Town; impressive medieval gates enclose Orthodox churches, Turkish baths, a soaring monument to "The Victor" and more. You will also enjoy a stroll in the park around the fortress, taking in the picturesque vistas of the river. Later, witness some of modern-day Belgrade during a short panoramic drive. Stop in the Square of the Republic to admire the statue of Prince Michael. You will have free time here in the adjacent pedestrian shopping area to browse the stores before returning to your ship.

2 PM for Diana only: Behind the Scenes at the Serbian Opera. Get an Insider's Glimpse of a National Institution. Join us on a small-group excursion for a behind-the-scenes tour of Serbia's treasured National Theater, home of Serbian opera. In 1868, Prince Michael invited the founder of the Novi Sad Serbian National Theater to open another performance center in Belgrade. Serbians have flocked here to celebrate their culture and tradition ever since. The theater's original design mirrored the Teatro alla Scala opera house in Milan. Today, as it overlooks Republic Square like royalty, Belgrade's National Theater houses three artistic ensembles (of opera, drama and ballet) under its roof, with more than 600 performances per year. So dedicated are its musicians, legend says that they have even held daily performances during air raids. A short drive delivers you to its doors, and you will take a guided tour behind the scenes. After, you will enjoy an exclusive performance of six breathtaking arias and visit the theater's museum while sipping sparkling wine.

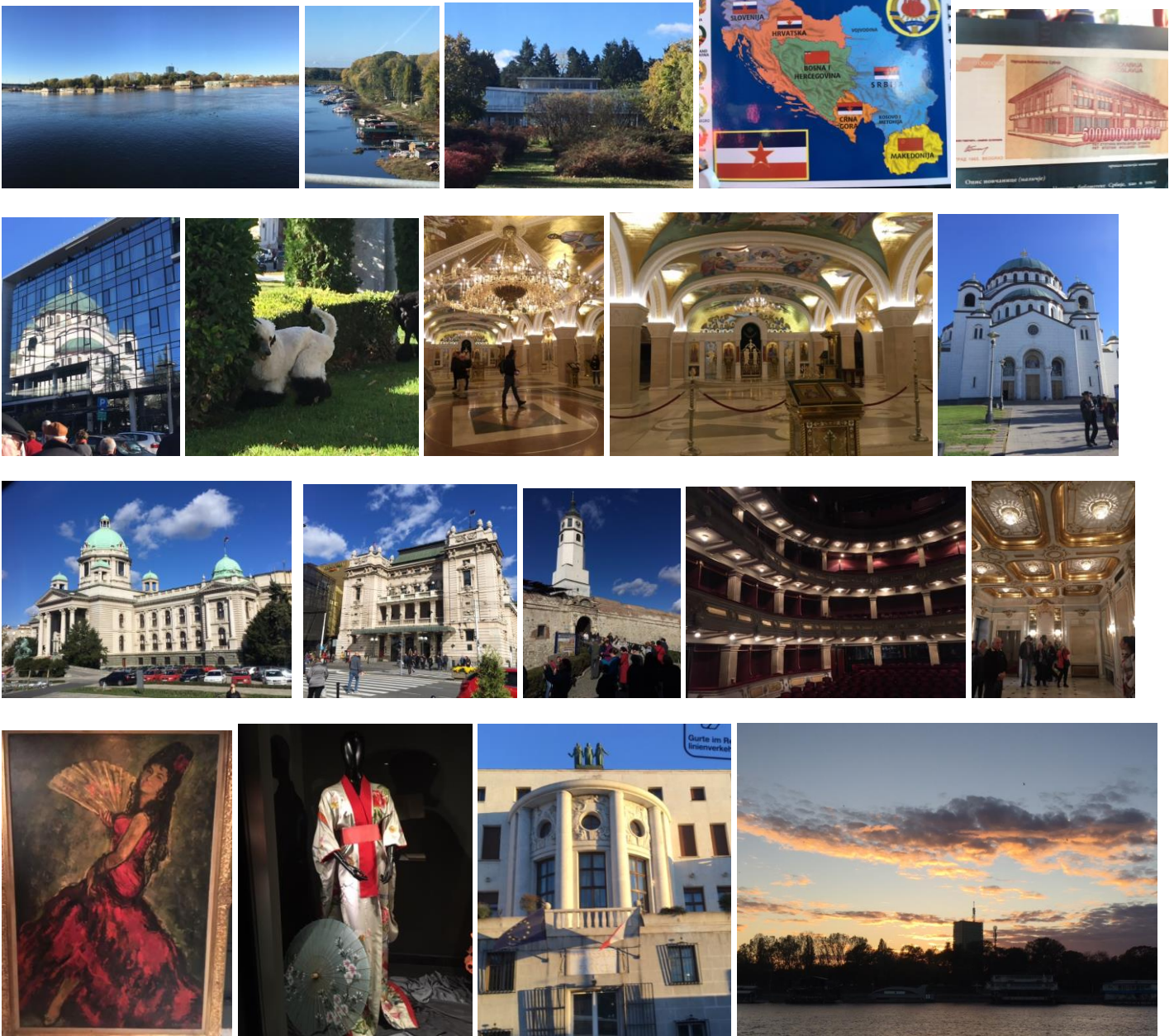
Pictures include: - How our stateroom balcony in the morning looking at a row of houseboats.

-Where are these Balkan countries? See Map. Then see their Funny Money with lots of digits. They need to drop 2.

-Futzy designer dogs in the park. – The church basement.

-The Opera House, costumes, and missing the champagne they served.

-French Embassy and finally – Sunset from our balcony.



Tuesday – Day 12 and Day 7 of tour — Osijek, Croatia

From the itinerary: *Cruise along the Danube, arriving at Vukovar around noon. Disembark for an afternoon excursion to the charming Croatian city of Osijek. Inhabited since Neolithic times, this area has had several heydays under the Romans, the Ottomans and the Hapsburgs; now Vukovar is revered for its baroque buildings, parks and monuments.*

The fourth largest city in Croatia, Osijek is located near the confluence of the Drava and Danube Rivers. It is the largest city and the economic and cultural capital of the eastern Croatian region of Slavonia. In its early days, Osijek was a Roman settlement called Mursa Maior ("major"). It was later rebuilt by the Ottomans and ruled by the Hapsburg Empire. Today, with an abundance of farmland and game, as well as plentiful baroque architecture and musical and outdoor venues, Osijek has become a gastronomic and cultural center of Croatia. Its cathedral can host 3,000 people.

8:30 AM for Diana only: Croatian Countryside & Wine Tasting in the morning. Croatian Castles and Fine Vintages. *Discover the rich and varied history of Northern Croatia and sample some of its delicious wines. Since Roman times, this region of the country has been coveted, thanks to its strategic location on the Danube. During this enlightening excursion, you will drive with your guide to one of the area's renowned museums, a castle with fascinating medieval origins, where you will browse a rich and revealing collection of artifacts dating back centuries. As you tour the castle chambers and halls, Croatia's past comes alive in priceless relics that have survived the ages. You will also turn to the fruits of the earth when you descend into a wine cellar in the historic town of Ilok. In these dim corridors, you will taste two white wines and one red and experience for yourself why its prized grapes and hearty vintages have helped put Croatia on every oenophile's map.*

1:00 PM for 2: Osijek & Vukovar Excursion. Tour Two Major Croatian Cities and Visit a Local Family. See the highlights of Vukovar and Osijek, and stop to meet a Croatian family along the way. You will meet your guide and make the short drive to Vukovar, passing the Vuka River, the palace of the former Count Eltz and the city's main street, lined with buildings that carry echoes of Northern Europe. As you arrive in Osijek, you will pause to visit a local family in their home and learn about their daily lives. After, continue to the Osijek Citadel complex for a walking tour. Enjoy a concert in the Rising of the Holy Cross Church. Then explore Holy Trinity Square, see the town's only surviving gate and stroll the picturesque promenade along the Drava River. See more of the town by coach, passing green parks and driving along European Avenue, the most scenic street in Osijek, lined with elegant baroque and Belle Epoque buildings. End.

Pictures include: - Woke at 6 AM to a most astounding sunrise and autumn colors with the reflections on the water.



Wednesday Nov 1 – Day 13 and Day 8 of tour — Kalocsa, Hungary

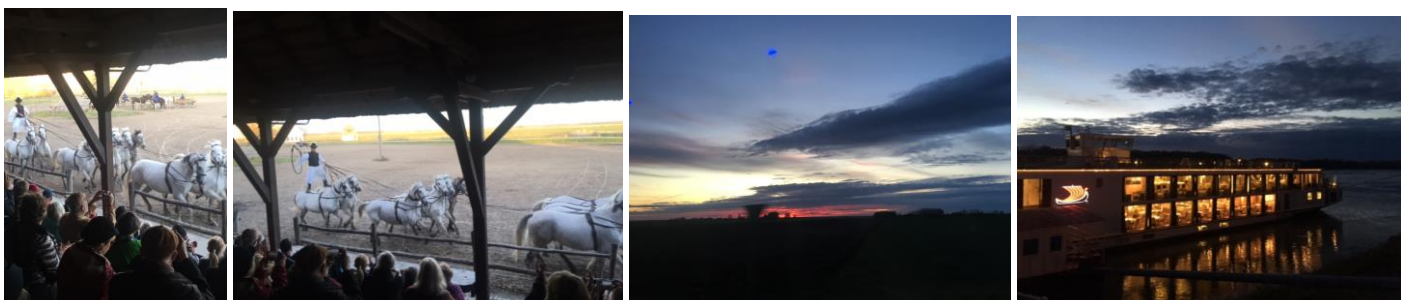
From the itinerary: *Sail into Hungary this morning, arriving in Kalocsa after lunch. Take a guided city tour followed by a short organ concert at St. Joseph Church. Then, you are treated to a performance of traditional Puszta horsemanship. Return to the ship and enjoy a festive final dinner aboard as we depart for Budapest.*

Once the seat of the archbishop, the cultural center of Kalocsa is more than 1,000 years old. The quaint town, surrounded by 8,000 acres of farmland growing fiery red peppers, is brimming with traditional Hungarian culture and steeped in the piquant flavors of paprika, the "red gold" that has been giving local goulash its distinctive taste for centuries. The world's first Paprika Museum chronicles the spice's history. The streets are adorned with bright murals of floral motifs, which create a cheery ambiance as you browse craft-filled shops. Hungary's artistic heritage takes center stage at the House of Folk Arts museum.

