



**Prague to Berlin Elbe Cruise+ Trip Notes**  
**March 13-30, 2019**

**Summary/headlines**

- A cruise with Viking River Cruise - Prague to Berlin.
- Opportunity to spend four extra days in Prague for my third visit. (Tom and me in 2005 for biking to Vienna and me in 2007 with my runner girlfriends).
- Opportunity to spend three extra days in Berlin for both of us though separate but second times. (Me in 2011 for the marathon and Tom in the early 60s when he lived in France).
- Cruising with Viking means docking every day and having one to two guided tours.
- It was a lazy two weeks with a lot of naps and very little exercise. We are getting used to this, having cruised last month and last November and last June, etc. etc.
- We double-spoiled ourselves with first class flight and one of only two suites on the ship.

**River cruise versus ocean cruise:**

- 90 to 120 passengers on River Cruise versus 920 on ocean.
- More optional and more variety of tours available on ocean.
- Meals on the river cruises are generally communal tables though we were offered a private dining room. Meals on ocean cruises give selections of three main dining rooms plus snack areas.
- We meet more people on River cruises. Yet we have learned it's like summer camp that you bond and you think you are best friends and then you never contact each other again.
- Room accommodations on river cruises are considerably smaller even for the suites. On ocean cruises they are larger and especially comfortable even for the junior suites. (Equate the best cabin on the river to the middle choice accommodation on ocean). All are especially well thought out, workable, classy, and full of pleasant surprises.
- Motion sickness never happens on river cruises but I feel a little iffy the first day on ocean cruises.
- Overall - We have not decided which is our preference. We have just booked two additional ocean cruises simply because of the destination offerings but would look toward more river cruises.



**Upcoming cruise bookings for 2020:**

“**Viking Homelands**” is a long ocean cruise from Stockholm to Bergen. It includes Tallinn Estonia, Gdansk Poland, Copenhagen Denmark, Helsinki, two days in St. Petersburg, Bergen, then we added the famous train ride to Oslo and a few days stay.

“**Jewels of the Mediterranean**” will give us three days on our own in Venice (where we have been countless times) and then go down the coast to Istria to Koper Slovenia, Zadar and Dubrovnik Croatia, Kotar Montenegro, Corfu then Olympia Greece, Santorini, an included tour every day, finishing in Athens for 2 days and where we will spend an additional 4 days. (We were last in Athens and the islands in the 70s and I was there in 2010 for the 2500th anniversary of Philippides run from Marathon to Athens).

**The Viking Norway disaster** happened while we were on board this river cruise. The big issue open in my mind is “why did they sail” into the severe weather. Here is the current thinking as I write:

Viking Sky cruise: U.S. residents tell what happened to them in Norway

<https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/2019/03/30/asheville-residents-aboard-viking-sky-cruise-accident-norway/3309291002>

Our trip before last was on the Sea to the Caribbean:

<https://www.travelingwithmj.com/life-onboard-viking-sea/>

This is the same Viking ship that recently was in a big storm and in the news. We booked for this similar “Homeland” cruise to Norway and Scandinavia and the fjords for May 2020.

### **In Prague- first two days.**

Why would we go to Prague again? You will never hear us say “we’ve already been there” because if a place is good, it’s good enough to go again. We are trying to remember but we know that we were here for a few days in 2005 before the start of a bicycle trip to Vienna. In 2007 or 2008, I made good on my promise to runner friends to take them to Prague despite their expecting it to be Prague Kentucky or Prague Virginia. (That’s a whole story in itself).

With an opportunity to do a river cruise with Viking on the Elbe River, which would start in Prague and end in Berlin, we realized both of those cities needed to be seen again. It will be six days in Prague and five days in Berlin with the cruise in between.

Here, from Viking cruises but in reverse order:

### **Highlights of the Elbe River**

The once divisive Elbe River is today a symbol of unity. Along this scenic river, East Germany became free, and cities that once lay in rubble now stand tall. With much of this breathtaking river unaltered by mankind, it is a truly inspirational waterway. Here are some sample highlights you will see with Viking:

- Berlin’s ultra-modern, forward-thinking architecture
- Rococo splendor of Potsdam
- The incredibly preserved medieval city of Prague
- Dresden’s baroque wonders, risen from wartime ashes
- The natural beauty of the Elbe Biosphere Reserve
- Saxon’s Switzerland’s monoliths of natural rock formations
- Wittenberg, birthplace of the Protestant Reformation
- Meissen’s famed porcelain factory

Discover Berlin’s modern chic, Potsdam’s rococo whimsy and Prague’s Gothic exuberance. Walk in Martin Luther’s footsteps in Wittenberg, birthplace of the Protestant Reformation. Admire delicate Meissen porcelain. Celebrate Dresden, a phoenix risen from the ashes of war. View Saxon Switzerland’s monoliths. See the Elbe Biosphere Reserve. The Elbe is one of Europe’s most unspoiled rivers and it awaits you—from Berlin to Prague—on our 10-day cruisetour. End.

We assume this cruise is really going to work but realize that it wasn’t but a few months ago that there was not enough water in the river and the cruises were all canceled. Now that we are in Prague and it is raining I have to wonder if there could be too much water. Smile.

Getting to Prague was fairly easy but we sure are spoiled when there are direct flights. This took us through Brussels for a connection and my pedometer suggested at least 3 miles were walked and Tom believes it was more like 10. European airports are more exercise than any in the US (even more so if you first go to the wrong gate) and I’m pleased that near-84 year old Tom has never asked for a handicappers-ride or early boarding.

Our Prague hotel was lucky in more ways than one. We were pretty tuckered out on arrival but the room was ready before noon. And the room was hugely more than I expected, but as typical, it was exactly what Tom expected. (It's not bad to have an optimist and pessimist together.)

Day one was cold, rainy, and extremely windy causing us to wonder if we had enough clothing. Day two even had some blue sky and the rains didn't come until we needed a nap anyway. By our dinner hour we got soaked.

Did we eat any good food? Hold your hat. Our first full meal was Mongolian barbecue, can you believe? We made up for it on the second day indulging in Czech region specialties to include an oomph-pa band but more importantly the Czech goulash, schnitzel, red cabbage and one of about a hundred beers. The hotel breakfast is nearly the best we've seen and should hold us for the day. But it didn't.

Speaking of indulging: we tried Becherovka - pronounced like bek a rov ka – it's a local medicine type liquor. If you like grappa or eau d'vie, you might like this too. At one time it WAS a medicine. We tried it in a little café near to the Charles Bridge but unknown to tourists. It was at a monastery and they made a similar one that we also tasted. Maybe that just proves that I'll taste anything.

With the help of the hotel concierge we hired a private guide and felt lucky to get Wendy who has 20-years of experience. Some of what we saw we remembered. Some was new and worthy of a repeat. She knew what we'd see with Viking in a few days so gave us some sweet surprises. Famous cafes included. Damn but coffees in some cafes cost nearly the same as our dinners. But we happily indulge.

The tourists are like a bee hive. Like ant hills. Like termites swarming. Like I'm half happy the Asians have taken over if not surpassed the Ugly American syndrome. We readily gave up the Charles Bridge Walk for the selfie sticks and poking umbrellas. We've walked that bridge plenty of times in the past minus Asians - thank heavens.