1:30pm - Booked for 2: Kalocsa & Puszta Excursion. *Hungary's Capital of Paprika and Equestrian Arts. Visit one of Hungary's major cultural centers and attend a breathtaking display of traditional horsemanship. Depart your ship for a short drive to the city of Kalocsa, where a rich history is flavored by the town's renowned peppery paprika. In Holy Trinity Square, you will see the splendid cathedral and admire the Archbishop's Palace. After a short organ concert at St. Joseph Church, continue to the Bakodpuszta Equestrian Center. The people of the Hungarian Puszta region have long relied on the horse for transport, settlement and defending their land. Many locals worry that their country's equestrian connection is being lost to a motorized world, so they hold fast to rural ways and to their four-legged comrades, elevating horsemanship to an art form. You'll witness the sometimes acrobatic culmination of this long-cherished relationship during a thrilling show. End.*

Hungarian border crossing: in almost all cases, the cruise line held our passports and took care of border crossings at the other four countries. In the case of Hungary, they were noted for needing to put a face to passport and we were expected to be called out of our cabin at about 6 AM for inspection.

Fortunately on this trip they made an exception and we sailed away at 8 AM. We were warned that they have held up the ship for as much as six hours and to be especially respectable.





Thursday Nov 2 – Day 14 and Day 9 of tour— Budapest, Hungary

Every day I wrote a trip report but every day the cruise ship's Internet connection was too slow to send it. So here I am, happily in Budapest for the fourth time, and even happier to be on fast speed Wi-Fi connection. Eventually I'll accumulate my daily trip notes and they'll be on my website.

I was in Budapest in early 2007 with my running girlfriends (Prague was part of that trip), and again later in 2007 for the start of a river cruise to Amsterdam. Then with Tom in 2012 or 2013 for a Christmas trip when we rented a super apartment. It is good to be back. Someday Budapest really can be a Paris of the East. Considering their tough history, it's amazing what they've accomplished and every trip I see an improvement over the dark Communist times.

From the itinerary: *Disembark after breakfast and take a tour of Budapest. Begin in Pest, where you see the National Opera House and visit historic Heroes' Square. Cross the Chain Bridge to Buda, where you walk along Castle Hill to Fishermen's Bastion and Matthias Church. Check in to the deluxe Budapest Hilton for a 2-night stay, then take the rest of the day to sightsee on your own. Explore a museum, do some shopping or relax in one of the Art Nouveau spas.*

Riverside beauty, a vibrant cultural scene and echoes of late 19th-century architecture and romance blend together in Budapest to form one of Europe's most rewarding cities. Hungary's enchanting capital straddles the banks of the Danube, with traditional hillside Buda on one side and modern Pest on the other. By day, astounding Art Nouveau buildings, stalwart castles and glittering palaces set the stage for awe-inspiring strolls and long soaks in thermal spas. By night, a nostalgic glow settles in as the city's lights dance on Danube waters, the Chain Bridge uniting it all as a dramatic centerpiece.

9am Booked for 2: Panoramic Budapest City Shore Tour. *Hungary's Graceful and Inspiring Capital. Take in one of Europe's great cultural capitals. Over the last few decades, Budapest has reemerged as one of the continent's iconic cities, divided by the lilted Danube and connected by the graceful Chain Bridge. Meet your guide at your ship for a panoramic tour, beginning in modern Pest. Along the elegant Andrassy Avenue, the Champs-Élysées of Budapest, admire the Hungarian State Opera House. Stop at Heroes' Square, a wide-open plaza of monuments and statues commemorating the Magyar state. Across the river, explore the more traditional Buda side of the city. Here you will visit the Castle District with its massive hilltop castle complex, the turreted Fishermen's Bastion and Matthias Church, named for the country's most popular medieval king. From the heights of Buda Hill, enjoy fantastic views of the famous Chain Bridge, the first span to ever connect the two halves of the city when it opened in 1849. End*

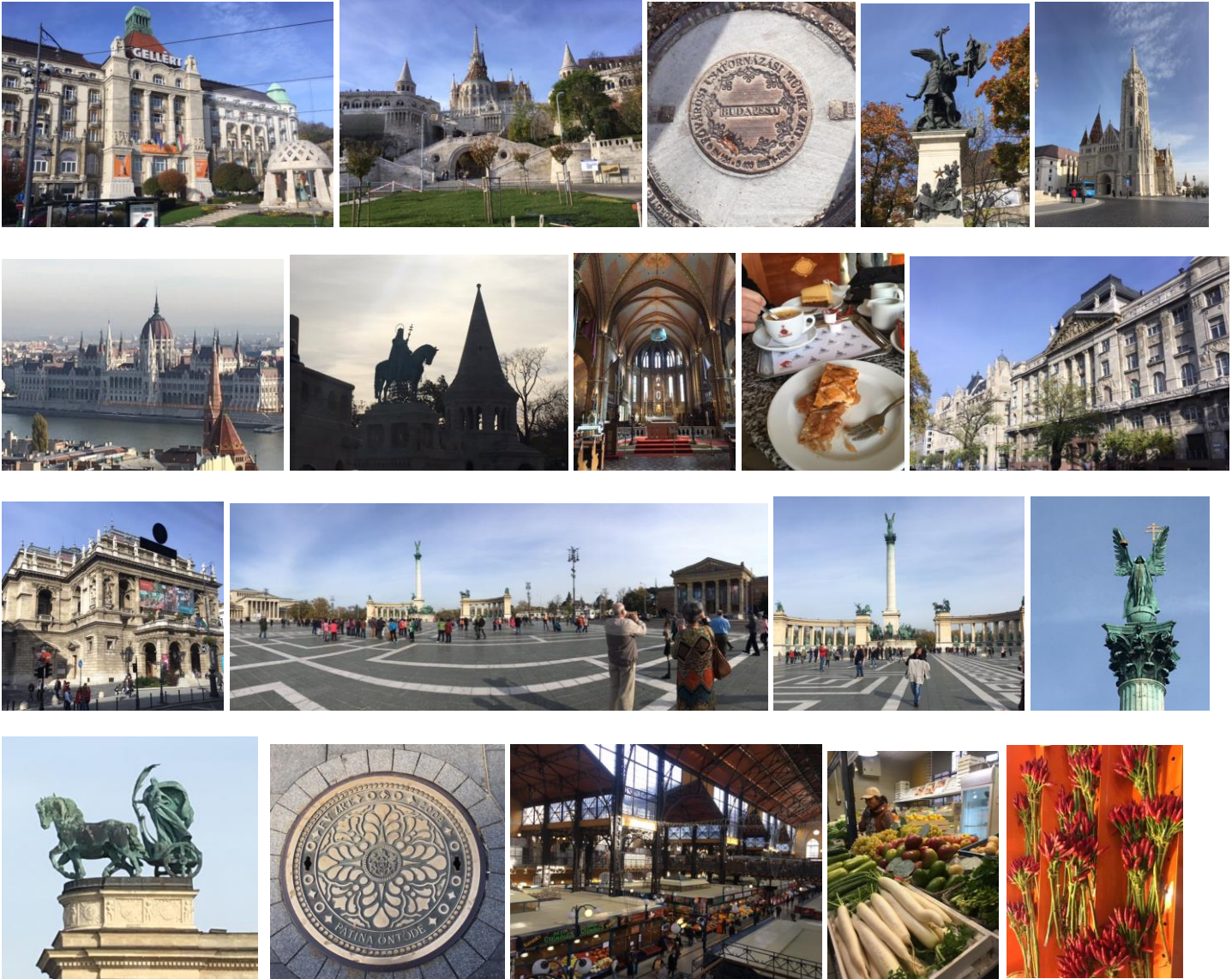
Great Market Hall (Central Market Hall) in Budapest - we were left with about an hour and a half in the grand and biggest market but it was crowded beyond imagine. It would seem that tourist buses have found it and it is near to the river boat docking.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/experience/food-and-wine/2017/11/01/great-market-hall-budapest/813762001/>

At about 3:30 PM we moved into the Hotel Hilton Budapest City for 2 nights with tour but we had arranged our own room upgrade and had an executive suite. Thank heavens for a lot of reasons one of which when the buses unloaded there were about three busloads of people standing in the lobby waiting for their key. I went up to the Hilton honors desk and got my key immediately and off to the room. www.budapest-city.hilton.com

This is not the Hilton on the Buda Hill where I stayed in 2007. It is away from city center and closer to the train station and I don't think Viking should have put us this far from city center.

The hotel is a bit Plain Jane but noted for their Roof Garden and Sky Terrace. It is too chilly for that but we were able to look out at the sky garden from our breakfast room. For me the Hilton will be noted for their concierge lounge with lots of food for breakfast lunch and dinner.



Friday Nov 3 – Day 15 and Day 10 of tour — Budapest, Hungary

I'm tired of traveling. My clothes are smelly, hair roots exposed, running out of 3-oz products, patience with crowds at an all-time low, sick in more ways than one of our food emphasis, and feeling fat. I've always known 10-14 days was the end of my traveling comfort limit.

But we are ready to change hotels on Saturday and be on our own which should mostly solve the problem(s). Four nights in a gloriously famous 5-star in a City we like a lot. Coming up! We have a list of favorite sites we want to see again.

The Hilton City (vs Hilton Buda Hill) was just okay despite having their best room and a lovely concierge lounge. It was the choice of the cruise line thus we simply upgraded. I'm surprised to admit that the tiny cruise stateroom wasn't so bad. I was enchanted with the river, the black-black night skies, and the comforting vibrations. The never ending booze didn't hurt either.

There was a serious cruise problem that (so far) hasn't affected us. I remember our only ocean cruise getting novo-virus and quarantines. There must have been troubles here too as we knew of some being violently ill and the last day's optional (and prepaid) tour had 12 out of 40 too sick to attend.

From the itinerary: *Take a full day to explore Budapest on your own. Ride the city's innovative, efficient metro; walk through the City Park or along the Pest embankment for views of the Buda Castle District; explore the Buda Castle Labyrinth; visit the Jewish Quarter and tour the beautifully restored Dohány Street Synagogue.*

9AM – Booked for 2: A Taste of Budapest optional tour. A Hungarian Sampler. *Get a flavor for Hungary's most renowned government building and for the nation's hearty cuisine. Transfer with your guide to the Budapest Parliament building,*

Hungary's largest building. As the nation's business goes on around you, you will enjoy a guided tour of select public rooms. Next, walk to Szabadság Square, or Liberty Square, stopping to view the monuments to Imre Nagy and Ronald Reagan and the Art Nouveau treasures that surround this public space. You will also see the US Embassy and the decorative Postal Savings Bank. Continue to the Hold Street Market (Szingli Market on Sundays) to browse colorful produce and fresh meats shipped from local farms. Taste some pogácsa, or salty scones, and hearty sausages. After time to browse this lively cornucopia, walk to Urban Betyár Restaurant for a cup of goulash soup. Finish your tasting tour with a delicious strudel and hear the story of this beloved sweet treat. End

Parliament- https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_Parliament_Building

In all my other trips I have never taken the time to tour inside of Parliament. One must be very patient for all the hurry up and wait, security, and masses of people, but it is worth it. Last I heard, they were still paying the zillions of dollars for upkeep for this quickly built building that was beginning to fall into the river.

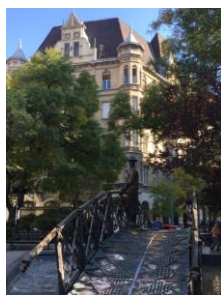
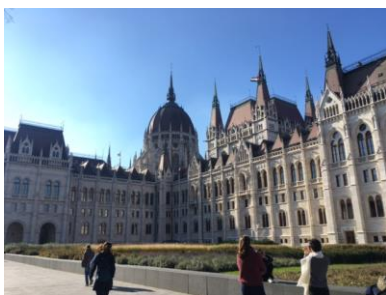
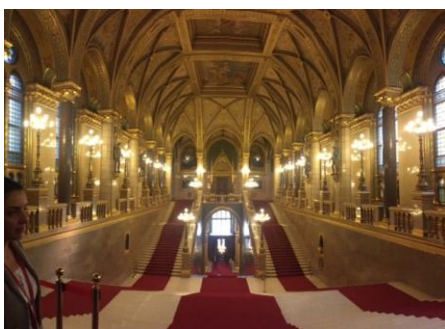
Pictures include: - A lovely window grill on walk to the parliament building.
-Inside the parliament which is one of the largest buildings in the world one finds an extravagant amount of gold and stained glass and a huge dome that we were unable to photograph. The one photo here proves someone took a picture as I found it on the web.

-Interesting features like many windows sills with brass numbered cigar holders.

-There are many parks in Budapest and one predominant one is bounded by embassies to include that of the US.

-Inside the park is a statue of Reagan. Remember "tear down that wall?"
The bridge with their famous prime minister from the revolution is all bronze.

-UNICUM is a rather bitter local after-dinner drink. They believe their type of brandy or snaps can cure anything. I rather like it and I really like the idea of curing anything. It was provided in the concierge lounge which might've contributed to my enjoyment of the lounge with its related sky Terrace and rooftop garden.





Saturday - November 4 and Day 16. Still in Budapest.

We moved from the Hilton City at West End to the famous 5-star Boscolo hotel generally known as the New York Palace. "She" is world famous for the New York Cafe. We took a small suite and I was grateful when Tom asked about an upgrade to the presidential suite that he declined the extra €1000 a day. Smile. The Boscolo Is part of the Marriott autograph collection now but clearly has not been integrated into their strict requirements.

She is certainly the best in town; yet think of her as a gorgeous blonde gal without a brain. Without any depth. Everywhere was a wow factor and practically beyond belief. Think of Versailles. Yet she is only skin deep; the list of 'stupid' is long.

The rope chain window curtain between bathroom and foyer was dramatic but couldn't be closed off, the big bright chandelier could only be turned off if every other light was off, there was no night light, no plug-in next to the bed nor an alarm clock, no plug-in in the bathroom for hairdryer or rollers, pillows were not down-filled, the summer rain shower spewed out sideways and onto the bathroom floor, the Inefficient and noisy air conditioner/heater system had nothing but 1 through 3 choice whatever that was, and to top it off bath amenities had been used! Then breakfast seating was for 120 whereas they had 320 to accommodate and breakfast offerings were no better than the Hilton concierge's floor.

Pictures include: - The first three pictures of the hotel are from the web as is the night shot of the hotel. We did have our own full moon.

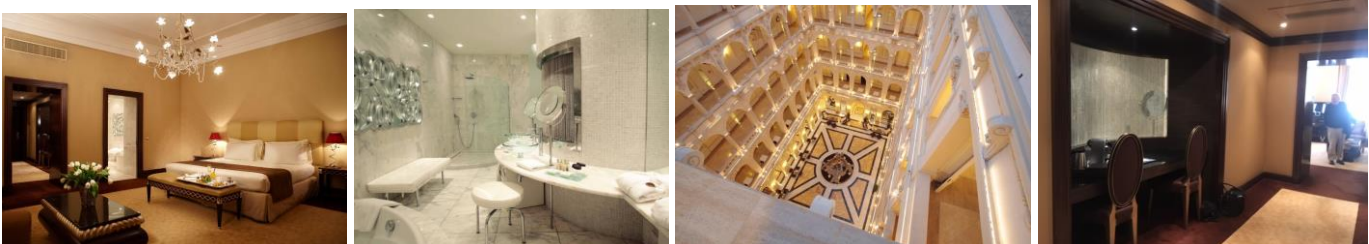
-The hotel sent us to a sweet little traditional restaurant where Tom finally had his chicken paprikash and I had the stuffed cabbage.

From there we walked to their Champs Elysee called Andrassy via the Music Academy, outside pedestrian streets lined with little cafés and lots of smokers sitting outside, and onto their opera house.

We got reacquainted with the Maria Callas Café where there is a long tradition of famous pastries. How Callas managed to lose 60 kg while creating desserts is hard to imagine. Maybe it was during the time that Onassis left her for Jackie Kennedy. Tom indulged in the Maria Callas torte, coffee and a Calvados while I had a grappa in the cutest little glass. All for \$21 US to give you an idea of bargains in Hungary. Our dinners with three drinks was under \$50.

Pictures of some hotel patrons would be entertaining but I'm not sure I'm courageous or gutsy enough to take the pictures. If you have ever looked through Vogue magazine and wondered who wears those weird and often revealing outfits, well they are here.

My sister's collection of manhole cover pictures was greatly enlarged during this visit. I've never seen such a collection and many of them beautiful and most of them with the Budapest name on them.





Sunday November 5. Our Day 17. It's been a long trip.

Tom begged off so I went out for a long walk. But not as long of a walk as I might've done in 2007. When I look at the map I am rather amazed at how many miles we put on in the past.

It is not the same place as in 2007 either. They went through an extreme financial crisis in 2008, maybe worse than other places in the world. Now it is Sunday and as I walk from park to park I see a lot of family socializing and on their feet. Even on the pedestrian streets full of retail, I am pleased to see all shops closed for Sunday but lots of walkers no matter. I am not pleased to see so many Christmas decorations. Christmas markets are just opening up. (Our last trip was at Christmas in order to enjoy the Christmas markets. I suspect Tom will never eat another sausage at a Christmas market however.)

I see Starbucks everywhere now. In 2007 our tour guide Maria chastised me for wanting a coffee to-go. She said coffee is for sitting and socializing. She bragged that they have no Starbucks. Now they are on many street corners.

My walk took me from the hotel to the river, toward the big market, to the largest synagogue in the world outside of New York City, through a few pedestrian streets, past the big London-eye-looking-carousel, and along the river but one layer up street side. I traversed three bridges worth and passed the Parliament then returned Riverside and again took in the Jewish shoe memorial.