English is not only spoken everywhere, its clear American, not British, and accent free. Since the end of communist rule in 1989, schools teach English from age 6.

As Tom would say, and who can disagree, life is good.



The Art Deco Imperial Hotel. Pictures from the web.

Even an added half bath, heated marble floors, champagne with fruit basket, and Nespresso coffee maker. What more could one want.



A common snack somewhat like a hollow cinnamon donut. In the summer their traveling carts were all over the pedestrian bridge.



From 1400s and rather amazing all it can tell. We watched the 11am show. Lots of wedding parties. This couple from Russia taking pictures under the astronomical clock. At the monastery's cafe for coffees, pastries and the medicine tasting liquor.



### **Days 3 and 4 in the City of 100 Spires**

Prague - The Czech City of 100 Spires.

[www.hotelpraguecity.com/fotky/okoli/100v.html](http://www.hotelpraguecity.com/fotky/okoli/100v.html) - Prague is a well known city because of its Gothic style Cathedral of Saint Vitus, the Tyn Cathedral, also known as Church of our Lady, and all of the beautiful towers, spires, and churches. Prague is the capital of the Czech Republic. The city has about 1,200,300 inhabitants, and it covers an area of almost 500 square kilometers.

### **Check out the Czech spelling - plus more:**

[https://wikitravel.org/en/Czech\\_Republic](https://wikitravel.org/en/Czech_Republic)

Town center is largely from the 1400s and only a small swath was bombed in World War II and that was Allies accidental bombing intended for Dresden.

Costs seem quite reasonable: Our lovely large suite, with some negotiation, was under \$300 a night. It is pretty close to city Center and included a lush breakfast. Dinners, including a drink each, have been in the \$50 range. Be careful however as the Czech folks are insulted when reminded their prices are low. They equate that to cheap or low standards.

The Czech people do seem kind, well-educated and especially customer oriented. They've come a long way since their Velvet Revolution in 1989. They are said to be anywhere from 70-90 percent atheist, that was suggested religion didn't help, but they do believe in a higher-being. Thus the churches are primarily retained for concerts. The streets are totally clean with rubbish continually collected by the little orange men with their push cart wagon and broom.

Jet lag hit us both harder than usual. Is it due to getting older or just lazier? The usual four o'clock syndrome stays alive and well.

We've had two walking tours and a bus tour and did a lot of what French call window-licking. On our first trip we did some outside Prague visits such as the famous Kresky Kumlov. Here are more options: **Day trips** from Prague

<https://www.thecrazytourist.com/15-best-day-trips-prague/>

Coming up - another day tour for both of us then a palace tour, concert and meal for me.



In the hotel elevator with walls of mirrors.

Puppets and puppet shows are big fun here



Rows of old touring cars and a beer cycle all go together here.

A restaurant "fresco" - no it's not a Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire style hat. The meal wasn't worth mentioning.

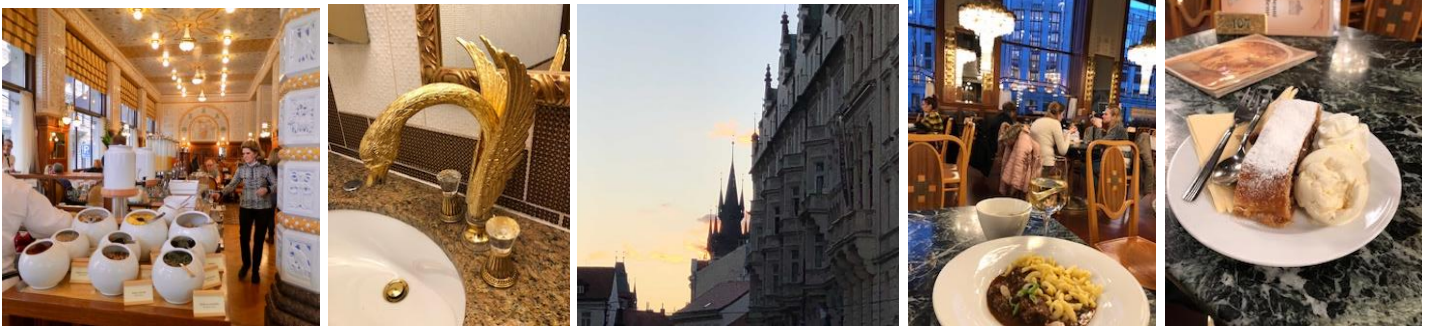
On the Charles Bridge with palace in the background.

On the Palace side. There are hordes of people and it's not even tourist season.



Wenceslas Square with the National Museum in the background. It was here they communism ended for the Czechs.

We guess this to be a common bachelor party. There were a half dozen tuxedos.



Breakfast at our Art Deco Imperial Hotel.

Bathroom fixtures at the hotel.

Gorgeous Art Deco cafe in The Municipal House complete with piano player and followed by streusel for guess who.

On that, good night.

### ***Goodbye Prague - Hello Ship***

We moved from a suite in the glorious Art Deco Imperial Hotel to a plain room in the largest of two Hilton's for the first of 2 nights with Viking. It is the one where presidents stay, the largest in Prague, built during communist days, continually updated, but nothing much to headline. Fortunately we had arranged ahead for an upgrade to a deluxe room and one of the remodeled rooms yet it still was just okay. Here's part of their sales pitch:

*Hilton Prague: Across the highway from the Vltava river, this relaxed hotel in a modern building is 16 km from Václav Havel Airport Prague, 3 km from the Gothic buildings around Old Town Square, and 2 km from the shops along Pařížská. Down-to-earth rooms feature flat-screen TVs and Wi-Fi (fee), plus tea and coffeemakers, and mini-fridges. There's a cafe, a rooftop lounge and an international restaurant with a terrace. Other amenities include a spa and a gym, plus an indoor pool and a hot tub.*

Review of Hilton which I might or might not publish: A hotel with plenty of potential but we encountered "no" far too often. While they did have their rights, they were not customer oriented. Despite my being a gold elite member and consuming a bottle of water that was listed in my room for gold members, I was charged for it. I wasn't able to get an upgrade, a late check out, or any gold perks. They claimed it was because Viking made my reservation - despite my having arranged and paid for an upgrade. Upon check out they refused my Czech cash saying that my credit card had been on file - no matter that the credit card had not gone through yet. I certainly felt a Rodney Dangerfield syndrome. They did not care. What ever happened to "The Customer is Right?"

So I spent my remaining Czech cash on two bottles of booze and left the excess with the young pregnant cashier.

**Day 1 of Tour** - From [www.VikingCruises.com](http://www.VikingCruises.com)

.... join our “welcome walk” to stretch your legs and get oriented.

Destination Information - Few cities embody the past as authentically as Prague, the Czech Republic's atmospheric capital on the Vltava River that clings to its history with unwavering passion. Prague's medieval architecture is its most prominent, but the city is also a rich repository of Romanesque, baroque and Art Nouveau buildings that stir the imagination. The main square in the heart of the Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, may be the most dramatic gathering of centuries-old structures, including the still-functioning Astronomical Clock, ticking since 1410. The city's graceful, pedestrian-only Charles Bridge leads to Hradcany Castle and its rich complex of royal buildings.

**Day 2 of Tour:** This morning, tour the “City of a Hundred Spires.” A guided walk takes you through Old Town to the famed Charles Bridge. Then, travel to Hradčany for a guided tour inside Prague Castle and St. Vitus Cathedral. Enjoy the rest of the day at leisure; you can see the Town Hall's intricate 15th-century astronomical clock and spend some time in historic Wenceslas Square. You also have the opportunity today to join an optional tour to Lobkovicz Palace.

Panoramic Prague –Step back in time in Prague, an incredible tapestry of medieval brilliance remarkably preserved. Visit the Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its main square was a major crossroads on 12th-century trade routes, and so it was the focal point of the city's early development. Today, it is a repository of Romanesque, baroque and Gothic splendor. Among the buildings you will see are the Týn Church and the 15th-century Astronomical Clock, which comes alive every hour with its “Walk of the Apostles.” Continue to Prague Castle. Within this massive complex, visit the Gothic St. Vitus Cathedral where the good St. Wenceslas is entombed behind polished emeralds and stones. You will also see the grand castle itself, residence of the Czech president and the powerful seat of Bohemian kings and Holy Roman emperors of old.

PM - Privileged Access: Lobkovicz Palace –for Diana only - See the stately residence of one of the region's most avid patrons of the arts, and admire the priceless artifacts they left behind. The 400-year Lobkovicz family history is rich with tales of political and military leadership, inlaid with the art of great masters and bejeweled with musical masterpieces. As you tour their resplendent palace with an audio guide narrated by members of the Lobkovicz family, you will be regaled with intimate family stories, including the loss of the palace to both the Nazis and the Communists and its recent restitution to the family. Mingle with royalty as you survey grand portraits, weaponry, tableware and personal love letters from the Lobkovicz family archives. As a special treat, you can trace Mozart's red-inked annotations to Handel's Messiah and study Beethoven's Fourth and Fifth Symphony manuscripts. Your visit includes an elegant lunch in the Lobkovicz family's original living quarters and a private concert in the baroque concert hall.

End

**Day 3 of Tour**

From Viking: Enjoy your final morning in Prague at leisure, or join an optional excursion to discover the city's rich Jewish heritage in the Josefov Quarter. This afternoon, continue to Děčín to embark your ship.

AM – Jewish Prague – NOT booked - but most interesting so included here. Tom did this tour once in 2005. Diana also plus in 2007 so we slept in and had a leisurely breakfast.

From Viking: Immerse yourself in the Josefov, or Jewish Quarter, of Prague during an enlightening walking tour. Jews are thought to have settled in the city as early as the 10th century. Today, the small district lies within the larger Old Town and is a rich repository of history. With your guide, you will visit the Maisel Synagogue museum, built during the 16th-century Golden Age of the Jewish Ghetto, and the Pinkas Synagogue, a memorial to Holocaust victims. Peruse the historic Old Jewish Cemetery, the largest of its kind on the continent, before continuing to the elegant, baroque Klaus Synagogue and the neo-Renaissance Ceremonial Hall. Marvel at the Moorish styles of the Spanish Synagogue and the Gothic exterior of the Old New Synagogue, the oldest active synagogue in Europe.

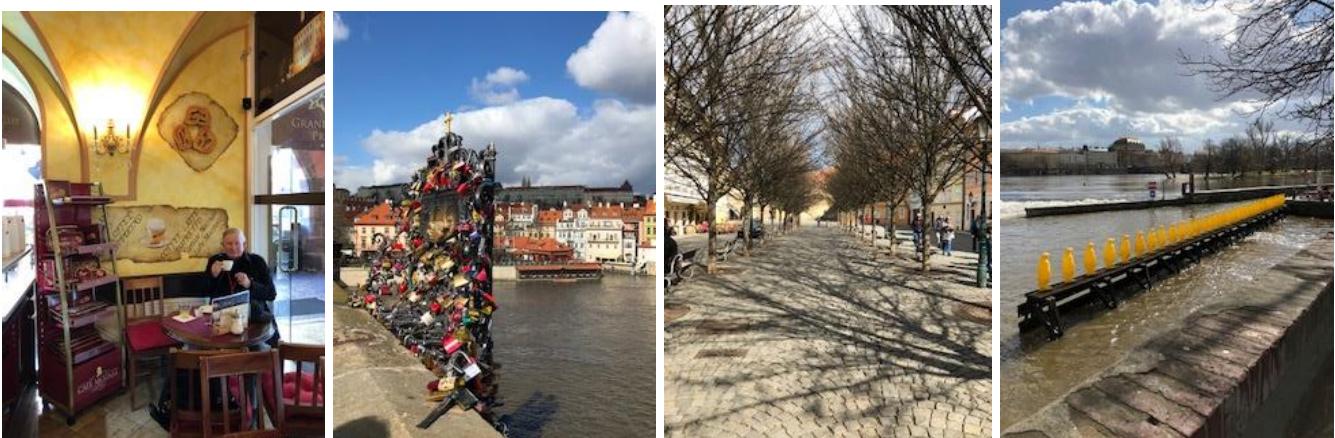
Lunch on ship mid-day.



The Hilton hotel is the largest in Prague and where presidents stay. The night scene was dramatic in their huge central courtyard.

Part of our walking tour through the Jewish quarter.

Back in Central Square of old town before a stop in café Mozart for a little coffee and grappa.



On the Charles Bridge here is their solution to the love locks. Locks are even sold in the red heart shape.

An island between old town and the palace quarter.

Many of the cruise boats have to go through this lock system which is lined with yellow penguins. I've no idea why or why we all lined up to take the picture.





Up high on Palace hill with a glorious view of the river are a series of villas. The largest stadium in Europe is said to be largely useless as it is too large. And old and run down.



We have seen the changing of the guard but did not this time. This is at the Palace which is still used.

St Vitus is huge and full of stained glass. The sun was shining perfectly to give many walls a glow. Our private concert in the palace that remains privately owned after many generations. They served us a three course lunch complete with wine. This palace only opened to the public in 2007 after many organizations assisted in the rehab of previously confiscated art and treasures. Twice confiscated - by Nazis and communists.



Our private concert in the palace that remains privately owned after many generations. They served us a three course lunch complete with wine. This palace only opened to the public in 2007 after many organizations assisted in the rehab of previously confiscated art and treasures. Twice confiscated - by Nazis and communists.

Original notes by Mozart as well as a number of priceless mementos in their music room.

Next - off to the Elbe River cruise. For some fly-over type views of cities. Not the best way to go, but here we are.

### ***The Viking ship Beyla***

Built about three years ago as a Baby Longship able to negotiate the Elbe River. There are two twin ships holding about 90 people each.

Do we like river boats or the smallish ocean vessels? There are pluses and minuses to each but we lean towards river boats, while we miss the larger staterooms of the ocean vessels.

We would do more river but some destinations require ocean. We paid for "Viking Homelands" Stockholm to Bergen for May 2020 and ready to pay for Venice to Athens (includes Santorini) for April 2020. Why so far out in the calendar? Closer dates are sold out plus our calendar is full through 2019 and big chunks of 2020.



Safety First. Everyone required to participate.



Cruising in the sunshine. I do like the water flowing by. We've had cold, wind and rain. We've had sunshine and 65°.

We have one of two suites but it's still very small. Last two pictures from the web.

### ***Hello Viking River Boat - Thru Day 4***

A 90-minute drive from the hotel to the Elbe River going Westerly and then North into a mountain range before we came to our ship. We have had four Prague days on our own and then two days in a hotel with Viking.