It is heartbreaking to see the long line of shoes on the river. The authorities lined up the Jewish families, shot them, and dumped them into the river. Someone collected the shoes and then later a sculpturer recreated them in bronze. So how could it possibly be that there is more anti-Semitic happenings in the city?

My walk took in the Riverside Intercontinental Hotel, Gresham palace which is a four seasons Hotel, Saint Stephen's basilica, and back through their Champs Elyse known as Andrassy and via the opera.

Dinner? At a family run little bistro about 20 minutes away from our hotel and recommended by the hotel. I was thrilled with the food and the wine and the ambience and I suspect that Tom will want to come here too. If his stomach recovers from what I'd call the Cruise Flu.

Pictures include: - I mention some of the outfits at our hotel? These little girls must've had very cool fannies. Maybe they were saving on the leather of their short little skirts.

-The breakfast room is probably one of the most magnificent rooms in our memory other than palaces like Versailles.

-Buda-what? I think it was a T-shirt shop but most all retail is closed on Sunday.

-The super huge synagogue in Jewish quarter.

-Cigarette smokers everywhere despite the frightening warnings on packages.

-Christmas decorations were out already. The Christmas market was just being set up. We once came for Christmas and were enchanted by the Christmas market and the stalls for food and knowing that Hungary is noted for their sausage - of course we indulged. We paid a serious price for a day or two.

-Across from the Chain Bridge which connects the hillside old town of Buda to the new modern and flat Pest side, sits the famous Gresham palace which is now a luxurious Four Seasons Hotel.

-I continued on beyond the parliament building past many side sculptures. The little pixie boy sitting on the fence is famous for prince Charles liking it so well he hired this artist to do a series in London.

-The old man is real and the little girl and her dog are bronze sculpture. The old man seemed to be living on the streets. --

-There are more on the streets than there were other times here and I'm told that many of the population are hoping for regime change at next elections. Anti-Semitism is sickeningly alive and well here too.

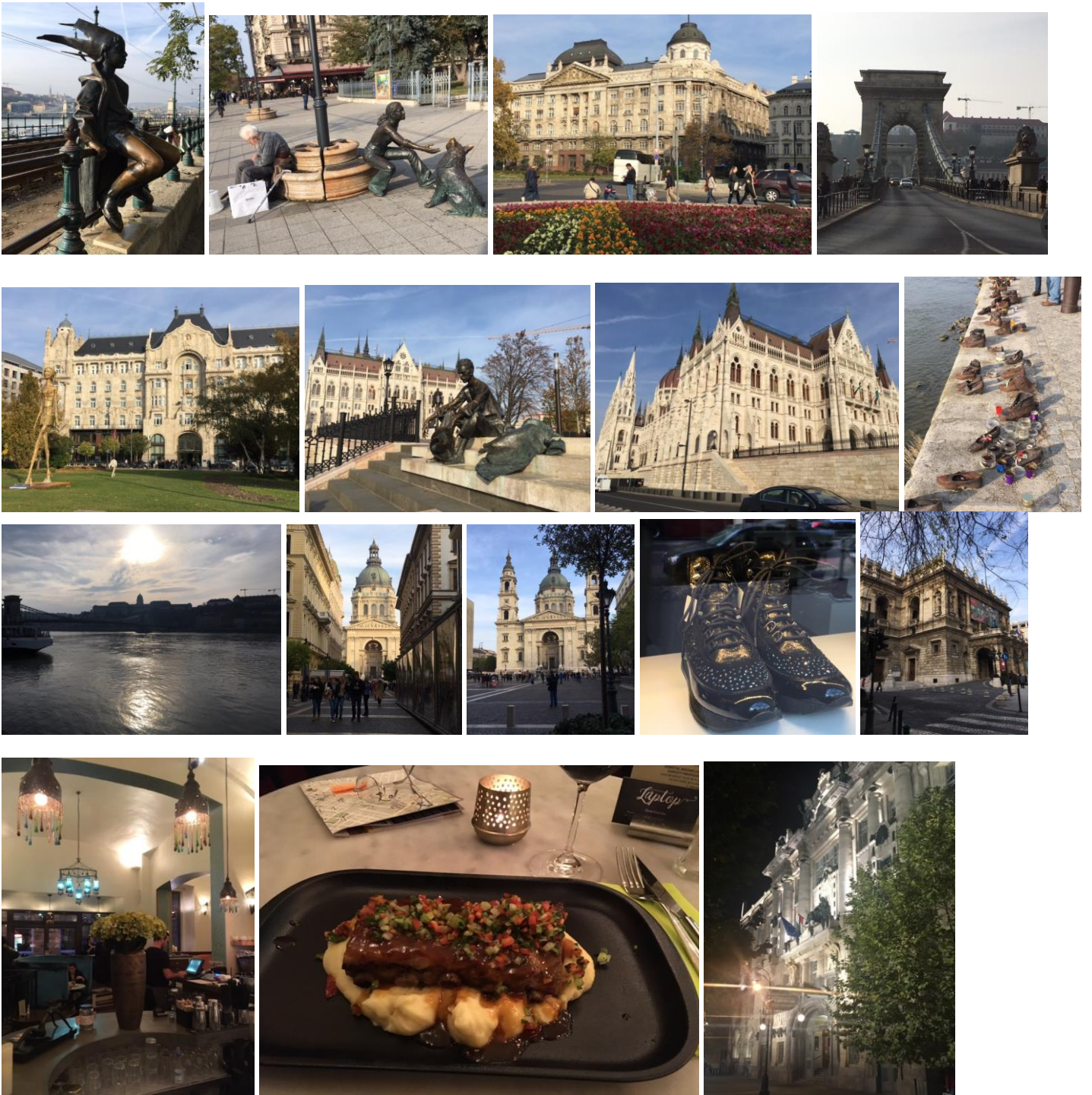
-I spoke of the bronze shoes memorial before. I want to speak of it again because our regime is causing such white supremacist movement that we need to remember. Babies and mommies and daddies and grandparents were all stood by the edge of the river and shot. Just because they were Jewish. Think it won't affect you? It could be you or your grandchildren next.

-The church is St Stephen's Basilica. There was a Christmas market outside of it when we were here last.

-For my hiking friends, if you want extra attention, I took a picture of some hiking shoes for you.

-The music Academy was all lit up at night and it is still another pedestrian street full of cafés.





Monday November 6 or Day 18. Too many! Time to get home.

Another breakfast under the Versailles—room. Magnificent and other worldly. I didn't partake of the many champagnes. I did hurry out for a long walk to the main market for the start of a food tour. Tom worked on recovering and was into Day 2 of no food.

www.TasteHungary.com. CULINARY WALK from their website: *There is no better way to begin any exploration of Budapest than with its food and drinks. Our food, wine, and cultural walking and tasting tour begins at The Central Market Hall—Budapest's cathedral of food—and continues through one of its most delicious and charming neighborhoods. Be sure to come with an appetite. You will need it on this tour!*

The Central Market Hall, one of Europe's largest and most spectacular indoor markets, is a natural place to begin getting acquainted with Hungarian food. Here you will get an introduction to the culture of Hungarian cuisine through the great variety and abundance of ingredients (which are mostly local and seasonal) on display. We will discuss the history of the building, the culture of eating and drinking in Hungary, and just what it is that Hungarian home cooks do with all of that

pork fat, paprika, and goose liver. From there, we will visit a few more places in the surrounding neighborhoods, to include: a spice shop, a kosher bakery, a coffee house, a candy manufacturer, an artisan chocolate shop. We will visit a butcher shop where we will sample several traditional Hungarian dishes, and afterwards we will visit a traditional patisserie to sample some of the elegant cakes for which Hungarian bakers are known. By this time you'll be ready for a glass (or three) of wine. The finalé will be a wine tasting session in which we will taste three quintessential Hungarian wines and get an introduction to the Hungarian wine regions, varietals, and styles. This tour will give you a taste of the traditional side of Hungarian cuisine, as well as the modern artisan producers and specialty food shops which are spicing up Budapest's food scene.

The Menu:

Learn—Discover Hungarian food and wine, from the raw ingredients through the most delicious dishes and wines. Learn about the history of the market, the ingredients, and the recipes.

Experience—Eating and drinking like a local.

Wine—Put the Hungarian wine scene in context as you taste three wines, while discussing the state of Hungarian winemaking, some of the important regions, and the major varietals.

See—The tour will provide a thorough tour of the different stalls and sections of Budapest's largest food market, followed by a walk through the surrounding neighborhood (one of Pest's most vibrant) and visits to several more venues.

Taste—You will have several tastings at the market, including a variety of local cheeses, cured meats, and pickled vegetables. Afterwards there will be a shared meal of traditional dishes, a tasting of several cakes, and one to two more tastings. Drinks which will be tasted include Unicum and three Hungarian wines. Come hungry, and don't bother to make lunch plans afterwards!

Walk— Though there will be plenty of eating breaks, be prepared to cover a lot of ground on your feet during this four-hour tour. End.

We had a lovely guide named Fanny. She was 43 with three kids, an extended education and family background. She had lived through communist regime and had many stories from parents and grandparents. She had been schooled in Vermont and traveled in Canada and had a sweet accent that I liked, was like a musical melody, but I missed a lot of her commentary due to both accent and hearing. I liked her no matter. Plus I've had a lot of food tours but maybe never so many tastings plus full meal(S)! I came home with strudel, scones, hand-made chocolates with no preservatives, and a list of favorite drinks. I knew I liked her when she started with a grappa type drink. Then we ended with three wines and thereafter I stumbled home many hours later.