Viking doesn't leave us un-entertained for long and sure enough there was a history lesson on board the bus. Typical communist stories of cruelty and deaths though unfortunately given in painful-to-hear English. One kind gentleman suggested to the guide that she had a melodious voice but that adjusting her microphone for more treble would be helpful. (This is not intended as a complaint but trying to be honest that not everything is glorious.)

We did learn about a lot of famous people from the Czech Republic such as Martina the tennis star and Ivana Trump. The Czech people seem to be pretty courageous: during Nazi time they had a number of paratroopers drop down in country who finally managed the assassination of the second most powerful after Hitler.

I had wondered about these ugly architectural monstrosities and sure enough they were from the 70s and 80s as communist housing. The locals call them rabbit hutches because they are not only small but also very low ceilings.

We decided this was likely some of the same area we bicycled in 2005 with our Prague to Vienna bicycle trip. Similar in that we noticed leaving commercial and modern civilization to find more simplicity, more farmlands. Then we got into mountains, cliffs, forests and little villages growing wine and finally to the ugly port towns full of industry and apparently high unemployment not to mention pollution.

**Later day 3** to cruise ship (commentary by Viking):

Destination Information - Located at the confluence of the Elbe and Ploučnice Rivers, the Czech town of Děčín enjoys a pastoral setting amid green hills. The 13th-century King Ottokar II of Bohemia invited northern neighbors to settle here, forever giving the town a German flair. Though the 1945 Potsdam Agreement expelled postwar Germans, Děčín embraces its rich heritage in many of its architectural treasures, including its namesake castle, grandly overlooking the Elbe, and the 1906 buttercream- and azure-colored synagogue, the only surviving structure of its kind in the former Sudetenland. Děčín's elegant beauty was inspiration for Polish composer Frédéric Chopin.

**Day 4 of Tour**

Saxon Switzerland, Germany, i.e., Bad Schandau, Germany

After breakfast, dock at the spa town of Bad Schandau. From here we make our way to the famous rock tower known as the Bastei (bastion), formed by water a million years ago, to enjoy stunning panoramic views of the Elbe. Return on board for lunch and afternoon cruising through the magnificent, soaring rock formations of the Saxon Switzerland region.

Tour The Bastei – Natural World - See the graceful path of the Elbe from the most dramatic lookout point. Journey with your guide to the breathtaking Bastei. These towering rocks soar above the river like jagged teeth and offer sweeping vistas from the footbridge that connects them. These massive walls once formed a natural defense around the adjacent rock castle of Neurathen, hence their name Bastei, meaning "Bastion." The bridge that you will cross to reach the castle's remains was originally built of wood in 1824 and was replaced with a sandstone structure just 27 years later. It spans 250 feet and boasts seven arches. Throughout your visit, you will see evidence of Germany's pride on the grounds of this natural wonder: rock tablets commemorate the first mention of Bastei by a travel writer in 1797, the first landscape photographs taken in 1853 and the first pioneers of tourism who introduced the world to this wondrous sight.

Destination Information - One of the oldest and most important spa resorts in Saxon Switzerland, this beautiful resort city among lush hills and deep gorges has retained much of the splendor and charm of bygone ages. After iron-rich springs were discovered here in the mid-18th century, hotels and spa houses soon dotted the landscape. In 1920, the town (then Schandau) was awarded the right to use the prefix "Bad," meaning "Spa." For refugees and emigrants during World War II, this was a place of hope. Many were helped to safety by climbers who knew secret passes through the mountains and out of Germany.

Scenic Cruising on the Elbe River – One of Central Europe's most important waterways, the Elbe River traverses much of Germany and has long provided an inland trade route to Prague. As you cruise, you will admire an extraordinarily beautiful landscape, with stunning views of lush forests, rolling hills blanketed with vineyards and dramatic mountains that have hardly changed in centuries. The remarkably natural course of the river, unaltered by human technology, means you will see wetlands and woodlands virtually untouched, and wholly protected as a biosphere reserve. From wetlands to woodlands, you may see hundreds of bird species such as storks, cranes and red and black kites.

Scenic Cruising: Saxon Switzerland – Cruise through magnificent, soaring rock formations of Saxon

Switzerland. This spectacular region earned its name from two Swiss painters who were reminded of their home while visiting. You will witness some of the wildest cliff formations imaginable, with nicknames such as Catapult, Locomotive and Wolf's Ravine. Cruising past these chalk sandstone monoliths is sure to be a highlight of your cruise. As you pass, marvel at the fact that these mountains were quarried to build some of Germany's grand buildings. From the ship, you will also gaze up at the Bastei, a 1,000-foot spectacle of tooth-like rocks connected by a footbridge.

Miscellaneous: Buford - a local hobby of sleeping overnight under a rock overhang.

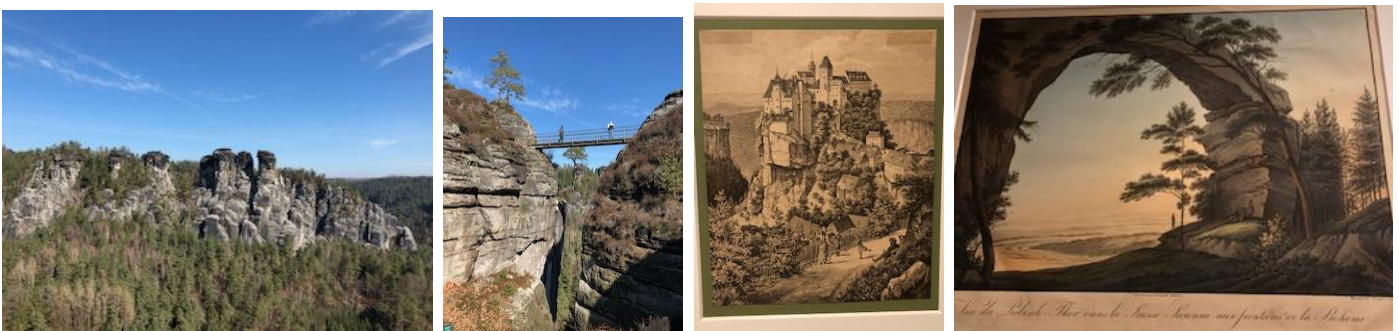


Very high water level whereas last year one could walk across the River - ruining the river boat business.

Really wonderful food choices.



Lots of rock climbers but the monk on the top of the mountain is a sculpture.



A museum of the artist paintings shown against the current photo. A most unusual park.



A German Saxon feast. Complete with music entertainment.



Next up: Dresden

***Dresden - a MUST!***

Dresden - now and Dresden certainly again and as soon as possible.

**Day 5 of Tour**

Dresden, Germany - After breakfast, disembark in Dresden, nicknamed "Florence on the Elbe." Drive through the 19th-century residential area to the Dresden Castle complex; enter the Green Vault to see a comprehensive collection that houses what many claim is the world's largest collection of treasures, including priceless jewels and emeralds. Continue on foot to see Zwinger Palace, Semper Opera House and the Frauenkirche (Cathedral of Our Lady) with its distinctive bell-shaped dome that survived World War II bombings but collapsed the following day. Later, it was rebuilt. Alternatively, enjoy more of Dresden on our optional tour with visits to Dresden's baroque castles, sweeping wine estate and opulent palace, once home to royal and lavish banquets.

Dinner is served on board your ship; after, feel free to enjoy Dresden's many charms and attractions as we remain docked until early morning.

Tour - Panoramic Dresden – Witness the breathtaking baroque beauty of Dresden by motor coach and by foot, gloriously revived after 50 years of restoration. Begin with a panoramic drive to the Neustadt district on the right bank of the Elbe to admire beautiful 19th-century residences and cultural institutions. Then, visit the Grünes Gewölbe, the Green Vault museum that houses what many claim is the largest collection of treasures in the world, including priceless jewels and emeralds. Afterward, take a stroll among splendid architectural wonders. Marvel at the magnificent Semper Opera House, with its several stories gracefully layered like a wedding cake. And see the spectacular Zwinger Palace, a rococo-style complex that was once an exhibition court for royalty. Today, it houses several museums. Note for future travel: On Tuesdays, the Green Vault museum is closed; instead visit

Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister (Old Masters Picture Gallery) to view magnificent masterpieces of Raphael, Vermeer, Rubens, Rembrandt and others.

(Diana did full walking tour - no bus).

Later tour - Semper Opera House –

Enjoy a private visit to the Semper Opera House, one of Dresden's finest examples of High Renaissance architecture. A magnificent venue and one of the most prestigious opera houses in the world, it is home to the Saxon State Opera, Saxon State Orchestra and Semperoper ballet. During your tour, you will explore its opulent interiors and learn about its rich history, having hosted premier performances by some of the world's most revered composers including Wagner and Strauss. See the beautifully painted ceilings and captivating concert hall, with its tiered balconies and stunning chandelier. Learn about the many restoration projects that have taken place over centuries to return the building to its former glory. As you explore the grand halls, your guide will regale you with stories of the scandals and anecdotes surrounding some of the artists who have performed here. Following your tour, you will return to your awaiting ship.

Destination Information - Known as the "Florence on the Elbe," Dresden is awash in artistic treasures and baroque splendor. The city is blessed with water meadows and green parks near the center, giving it a wide-open feeling and making it easy to focus on the beautiful sandstone buildings that line the river. It took Dresden more than 50 years to rebuild after it was devastated during Allied bombing. Most agree it was certainly worth the wait. The city has been lovingly restored to its original glory, from the ornate Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady) and grand Semper Opera House to the shining Zwinger Palace. End

**Gotta visit Dresden. I'm going to find a way. Such the art collection!**

<https://m.dw.com/en/10-reasons-to-visit-dresden/q-38189936>

**The Green Vault - museum worth a trip**

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gr%C3%BCnes\\_Gew%C3%B6lbe](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gr%C3%BCnes_Gew%C3%B6lbe)

**Dresden guide** I'll want to hire: Codina Curth at [Dresdenguide@cosima-curth.de](mailto:Dresdenguide@cosima-curth.de)

Tel 0049-351-441-5211. [www.cosima-curth.de](http://www.cosima-curth.de).



Germany or not, the citizens of Dresden built this synagogue for their 800 Jewish residents.

After World War II, only a few walls were left standing and amazingly after 50 years they have rebuilt the city. Our guide was able to show us photographs of the rubble and explained how necessary it was if the rubble ladies stepped in to promote rebuilding. The men were largely nonexistent due to the war.

Lots of paddle boats for tourists.



A super guide I'll find again. Standing in front of the re-created opera house. This is a huge complex that goes on and on and not possible to picture it all. Augustus the Strong built many of the buildings and funded much of the art. He is said to have been pretty busy if he really did sire 360 children.



This is the center courtyard of the green vault where much more will be open after the fall of 2019. The more important part of it we did not go into and requires timed tickets. If you want to know more I included a link. It is said to be one of the largest and most important museums in the world. Who knew!



So many treasures. So little time. This huge ivory piece is mind blowing and no one knows how they made the sails or how they engraved in relief all of the kings and emperors names on the hull. Chest set with amazingly intricate marquetry on all sides and on the playing pieces. Just one example was a tiny Picture of a fly up in the corner that was not larger than a fingernail and even one leg of the fly required four different pieces.

There was a whole section of pearl art said to be the largest and most important in the world. Sometimes one huge pearl would be a body and sometimes a few pearls put together to make a figurine.



This tea set was so intricate it took a long time to understand. Gold and enamel. Lift up the top and there was a whole village of figurines inside.

This whole Village had a number of moving pieces. The scales with little teeny gold pieces, the fountain that could sprout water, on and on. I doubt that one could take it all in without spending an hour or so in front of it.

This green diamond is said to be by far the largest in the world. Around it are a few hundred diamonds with the smallest being in the 6 carat range.

Correction from my earlier email – It's a green diamond not emerald.

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dresden\\_Green\\_Diamond](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dresden_Green_Diamond)



What I really want to see would require a day and a timed ticket. It is in the original palace with all the rooms intact. Art pieces are not individually displayed like the section we saw. The picture above is just a picture of a picture. I've included a link about the green vault.

Here is our Guide. She had once been hired to explain this block long tiled old historical piece and she said she did so for two hours and could give even more information. It oddly was one of the only remaining structures that did not fall after the World War II bombing. It has the look of a tapestry and tells a story. On the opposite side of this wall was a long white columns Jostling courtyard.

I wish I had more pictures of this church. I returned but was unable to get in since it was worship time. Business was once conducted in these balconies with the thought that business would be more honest conducted in a church.

On another tour we went into the opera house. It too was mostly destroyed with only a few walls remaining. It is truly in its glory now.





It was hard not to give you even more pictures but if you are interested, I can give you access to my iCloud Photo shared drive.

Next? Meissen - home of the famous hand-made and very pricey porcelains. But not until we have another couple big meals. . . . This can't be good in the long term.

### ***Meissen and Wittenberg***

While we were river cruising, a sister ship to our last month's trip, and one we booked to Norway Homelands for next year, suffered a major problem that you probably read about, or is listed below.

### **Viking cruise ship: Inside look during the storm and rescue**

<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/travel/2019/03/25/viking-cruise-ship-inside-look-during-storm-and-rescue/3269597002/>

It wasn't exactly our next year's itinerary but pretty close. I was about to book still another cruise from Venice to Athens but decided to hold off. For safety? Maybe as much for discounts that might arise from potential ugly PR fallout.

And maybe also because the evening after Meissen I got a short term 20 hour virus that left me feeling puny.

### **Day 6 of Tour**

Meissen, Germany - This morning, arrive in Meissen and stop in at the Meissenware factory, producer of fine porcelain since the early 1700s. Discover how this trademarked porcelain is created by hand, then tour the museum. Continue on to Castle Hill for a walking tour through Old Town. Return to your ship for lunch and an afternoon departure.

Meissen Walking Tour & Porcelain Manufacturing – Visit the famous Meissen porcelain factory, where fine pieces are still made by hand despite the technology of today. En route to the factory in the nearby Triebisch Valley, you will see the Albrechtsburg Castle. Upon the introduction of porcelain by Johann Friedrich Böttger in 1709, August the Strong required that the innovator set up his factory in the imposing structure. Upon arrival at today's factory, you will see firsthand how Meissen porcelain is made from china clay and potter's earth and trademarked with the famous crossed swords. Even now, many of the lines and motifs in the pieces have their origin in the baroque and rococo styles that were popular when the "white gold" was first created. Later, you will enjoy a walking tour past the beautiful Meissen castle built in the 15th century. You will have free time in the market square to explore on your own.