Tom felt somewhat recovered and wanted to eat what I had last night. It was more of an outing that he expected or was up for so we stumbled home still again.

Want to say CHEERS in Hungarian? It's a long stumbly word, so just say "I can shake the tree" real fast and you have it.

My favorite grappa is pictured as is a super dessert wine, like a Sauterne or Barsac. We found it for our dinner with duck pate. Call it the Wine of the Kings. Or King of the Wines. Tokay.

Pictures: - I rarely get pics of myself and hate hate hate selfies. The mirrors in the hotel elevator were too tempting. Yes, I always wear my backpack. It's just easier to carry everything.

-The sculpture at the doorway on my way to the market? Just an old shoe shop. It reminds me how elegant was Budapest pre-communists.

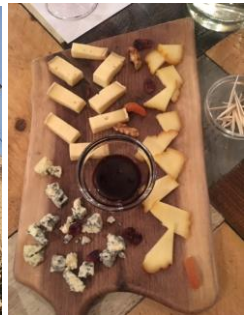
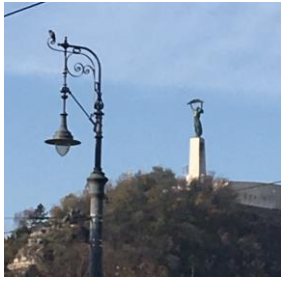
-Entering the main market entrance.

-High up on the Buda Hill across the river is their Lady Liberty. The locals call it their giant bottle opener.

-Poor little duckies. They produce so much generous and inexpensive fois gras but lose their life for it. I really like ducks. I sort of don't like fois gras.

-The End of a long day for both of us and a familiar site: Out hotel tower at night.





Tuesday November 7 - Day 19 and last full day in Budapest - and Day 20 going home.

Would you say that Tom got the King's Table by looking at his picture? It was his only breakfast opportunity out of four days. We ate lots and drank champagne. Finally able to eat after two full days of Cruise Flu, he got sufficient energy to want to walk to Hero's Square and the adjoining park with Spa, Ice Rink, and Castle - about five miles round trip.

Now a museum, huge park, world famous spa with natural hot baths, exhibition center and restaurant complex where I indulged. Food only. (In 2007 my running girlfriends talked me into the Spa). Tom had filled his shrunken stomach and was holding out for a Greek Gyro. We saw many stalls and little restaurants so guessed they would be good. Not as good as our memory from Athens so guess we need to go to Athens still again.

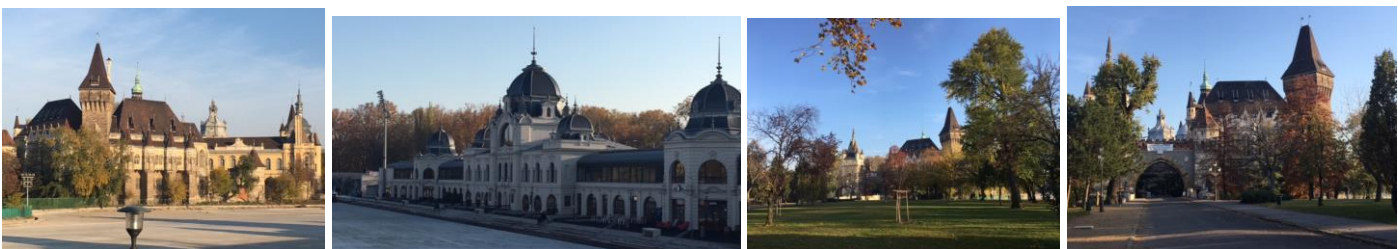
To walk back through Hero's Square with the setting sun was a treat and the final picture of the backside of the horse sculptures was fitting for out THE END to Budapest.

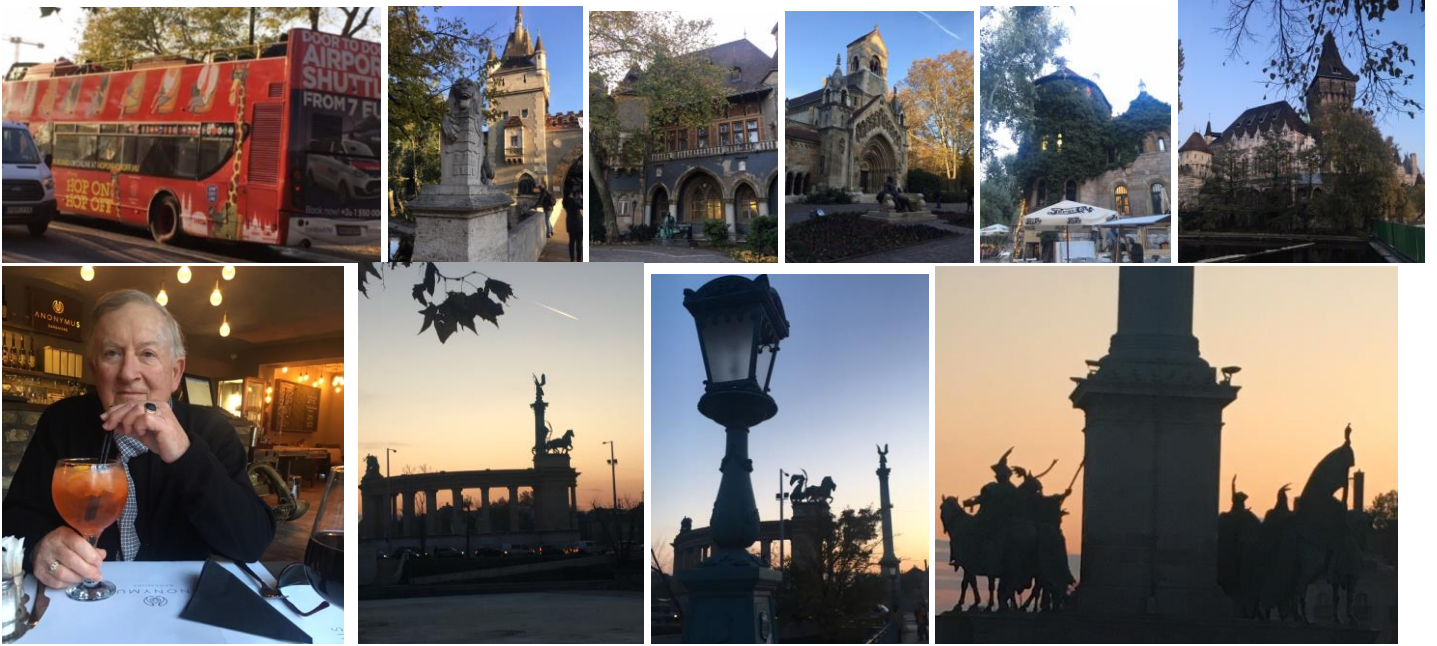
Four lengthy trips is likely enough though I'd like to see it after clean-up which every time I expect to see more. Budapest is rightly known as the Paris of the East: I'll go to Paris instead. Which I intend to do early December solo and again in February with Tom.

Another THE END when we had to get up for a 4am limo to the airport but I really didn't mind as I was ready for some home time. I'm home until mid-November when my sister Beverly arrives and we travel to Lake Placid for the National ice skating competition. After seeing Madame Butterfly at the New York Metropolitan Opera. An indulgence I only do at Beverly's request and since I have her (the singer and music major) as a guide. Well, Skating is with her as a guide too.

Pictures: - See the humorous hop on/hop off bus paint job. The missing bodies!

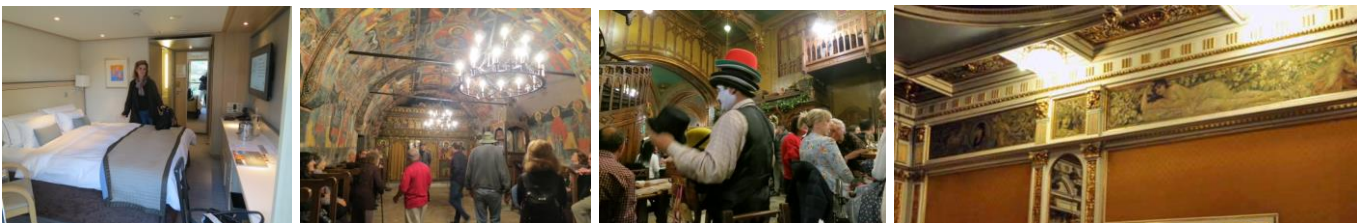
-See Tom at the King's Table (vs Throne room). Smile. - That's him with an Aperol Spritz a few hours later.





The End from Me. Appropriate to see Hero Square in the sunset and from the backside.

Now for a few added pictures from Tom's camera – look for him to do a Photo Show at www.TomsKoi.com in due course. Here are a few of his favorites:



Now we really are at The End. For this trip. Next up? Beverly arrives for our trip to Lake Placid, then early December I'm off for a solo trip to Paris, with later December Marie arrives for our yearly trip and this time to Rome and Florence. Tom and I will return to Paris and Nice in February. What more could we ask for!

Itinerary

Viking River Cruise Tour: October 25 – November 4, 2017

<https://www.vikingrivercruises.com/cruise-destinations/europe/passage-eastern-europe/2017-bucharest-budapest/index.html>

Passage to Eastern Europe - Bucharest to Budapest
11 Days | 7 Guided Tours | 5 Countries #4538250

See Bucharest's 3,000-room Palace of Parliament. Make banitsa bread with a home cook in Vidin. Explore Belgrade's Ottoman and European treasures, including 6th-century Kalemegdan Fortress. View the Danube's towering Iron Gate. Visit a Croatian family's Osijek home. Witness Hungary's daredevil Puszta horsemen. Behold Budapest's grandeur. Once hidden behind the Iron Curtain, the eastern Danube still has secrets to reveal on our 11-day cruise tour from Bucharest to Budapest.