Destination Information - Surrounded by idyllic wine villages and set at a rocky spur on the Elbe, Meissen dates back more than a thousand years. The city is dominated by its 13th- and 14th-century Gothic cathedrals and Albrechtsburg Castle, perched on a low hill, considered one of the great

achievements of German architecture. The introduction of porcelain here by Johann Friedrich Böttger in the early 18th century made Meissen world-famous. Meissenware has been produced here ever since. With any luck, you will hear the bells of the Gothic Church of Our Lady chime; they were the first church bells made of porcelain.

Later, arrive in Torgau with its remarkable Renaissance houses. Walking tour of Torgau. Ship remains docked overnight.

Torgau, Germany - Situated on the Elbe, Torgau played a key role in the Protestant Reformation. In the 16th century, the city was a hotbed of Protestant activity, resulting in the founding of the Torgauer Bund (Association of Torgau) in 1525, a refuge for Protestants. The first purpose-built Protestant church as built here. The city's fortified Hartenfels Castle, the most important early Renaissance palace in Germany, dominated the city and the riverbank, framed by the spires of St. Mary's Church behind. The most famous residents of the castle, three brown bears, are kept in the dry moat according to a centuries-old tradition.

### **Day 7 of Tour**

I totally missed Wittenberg for being completely incapacitated, and also missed by Tom who decided I needed a caretaker. Shown here for the record and because I'm wanting to return to neighboring Dresden.

Wittenberg, Germany - Follow in Martin Luther's footsteps to view many of Wittenberg's historic landmarks. Tour inside Luther's House and St. Marien's Church, where he preached. See the Castle Church where Luther posted his "95 Theses"; then enjoy free time. Return to your ship for dinner and a leisurely evening. Your ship remains docked overnight.

PM - Wittenberg Walking Tour – Stroll in the footsteps of Martin Luther, founder of the Protestant Reformation, during a walking tour of his city. Wittenberg's history centers around the courageous actions and teachings of Martin Luther, the Augustinian monk who nailed his "95 Theses" to the door of All Saints' Church, the palace's revered Castle Church. Walk with your guide to this late Gothic gem, which today hosts a Lutheran congregation. Luther preached here, and you will see the "Theses Doors" to which he attached the message that changed the world. After, continue to the Luther House Museum. The famous theologian lived here between 1508 and 1546, and the museum has preserved many of his manuscripts, printed books and paintings from the period. Stroll through his sitting room and his lecture room, which contains his pulpit. In the market square, you can admire the Town Hall and the statue of Luther.

Destination Information - An important center of culture and learning, Wittenberg is a quiet town known mostly as the birthplace of the Protestant Reformation. It was here that the Augustinian monk Martin Luther, in 1517, famously nailed his "95 Theses" against the selling of indulgences to the door of the palace church, launching the spread of a new religious movement throughout Germany, then all of Europe. Wittenberg's incredibly preserved Old Town was spared destruction during World War II, and so its charming houses remain as they have for centuries, with those in the market square huddled around the beloved statue of Luther. End.



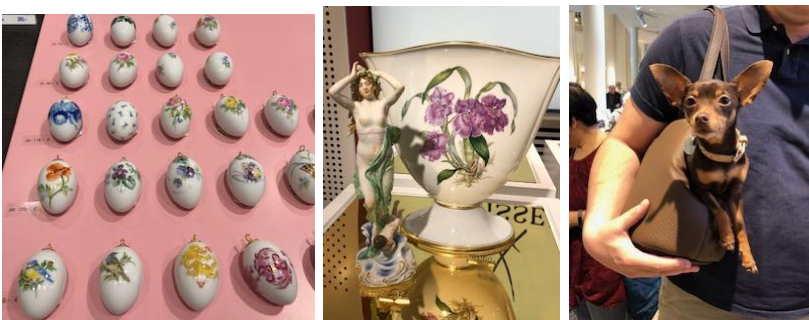
On board we were invited to watch Dresden lace making and of course options to purchase. Evenings included local entertainment and always piano but we skipped much of it. We went from room to room watching the various steps it took for this hand-made and thus pricey porcelain art being produced.



The history of Meissen copy marks. Check out your grandma's collection as there may be more value than you realize.



Yep. A porcelain organ. And the guide I'd want to hire.



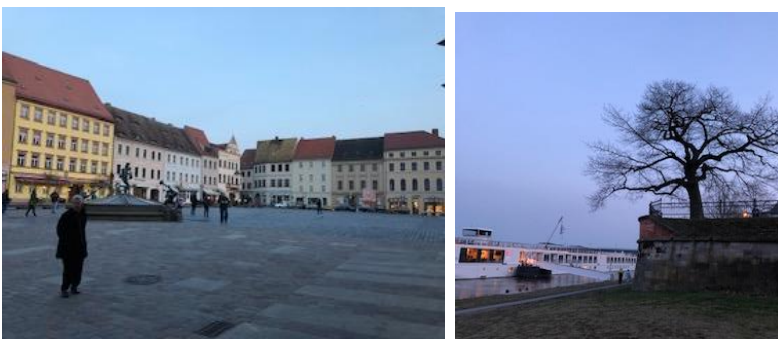
Plus 200 euros for a smaller than chicken egg size.  
Now that pooch in a pocket book is a real treasure!



One of us walked it all. One had a beer on town square.



A long past Meissen factory that proved to be too far up the hill to be profitable.  
In Torgau, a castle where Martin Luther first preached. That's a spiral staircase without a central column.



Saying good night to Torgau, off to a wonderful meal, that may have been the source of my 20 hour incapacitation. I wouldn't see the light of day at the next stop.

### Explore Berlin

Now we are in Berlin. I totally missed Wittenberg, home of Martin Luther, having had about 20 hours of a severe incapacitating virus that is now totally gone. Thank heavens it didn't happen today or we would've had a couple hour taxi ride to get me out of that area.

I'm behind in reporting but skipping Wittenberg helps. Ha ha.

I was last in Berlin in 2011 for the marathon having left Tom in the Dordogne River region where we went after the Bordeaux marathon. Tom was last in Berlin sometime in the early 60s. While we were residing and working in Belgium for SHAPE/NATO headquarters it was nearly impossible to visit Berlin due to our clearances and crossing onto THE OTHER SIDE. Here we go!

By the way, we really liked Potsdam and think a Dresden - Potsdam trip might be in our future. Yet timing is problematical due to their winters. Snow is no fun.

### **Potsdam and into Berlin**

Leaving Wittenberg - thank heavens!

Had my stomach upset been today vs yesterday, I'd have had a very expensive evacuation. The day before I couldn't take care of myself. Today all body parts worked sufficiently enough to pack and bus towards Berlin via Potsdam.

### **Day 8 of Tour**

Wittenberg, Germany

Disembark and travel to Potsdam. Tour Sanssouci Palace, a perfect example of German rococo architecture, built by Prussian king Frederick the Great in the 18th century. Built as a summer retreat, it became his personal sanctuary and place to relax in the company of his beloved dogs. Wander through the rooms of the elegant palace and stroll through the magnificent gardens. Enjoy free time and lunch on your own, then transfer to your hotel in Berlin in the afternoon.

Potsdam Walk & Sanssouci Palace – (see note below).

Marvel at one of Germany's most magnificent palaces, elegant in design and rich in history. Drive from your hotel to Potsdam, home to no fewer than 16 castles, palaces and beautifully landscaped parks. Stop to explore the summer home of Frederick the Great, the magnificent rococo palace of Sanssouci. This yellow confection and its glorious garden were built to rival the palatial Château de Versailles. Designed to his ideal of "living without a care," or sans souci, it became more than his residence for the warmer months—he retreated here in times of difficulty to relax in the company of his beloved dogs. Enjoy a guided tour of the elegant rooms and stroll through the stunning grounds and gardens. (On Mondays, you will visit the spectacular New Palace instead.) After your tour, enjoy lunch on your own before transferring to your hotel in Berlin.

I left the Sanssouci info because we are going on our own. I was there in 2011. The New Palace was just as good but in an entirely different way.

From <https://www.spsg.de/en/palaces-gardens/object/new-palace/>

The New Palace is a palace situated on the western side of the Sanssouci park in Potsdam, Germany. The building was begun in 1763, after the end of the Seven Years' War, under King Friedrich II and was completed in 1769. It is considered to be the last great Prussian Baroque palace.

By 5pm we were in the Hotel Grand Hyatt Berlin – for 2 nights with Viking – then 3 nights on our own.

*Hotel details - A 4-minute walk from concerts at the Berliner Philharmonie, this upscale hotel is a 6-minute walk from Mendelssohn-Bartholdy-Park U- Bahn station and 1.1 km from the 18th-century Brandenburg Gate. Offering city or park views, the chic rooms include free Wi-Fi and flat-screen TVs, plus minibars, and tea and coffeemakers. Upgraded rooms add access to a club lounge. Suites have kitchenettes, and upgraded suites feature pianos and conference rooms.*

*There's a cozy Italian eatery, a posh restaurant with a sushi bar, a show kitchen and a terrace, and a funky 1980's-inspired cocktail bar. There's also a gym and a spa.*

### **Day 9 of Tour**

Berlin, Germany

After breakfast, enjoy a panoramic tour of the vibrant German capital, which has seen its fair share of dramatic changes in the last century. See the Reichstag with its spectacular glass dome, the historic

Brandenburg Gate, Checkpoint Charlie and many other iconic sites. Enjoy the remainder of your day at leisure.

Tour - Panoramic Berlin - Witness Berlin's resurgence as you tour its highlights, an intriguing blend of modern sophistication and sobering reminders of the past. You will meet your guide and travel along Berlin's Unter den Linden, a lovely boulevard lined with Linden trees. Cross the Spree River over the restored Schlossbrücke, or Palace Bridge, and see the Berlin Cathedral, a breathtaking neo-Renaissance masterwork. You will also stop at the East Side Gallery, a section of the Berlin Wall where 106 paintings by international artists are on display. Continue with a drive into the older part of Berlin, past the New Synagogue, an imposing Moorish Revival structure topped with ornately gilded domes. After time to admire the many historic buildings in this part of town, stop to see the Brandenburg Gate, an entry into the city through which Napoleon once marched. Conclude your excursion at Checkpoint Charlie, once the only crossing point between East and West Berlin.

Destination Information - After a decades-long postwar rift both between Berlin and the world and within the city itself, Germany's capital has been reunified and undergone a remarkable rebirth as a center of art, culture and great architecture. It is still riding the wave of its newfound energy, and exploring its streets feels akin to browsing a newly opened museum. Risen from the ashes of war, many of its buildings that once stood for division now embrace unity. Among them, the Reichstag parliament building embodies a new transparency with its glass dome, and the city's Museum Island celebrates self-expression and creativity.



There was once a meal of ceviche in Chile that three of us business folks thought was the best we'd ever, ever eaten. I was the first to get violently ill. Then next a larger man, and next the largest man. I got local medical hell before getting on the airplane. The others, once back in the states, had to inquire what kind of medicine fixed me up.

This wonderful raw beef sure reminds me of that ceviche. I declared it to be fabulous, wished I had room for seconds, then soon collapsed. Maybe raw isn't for me?

Two days later. We are in Potsdam where war started it's end by signing of papers by Truman and Stalin. It's a Tudor style palace built by a prince who didn't want any of the other traditional palaces owned by his family.

Potsdam is a sweet little if not perfect village. Many Berliners live there. Real estate is expensive. Here is their own Brandenburger Gate.



Across from The New Palace stands two more. Built to accommodate the main palace but to house servants in one and the kitchen in another. Who wants a slum employee village nearby - smile - but they do want employees close, thus this solution. By the way, The New Palace is within the Sanssouci Park, a walk away, and built for guests. What a guest house!



Now in Berlin, you know this site. Checkpoint Charlie.  
 Berlin has more canals than Venice.  
 A short stretch of the remaining Berlin Wall retained for art work.  
 Famous. You'll hear more about this when I tell you about our food tour.



This ugly building isn't unique. There are a lot of them. And the others are mostly wild or weird glass architectural wonders.  
 Berlin has had to come back in about 70 years. Amazing all the building they've accomplished.  
 In 2011 I ran thru this Brandenburg Gate for the marathon.

**More Berlin. Including a food tour.**

Always food but this time was a guided tour and it took us to an area that I like much better than the usual downtown modern weird architectural styles of Berlin.



Damn but I lost all the pictorial commentary. Don't we love computers? This was the start of our food tour, along a canal, then into a food market. Later we'd learn about these bronze plaques installed around town in commemoration of a person lost to the Holocaust.



Remember the Wall and the political picture. Curry I restaurant had a play on it. We ate whole curry sandwiches, like a sausage but covered with a red sauce with a powdered yellow curry sprinkled on top. We rode the trolley. We saw this old street that has been saved in its original form from after the war results. It's a popular tourist spot.



After the old street that was NOT restored, we indulged in cakes at this café.



This area restored MY feelings about Berlin. It's without ugly high rises for one thing. Here is within a courtyard that we'd never have known to go into, complete with a Berlin watch maker that collectors find.





A chocolate shop of course! One of the courtyards contained this spiral staircase.



And finally, a beer hall of course. We ARE in Germany and we were with a small group. The TV tower makes for a good picture and also for a good view. We didn't always have blue sky but overall the weather was kind to us after that first day in Prague.

***The last of Berlin***

Should I return to the area it would be to stay in Potsdam about one hour drive away and closer to Dresden.

**Rick Steves Wants to Save the World, One Vacation at a Time - The New York Times**

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/03/20/magazine/rick-steves-travel-world.html>

We are doing our best.

Not so happy a subject but interesting. On our food tour I took a picture and included these little memorial brass plaques embedded in the cobblestones:

**The Holocaust memorial of 70,000 stones**

[http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20190328-the-holocaust-memorial-of-70000-stones?ocid=global\\_travel\\_rss&ocid=global\\_bccom\\_email\\_29032019\\_travel](http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20190328-the-holocaust-memorial-of-70000-stones?ocid=global_travel_rss&ocid=global_bccom_email_29032019_travel)



A lovely and unexpected mall.