Fri Oct 20 – Day 1

6:30pm Depart Newark EWR via UA#134

Sat Oct 21 – Day 2

8:30am Arrive Zurich for plane change (3 ½ hours connection time) – visit Duty Free

12:05pm Depart Zurich ZRH via Swiss International Airlines #LX1884

3:20pm Arrive Bucharest OTP

Car: By hotel and confirm in file.

Hotel Sheraton Bucharest Hotel – 4 nights on own in exec suite
Then 1 night with tour (confirmed to stay in same room for 5th night)
Calea Dorobantilor 5-7, Bucharest 010551 RO Tele: (40) (21) 2015000
Yes coffee, yes lounge access

Sun Oct 22 – Day 3

8:00am Day trip to Dracula's Castle and Pele's Royal Palace – 12 hours for 2

Mon Oct 23 – Day 4

2:30pm Overview of Bucharest

Tues Oct 24 – Day 5

10:30am Food Tour: Bohemian Bucharest Markets and Mahallas Small Group Food Walking Tour with a Local Guide. Booked and paid for 2 people.

https://www.tripadvisor.com/AttractionProductDetail-g294458-d11803789-Bohemian_Bucharest_Markets_and_Mahallas_Small_Group_Food_Walking_Tour_with_a_Local_Guide-Bucharest.html

Departure Point: On the stairs of the National Theatre in front of the main entrance

Overview: From the heart of the city to the tastes of the country, this tour takes you on a historical, architectural, and culinary adventure through the many faces (and tastes) of Bucharest! Journey deep

into the neighbourhoods of La Belle Époque Bucharest, while sampling the traditional peasant foods that define Romanian cuisine.

What to Expect: Your Bucharest tour begins in University Square. Absorb all that sociopolitical history before taking a short walk to Strada Batistei, formerly known as the 'St Germain' of Bucharest and the site of the old American embassy, now an overgrown testament to different times. Our first stop will be an exquisite turn-of-the-century townhouse, lovingly restored but with the sense of elegant decay so typical of Bucharest. Under trees and vines, with grapes dangling overhead, you'll sample a selection of Romanian entrees (gustari), including goat cheese, cured meat, spring onions, homemade bread, and locally brewed craft beers, and you can relax and absorb the atmosphere of this recherché little hideaway.

To help us digest all those treats, we'll then make our way to the Armenian quarter. The Armenians were a vibrant and successful merchant community in the 18th and 19th centuries, thanks to their valuable role as 'middlemen' for the Ottomans. Based around the Armenian church, their mahalla (neighbourhood) features a spectacular variety of architectural styles from all over Europe and the Ottoman empire, as the wealthy merchants strove to out-do each other in taste and elegance. Classical, Belle Époque, Modernist, New-Romanian, Balkanic, eclectic — this quarter boasts all these styles, including the oldest documented house in Bucharest, which you will visit.

Crossing into the old Jewish quarter, we'll then stop for the most famous street-food, covrigi, before heading on further on our Bucharest tour to discover one of the most beautiful and peaceful areas of the city: Mantuleasa.

After exploring 19th-century and inter-war Bucharest, we'll stop for an ice-cold Romanian weissbier, in a space that can only be described as art-gallery-meets-bookstore-meets-summer garden, before experiencing the quintessential Bucharest public transport: a short ride on a tram. Rattling along the famous Mosilor Street, you'll enter into Communist Bucharest, with its regimented blocks and housing projects, as you make your way to the famous Obor Market.

Since you'll be on the trail of the sights, scents, and tastes of Romanian cuisine, we'll stop for a drink of traditional Romanian palinca (brandy) to prepare the palate. Next, we'll enter the indoor market to sample a range of Romanian cheeses: cow, sheep, and goat. After that, it's on to the vegetable market, amid a riot of colours and textures, to taste and photograph the fresh local produce.

Probably the most famous and typical of Romanian foods — at least for Romanians — is called mici, which translates as 'little.' A kind of skinless sausage, these are served with mustard and cold beer, and here you will get to try them for yourself! And finally, because your gastronomic adventure would not be complete without a dessert, we'll grab a sweet Wallachian doughnut, served piping hot, before sending you happily on your way home.

Return Details: Saint George Square/ Unirea Square

Wed Oct 25 – Day 6

9:00am Monastery and Palaces – 4 hours for 1 - pending

More?

Bucharest bookstore is noted to be “the most beautiful in the world”.

Bucharest: 9 reasons to see Romania's capital <http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/16/travel/9-reasons-to-visit-bucharest-romania-capital/index.html>

Bucharest: <https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g294458-Activities-Bucharest.html>

Bucharest sites: <http://romaniatourism.com/bucharest.html>

At Ceausescu's Villa, Focus Is on Décor, Not Dictatorship - The New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/07/world/europe/romania-bucharet-ceausescu-villa.html?action=click&contentCollection=Travel&module=RelatedCoverage&ion=EndOfArticle&pgtype=article>

York Times - https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/24/travel/romania-europe-bargain-family-travel.html?emc=edit_tl_20170825&nl=travel-dispatch&nl_art=&nlid=22982744&ref=headline&te=1

Wed Oct 25 – Day 6 and Day 1 of tour — Bucharest, Romania

(Group) Arrive at the Bucharest airport and transfer to the Sheraton in the heart of the city for a 1-night stay.* Spend the rest of the day relaxing, or do some exploring on your own.

Bucharest is Romania's cultural capital. Its original fortress, the first of many, was built to protect the Walachian state from the Turks. Today, it is a city of elegant French-style boulevards, lush gardens and green expanses, including the tranquil Bucharest Botanical Garden. The historic Lipscani district exudes the old-world charms of cobblestone alleys, inns and shops. One of its more interesting churches is the monastery where Prince Vlad is said to have been buried, nestled on an island in the lake. The sprawling Palace of the Parliament is the world's largest civilian building, said to contain 3,000 rooms.

Hotel Sheraton Bucharest Hotel – 1 night with tour – our 5th night
Calea Dorobantilor 5-7, Bucharest 010551 RO Tele: (40) (21) 2015000
Coffee yes

Thu Oct 26 – Day 7 and Day 2 of tour — Bucharest, Romania

After breakfast, check out of your hotel and take a morning tour of the city. See the city's wide boulevards, the Romanian Athenaeum, the Arch of Triumph and the Palace of Parliament. Visit the outdoor Muzeul Satului, otherwise known as the Village Museum, where authentic dwellings from all regions of the country have been relocated and reassembled, including rural cottages, farmhouses and water mills. During lunch at a local restaurant, enjoy a lively folkloric performance that recalls the simple pleasures of rural life. You then proceed to Giurgiu to board your ship and enjoy a welcome dinner. (B, L, D)

? AM ? Booked for 2: Bucharest City and Village Museum Tour for 7 ½ hours - Easy. *From Modest Rural Dwellings to the World's Largest Building. Explore Romania's fascinating capital, an impressive collection of unique architecture and grand monuments. Founded in the 14th century, Bucharest became Romania's capital in 1859 with the merging of Moldavia and Wallachia. See the city's wide boulevards, the Romanian Athenaeum, the Arch of Triumph and other highlights. Ceaușescu's expansive Palace of Parliament is the largest civilian building in the world, with 3,000 rooms and 24-carat gold ceilings. Visit the outdoor Muzeul Satului, otherwise known as the Village Museum, where authentic dwellings from all regions of the country have been relocated and reassembled, including rural cottages, farmhouses and water mills. During lunch at a local restaurant, enjoy a lively folkloric performance that recalls the simple pleasures of rural life.*

Veranda Stateroom #333 on Viking Lif accessible at approximately 3pm; earlier okay with light buffet available in Lounge around mid-day. Ship: +49 152 225 38 090 or Viking.lif@vikingcruises.com

Fri Oct 27 – Day 8 and Day 3 of tour — Veliko Tarnovo, Russe, Bulgaria

After breakfast, disembark at Russe for a full-day excursion to Bulgaria's former capital, Veliko Tarnovo. There you will see Tsaravets Hill and the ruins of the royal castle. During free time, shop for local crafts along Samovodska Charshia. Continue your venture to Arbanasi for lunch in a local restaurant and a guided tour of the Nativity Church with its intricate floor-to-ceiling murals and icons. Return to your ship for dinner. (B, L, D)

The most integral Danube city in Bulgaria, Russe enjoys a setting amidst rolling countryside blanketed in sunflower and wheat fields. Once an outpost of the Roman Empire, it was known as Sexaginta Prista, or "Sixty Ships," for the fleet that once docked here. Today, it is more known for its colorful atmosphere and as a gateway to Romania's fabled Transylvania region. Perhaps its most imposing feature is the 7,300-foot Danube Bridge spanning the river. In 1866, the Ottoman Empire's first railway was inaugurated here. It is the longest span over the river and the only link between Bulgaria and Romania.

? AM ? Tour Booked for 2 - Easy: Witness True Bulgarian Character - Veliko Tarnovo & Arbanasi Shore Excursion for 8 ½ hours. *Tour two cultural gems rich in Bulgarian heritage during this full-day excursion into the heart of the country. You will begin with a drive through Russe. Then continue to Veliko Tarnovo, a fascinating medieval town built around Tsarevets Hill and its hilltop royal castle. After a coffee break overlooking the Old Town, stop at the Yantra River Bridge for a nice view of the majestic Assenev Brothers monument, a towering obelisk flanked by horses. Next, explore Samovodska Charshia, a traditional street teeming with handicrafts, or visit the castle ruins and enjoy vistas of the Old Town and countryside. Afterward, proceed to Arbanasi, rich in history and Greek influence. After lunch at a local restaurant, sample the Damascus Rose products, locally made from the essence of roses. After, you will visit a local merchant house and see the intricate frescoes of the Nativity Church with a local guide.*

Sat Oct 28 – Day 9 and Day 4 of tour — Vidin, Bulgaria

Arrive in the picturesque Bulgarian port of Vidin, and take an excursion to see Belogradchik Fortress, built right into the striking Belogradchik Rocks. See the fortress's amazing construction, begun in Roman times and greatly extended by Bulgarian tsars and the Ottomans, and enjoy breathtaking views. Enjoy lunch aboard your ship; then you have free time to explore Vidin's city center, Orthodox churches and the ruins of the city's once-grand synagogue. We depart during dinner. (B, L, D)

One of Bulgaria's oldest riverside towns, Vidin is home to the only entirely preserved medieval Bulgarian castle. It perches impressively on the riverbank as you approach. Because of its striking pose, thick ring walls, stout towers and solid gates, the fortress is known as Babini Vidini Kuli, which means Granny Vida's Towers. Around the castle rose a fairy-tale town of 25 minarets, many domes and other charming architecture of the period. Though many of these features have been shadowed by today's city, Vidin retains its charms. Today it is largely an agricultural and trade center renowned for its wines.

? AM ? Booked for 2 – Not Easy – Check with Guide and Tom: Belogradchik Rocks & Fortress Excursion for 4 hours. **Spectacular Rock Formations and the Defensive Structure They Helped Shape** - *Journey into one of the most scenic regions of Bulgaria for a unique glimpse of how geography helped create an architectural treasure. Join your guide for a drive from Vidin to the Belogradchik Rocks. With their strange, red-hued cliffs and massifs, these breathtaking mountains strike a dramatic pose. The result of millennia of weathering, river erosion, freezing, and countless other factors, these formations are more than Bulgaria's great natural wonder. They are also a curiosity for the multitude of fantastic figures and profiles that emerge when you catch them at just the right angle. Silhouettes of people, towers, ships, mushrooms, palaces and animals populate the cliffs. You will also see the fascinating Belogradchik Fortress, built by Ottoman conquerors in a maze of rock columns and pillars. You will have time to walk around the compound and enjoy superior views of the caves and rock shapes from its many terraced courtyards.*

Optional and NOT booked: Easy - Vidin Home-Hosted Cooking Demonstration for 3 ½ hours at \$49. Not booked. See how everyday Bulgarians live; learn how to prepare the nation's beloved banitsa, and how the diet here helps some locals live to 100 years. Drive with your guide to a home near Vidin, where your gracious hosts greet you with freshly baked traditional round bread. Relax, get comfortable and look around the house and garden. Then, head to the kitchen to see how Bulgaria's banitsa is prepared, and try preparing it for yourself. This phyllo pastry, a central part of family celebrations, may be prepared with spinach, cheese, grated pumpkin or whatever ingredient is on hand. Often, the baker inserts a lucky charm into the dough before cooking so it can be discovered with much surprise later.

Sun Oct 29 – Day 10 and Day 5 of tour— Scenic Cruising: The Iron Gate, Serbia

The Iron Gate is one of Europe's most dramatic natural wonders, a spectacular narrow gorge with enormous white limestone cliffs.

Today, sail through one of Europe's most dramatic natural wonders, the picturesque stretch famously known as the Iron Gate. As you cruise through these spectacular narrow gorges that slice through the Carpathian Mountains to the north and the Balkan Mountains to the south, marvel at the towering white limestone cliffs draped with forest. Be on the lookout for ancient remains as you gaze upon the dramatic walls. On the Bulgarian side, Trajan's Tablet was laid to mark the construction of a Roman military road; on the Romanian side, marvel at the enormous rock sculpture of Dacian King Decebalus.

Your Cruise Director will provide commentary about the region and scenic points of interest as you sail toward the next port. (B, L, D)

No touring.

Mon Oct 30 – Day 11 and Day 6 of tour — Belgrade, Serbia

Wake up in Belgrade, capital of Serbia. Take a guided walk through the grounds of Kalemegdan Fortress, now a stately park; also see the Orthodox cathedral and stop at the Square of the Republic. Enjoy lunch aboard your ship before you have free time to explore Belgrade's gracious architecture or visit one of its many museums, like the Nikola Tesla Museum. Dine aboard your ship or experience some of Belgrade's nightlife. We depart very late this evening. (B, L, D)

The former capital of the state of Yugoslavia, and today's Serbian capital, Belgrade is one of the oldest cities in Europe. Its location at the confluence of the Sava and Danube Rivers and at the intersection of Eastern and Western Europe has long made it a contested region. Throughout its history, the "White City," as its Serbian name translates, has been destroyed and rebuilt 20 times. Fortunately, the wide-reaching citadel remains, housing the Kalemegdan Fortress, Orthodox churches, Turkish baths and green parkland. Its Cathedral of St. Sava is one of the largest Orthodox buildings in the world.

? AM ? Booked for 2: Panoramic Belgrade City Tour for 4 hours – Easy – Tour the “White City” at the Scenic Confluence of Two Rivers. *See Belgrade's many fine monuments and architectural splendor during this enlightening tour of Europe's most resilient city. The Serbian capital of Belgrade overlooks the confluence of the Danube and Sava Rivers. Ravaged and rebuilt 20 times in its history, many of the city's finest buildings have been gloriously restored. Begin with a guided walk around the famed Kalemegdan Fortress. Its stalwart walls loom over the Old Town; impressive medieval gates enclose Orthodox churches, Turkish baths, a soaring monument to “The Victor” and more. You will also enjoy a stroll in the park around the fortress, taking in the picturesque vistas of the river. Later, witness some of modern-day Belgrade during a short panoramic drive. Stop in the Square of the Republic to admire the statue of Prince Michael. You will have free time here in the adjacent pedestrian shopping area to browse the stores before returning to your ship.*

? PM ? – Optional and booked for Diana only: Behind the Scenes at the Serbian Opera for 2 hours at \$39. Moderate. Get an Insider's Glimpse of a National Institution. *Join us on a small-group excursion for a behind-the-scenes tour of Serbia's treasured National Theater, home of Serbian opera. In 1868, Prince Michael invited the founder of the Novi Sad Serbian National Theater to open another performance center in Belgrade. Serbians have flocked here to celebrate their culture and tradition ever since. The theater's original design mirrored the Teatro alla Scala opera house in Milan. Today, as it overlooks Republic Square like royalty, Belgrade's National Theater houses three artistic ensembles (of opera, drama and ballet) under its roof, with more than 600 performances per year. So dedicated are its musicians, legend says that they have even held daily performances during air raids. A short drive delivers you to its doors, and you will take a guided tour behind the scenes. After, you will enjoy an exclusive performance of six breathtaking arias and visit the theater's museum while sipping sparkling wine.*

Tue Oct 31 – Day 12 and Day 7 of tour — Osijek, Croatia

Cruise along the Danube, arriving at Vukovar around noon. Disembark for an afternoon excursion to the charming Croatian city of Osijek. Inhabited since Neolithic times, this area has had several

heydays under the Romans, the Ottomans and the Hapsburgs; now Vukovar is revered for its baroque buildings, parks and monuments. Return aboard for dinner. (B, L, D)

The fourth largest city in Croatia, Osijek is located near the confluence of the Drava and Danube Rivers. It is the largest city and the economic and cultural capital of the eastern Croatian region of Slavonia. In its early days, Osijek was a Roman settlement called Mursa Maior ("major"). It was later rebuilt by the Ottomans and ruled by the Hapsburg Empire. Today, with an abundance of farmland and game, as well as plentiful baroque architecture and musical and outdoor venues, Osijek has become a gastronomic and cultural center of Croatia. Its cathedral can host 3,000 people.

? AM ? – Optional and booked for Diana only: Croatian Countryside & Wine Tasting in the morning for 3 ½ hours at \$79. Not Easy. Croatian Castles and Fine Vintages. *Discover the rich and varied history of Northern Croatia and sample some of its delicious wines. Since Roman times, this region of the country has been coveted, thanks to its strategic location on the Danube. During this enlightening excursion, you will drive with your guide to one of the area's renowned museums, a castle with fascinating medieval origins, where you will browse a rich and revealing collection of artifacts dating back centuries. As you tour the castle chambers and halls, Croatia's past comes alive in priceless relics that have survived the ages. You will also turn to the fruits of the earth when you descend into a wine cellar in the historic town of Ilok. In these dim corridors, you will taste two white wines and one red and experience for yourself why its prized grapes and hearty vintages have helped put Croatia on every oenophile's map.*

? PM ?– Booked for 2: Osijek & Vukovar Excursion in afternoon for 4 ½ hours Tour Two Major Croatian Cities and Visit a Local Family. Easy. *See the highlights of Vukovar and Osijek, and stop to meet a Croatian family along the way. You will meet your guide and make the short drive to Vukovar, passing the Vuka River, the palace of the former Count Eltz and the city's main street, lined with buildings that carry echoes of Northern Europe. As you arrive in Osijek, you will pause to visit a local family in their home and learn about their daily lives. After, continue to the Osijek Citadel complex for a walking tour. Enjoy a concert in the Rising of the Holy Cross Church. Then explore Holy Trinity Square, see the town's only surviving gate and stroll the picturesque promenade along the Drava River. See more of the town by coach, passing green parks and driving along European Avenue, the most scenic street in Osijek, lined with elegant baroque and Belle Epoque buildings.*

Wed Nov 1 – Day 13 and Day 8 of tour — Kalocsa, Hungary

Sail into Hungary this morning, arriving in Kalocsa after lunch. Take a guided city tour followed by a short organ concert at St. Joseph Church. Then, you are treated to a performance of traditional Puszta horsemanship. Return to the ship and enjoy a festive final dinner aboard as we depart for Budapest. (B, L, D)

Once the seat of the archbishop, the cultural center of Kalocsa is more than 1,000 years old. The quaint town, surrounded by 8,000 acres of farmland growing fiery red peppers, is brimming with traditional Hungarian culture and steeped in the piquant flavors of paprika, the "red gold" that has been giving local goulash its distinctive taste for centuries. The world's first Paprika Museum chronicles the spice's history. The streets are adorned with bright murals of floral motifs, which create a cheery ambiance as you browse craft-filled shops. Hungary's artistic heritage takes center stage at the House of Folk Arts museum.

? PM ? Booked for 2: Kalocsa & Puszta Excursion for 3 ½ hours in the afternoon. Easy. Hungary's Capital of Paprika and Equestrian Arts. Visit one of Hungary's major cultural centers and attend a breathtaking display of traditional horsemanship. Depart your ship for a short drive to the city of Kalocsa, where a rich history is flavored by the town's renowned peppery paprika. In Holy Trinity Square, you will see the splendid cathedral and admire the Archbishop's Palace. After a short organ concert at St. Joseph Church, continue to the Bakodpuszta Equestrian Center. The people of the Hungarian Puszta region have long relied on the horse for transport, settlement and defending their land. Many locals worry that their country's equestrian connection is being lost to a motorized world, so they hold fast to rural ways and to their four-legged comrades, elevating horsemanship to an art form. You'll witness the sometimes acrobatic culmination of this long-cherished relationship during a thrilling show.

Thu Nov 2 – Day 14 and Day 9 of tour— Budapest, Hungary

Disembark after breakfast and take a tour of Budapest. Begin in Pest, where you see the National Opera House and visit historic Heroes' Square. Cross the Chain Bridge to Buda, where you walk along Castle Hill to Fishermen's Bastion and Matthias Church. Check in to the deluxe Budapest Hilton (or similar) for a 2-night stay, then take the rest of the day to sightsee on your own. Explore a museum, do some shopping or relax in one of the Art Nouveau spas. (B) **Lunch and Dinner on own.**

Riverside beauty, a vibrant cultural scene and echoes of late 19th-century architecture and romance blend together in Budapest to form one of Europe's most rewarding cities. Hungary's enchanting capital straddles the banks of the Danube, with traditional hillside Buda on one side and modern Pest on the other. By day, astounding Art Nouveau buildings, stalwart castles and glittering palaces set the stage for awe-inspiring strolls and long soaks in thermal spas. By night, a nostalgic glow settles in as the city's lights dance on Danube waters, the Chain Bridge uniting it all as a dramatic centerpiece.

? AM ? – Booked for 2: Panoramic Budapest City Shore Tour for 4 hours in the morning. Moderate. Hungary's Graceful and Inspiring Capital. *Take in one of Europe's great cultural capitals. Over the last few decades, Budapest has reemerged as one of the continent's iconic cities, divided by the lilted Danube and connected by the graceful Chain Bridge. Meet your guide at your ship for a panoramic tour, beginning in modern Pest. Along the elegant Andrassy Avenue, the Champs-Élysées of Budapest, admire the Hungarian State Opera House. Stop at Heroes' Square, a wide-open plaza of monuments and statues commemorating the Magyar state. Across the river, explore the more traditional Buda side of the city. Here you will visit the Castle District with its massive hilltop castle complex, the turreted Fishermen's Bastion and Matthias Church, named for the country's most popular medieval king. From the heights of Buda Hill, enjoy fantastic views of the famous Chain Bridge, the first span to ever connect the two halves of the city when it opened in 1849.*

Hotel Hilton Budapest City – 2 nights with tour – upgrade agreed and in file
Vaci ut 1-3, Budapest, 1062, Hungary Tele: +36-1-288-5500
info.budapestcity@hilton.com www.budapest-city.hilton.com
Coffee not in room (This is NOT my prior Hilton on the Buda Hill.)
Upgrade includes Executive Lounge.

See Roof Garden and Sky Terrace

Fri Nov 3 – Day 15 and Day 10 of tour — Budapest, Hungary

Take a full day to explore Budapest **on your own**. Ride the city's innovative, efficient metro; walk through the City Park or along the Pest embankment for views of the Buda Castle District; explore the Buda Castle Labyrinth; visit the Jewish Quarter and tour the beautifully restored Dohány Street Synagogue. (B) **Lunch and Dinner on own**

Optional but with a conflict so NOT booked: *Szentendre & the Margit Kovács Museum for 4 hours in the morning at \$59 per person. Stroll the delightful streets of Szentendre, a colorful village of galleries and artists, and pay a visit to one of its renowned museums commemorating one of the town's beloved. With cobblestone streets, pastel facades and a red-roofed townscape, Szentendre overflows with charm. In the 1500s, the Hungarian-Serbian community laid the foundations of what we see here today; at one time, eight Serbian Orthodox churches served this rural hamlet. The town holds fast to its roots. And today, it is home to a thriving artists' community, embodied in the richly hued houses and decorated storefronts. Journey here with your guide and amble along the narrow, picturesque streets, pausing to browse inviting galleries that display the work of local artists. You will also visit the Margit Kovács Museum; this artist's early 20th-century ceramics and other sculptures won her international accolades as they captured a rich tableau of past times in the Hungarian countryside.*

? AM ? – Optional and booked for 2: A Taste of Budapest for 5 hours in the morning at \$89 per person. Paid \$178. Moderate. A Hungarian Sampler. *Get a flavor for Hungary's most renowned government building and for the nation's hearty cuisine. Transfer with your guide to the Budapest Parliament building, Hungary's largest building. As the nation's business goes on around you, you will enjoy a guided tour of select public rooms. Next, walk to Szabadság Square, or Liberty Square, stopping to view the monuments to Imre Nagy and Ronald Reagan and the Art Nouveau treasures that surround this*

public space. You will also see the US Embassy and the decorative Postal Savings Bank. Continue to the Hold Street Market (Szimpla Market on Sundays) to browse colorful produce and fresh meats shipped from local farms. Taste some pogácsa, or salty scones, and hearty sausages. After time to browse this lively cornucopia, walk to Urban Betyár Restaurant for a cup of goulash soup. Finish your tasting tour with a delicious strudel and hear the story of this beloved sweet treat.

Sat Nov 4 - Day 16 and Day 11 of tour — Budapest, Hungary

After breakfast, (group) check out of your hotel and proceed to the airport for your return flight. (B)
End of tour – move to new hotel

Hotel Boscolo Budapest, (ex-New York Palace) Autograph Collection – 4 nights junior suite
Erzsebet korut 9-11 Budapest 1073 Hungary Tele: +36-1-8866111
<http://budapest.boscolohotels.com/>
Conf#93175312 – form in file
Yes coffee; mini bar with fee, yes continental breakfast and yes lounge IF there is one



Sun Nov 5 – Day 17

Tours needed. Check old trip files as to what we wish to return to see

Mon Nov 6 – Day 18

Tours needed.

Tue Nov 7 – Day 19

Tours needed.

Wed Nov 8 – Day 20

6:20am Depart Budapest BUD via Lufthansa #__ also UA#9143 to Newark

7:15am Arrive Munich MUC for plane change

9:20am Depart Munich MUC via UA#31

12:50pm Arrive Newark EWR

Optional cruise ship fees: Gratuity suggested at \$15 per day per person ie \$30 or 30 Euros per day

2 Euro per guest per day for Program Tour Director

12 Euro per guest per day for ship's staff which is distributed

2 Euro per guest per trip for local guides

1 Euro per guest for drivers

Restaurants (most) include service in prices but customary to round up generously for good service.

On board, free teas and specialty coffee anytime, free house wines, beers and soft drinks with meals.

Booked cruise with Lorne 888 663 8454 x8524 ref#4538250
Category A Veranda (no suites left) room 333 – on wait list for suites

Paid to Viking for optional tours:

1 Opera for D at \$39

1 Croatia wine for D at \$79

2 Taste of Budapest for T & D at \$178

Budapest: <http://www.rivercruiseadvisor.com/2016/07/vikings-passage-eastern-europe-budapest-hungary/>

Emergency:

U.S. Embassy Bucharest

4-6, Dr. Liviu Librescu Blvd., District 1, Bucharest

015118 Romania Tele: (+40) 21 200-3300

U.S. Embassy Budapest

Szabadság tér 12, H-1054 Budapest, Hungary

Tele: (36-1) 475-4400

Emergency Assistance

Emergency Assistance Plus Program – 24/7

United Mileage Plus member #0186014 (card in file and D's wallet)

Tele: 866 816 2073 or 60 328 1752 collect