A lovely memorial in design and placement but a reminder of such an ugly happening:

### Holocaust Memorial

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Holocaust](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Holocaust)

I am glad for these memorials but I understand sometimes they are criticized because they are commemorating mostly the Jewish folks. In reality it was about 17 million people who were lost of which 6 million were Jewish people.

### Holocaust memorial part 2

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memorial\\_to\\_the\\_Murdered\\_Jews\\_of\\_Europe](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memorial_to_the_Murdered_Jews_of_Europe)

Check out the criticism, realistic or fair or not, it is a reminder.



Another example of unique architecture.

**Sony Center** - [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sony\\_Center](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sony_Center)

**More on Sony Center** - <https://www.sonycenter.de/en/architecture>

This Sony center was very close to our hotel and we found a beer hall and consumed their local potato soup that includes mushroom and little pieces of sausage. I indulged in the German macaroni and cheese which would be spaetzl, a pasta, with cheese a top, baked in a skillet. Before and after picture would suggest that I'm coming home with more pounds again.



The opera house plaza.



This really isn't red bricks — it is a painted fabric covering a building that has been under renovation for far too long.



## Itinerary

### Wed Mar 13 – Day 1

7:55pm Depart Newark EWR via UA#999

### Thu Mar 14 – Day 2

8:05am Arrive Brussels BRU for plane change with 1:30 hour connect time

9:35am Depart Brussels BRU via Brussels Air #SN2809

11:00am Arrive Prague PRG, Czech Republic CZ

Transport By hotel – see confirmation in file – can pay the hotel – 990 CZK = 40 Euros

Hotel Art Deco Imperial Hotel – 4 nights  
Na Porici 15, Prague 1, Czech Republic Tele: 00 420 246 011 600  
[reservation@hotel-imperial.cz](mailto:reservation@hotel-imperial.cz) [www.hotel-imperial.cz](http://www.hotel-imperial.cz)  
Near to Republic Square; includes breakfast; yes coffee and mini bar  
In 2005, at Atlantic Hotel, Na Porici 9.

### Fri, Sat and Sun – Days 3, 4 and 5

To do: Walking tour, food tour, foie gras dinner, Opera, Black Theatre, up to Castle, night lights tour

### Mon Mar 18 – Day 6 and Day 1 of tour

Viking tour starts – taxi to start location of Hilton Prague  
9 minute walk across Wilsonova and 700 meters

Hotel Hilton Prague Hotel – 2 nights with Viking  
Pobřežní 1, 186 00 Praha 8-Rohanský ostrov, Czechia Tele: +420 (0) 224 841 111

Note that there are two Hilton's in Prague, one in old town and the other a mile out. Our hotel is on the outskirts.

Hotel details: *Across the highway from the Vltava river, this relaxed hotel in a modern building is 16 km from Václav Havel Airport Prague, 3 km from the Gothic buildings around Old Town Square, and 2 km from the shops along Pařížská. Down-to-earth rooms feature flat-screen TVs and Wi-Fi (fee), plus tea and coffeemakers, and mini-fridges. Club-level rooms offer access to a lounge serving free breakfast and snacks; suites add living rooms. Room service is available 24/7. There's a cafe, a rooftop lounge and an international restaurant with a terrace. Other amenities include a spa and a gym, plus an indoor pool and a hot tub.*

**Viking Booking** #5185922 on AA Veranda Suite #204 on Ship Beyla

### **From Viking.com - Journey to Berlin, Dresden & Prague**

Discover Berlin's modern chic, Potsdam's rococo whimsy and Prague's Gothic exuberance. Walk in Martin Luther's footsteps in Wittenberg, birthplace of the Protestant Reformation. Admire delicate Meissen porcelain. Celebrate Dresden, a phoenix risen from the ashes of war. View Saxon Switzerland's monoliths. See the Elbe Biosphere Reserve. The Elbe is one of Europe's most unspoiled rivers and it awaits you—from Berlin to Prague—on our 10-day cruise tour.

***Highlights of the Elbe River*** - The once divisive Elbe River is today a symbol of unity. Along this scenic river, East Germany became free, and cities that once lay in rubble now stand tall. With much



of this breathtaking river unaltered by mankind, it is a truly inspirational waterway. Here are some sample highlights you will see with Viking:

- Berlin's ultra-modern, forward-thinking architecture
- Rococo splendor of Potsdam
- The incredibly preserved medieval city of Prague
- Dresden's baroque wonders, risen from wartime ashes
- The natural beauty of the Elbe Biosphere Reserve
- Saxon's Switzerland's monoliths of natural rock formations
- Wittenberg, birthplace of the Protestant Reformation
- Meissen's famed porcelain factory

### **Mon Mar 18 – Day 6 and Day 1 of Tour – cont'd**

Prague, Czech Republic

Arrive in Prague, then transfer to your hotel. After check-in, enjoy free time to explore this celebrated city, or join our "welcome walk" to stretch your legs and get oriented.

Destination Information - Few cities embody the past as authentically as Prague, the Czech Republic's atmospheric capital on the Vltava River that clings to its history with unwavering passion. Prague's medieval architecture is its most prominent, but the city is also a rich repository of Romanesque, baroque and Art Nouveau buildings that stir the imagination. The main square in the heart of the Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, may be the most dramatic gathering of centuries-old structures, including the still-functioning Astronomical Clock, ticking since 1410. The city's graceful, pedestrian-only Charles Bridge leads to Hradčany Castle and its rich complex of royal buildings.

### **Tue Mar 19 – Day 7 and Day 2 of Tour**

Prague, Czech Republic

This morning, tour the "City of a Hundred Spires." A guided walk takes you through Old Town to the famed Charles Bridge. Then, travel to Hradčany for a guided tour inside Prague Castle and St. Vitus Cathedral. Enjoy the rest of the day at leisure; you can see the Town Hall's intricate 15th-century astronomical clock and spend some time in historic Wenceslas Square. You also have the opportunity today to join an optional tour to Lobkowitz Palace. (B)

AM – Included and booked for 2 - Panoramic Prague – 5 hours – **DEMANDING** - Shopping and Free Time - Sightseeing - UNESCO

Step back in time in Prague, an incredible tapestry of medieval brilliance remarkably preserved. Visit the Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its main square was a major crossroads on 12th-century trade routes, and so it was the focal point of the city's early development. Today, it is a repository of Romanesque, baroque and Gothic splendor. Among the buildings you will see are the Týn Church and the 15th-century Astronomical Clock, which comes alive every hour with its "Walk of the Apostles." Continue to Prague Castle. Within this massive complex, visit the Gothic St. Vitus Cathedral where the good St. Wenceslas is entombed behind polished emeralds and stones. You will also see the grand castle itself, residence of the Czech president and the powerful seat of Bohemian kings and Holy Roman emperors of old.

PM - Privileged Access: Lobkowitz Palace – 4 hours - Optional and booked for Diana at \$119 - EASY - Privileged Access

See the stately residence of one of the region's most avid patrons of the arts, and admire the priceless artifacts they left behind. The 400-year Lobkowitz family history is rich with tales of political and military leadership, inlaid with the art of great masters and bejeweled with musical masterpieces. As you tour their resplendent palace with an audio guide narrated by members of the Lobkowitz

family, you will be regaled with intimate family stories, including the loss of the palace to both the Nazis and the Communists and its recent restitution to the family. Mingle with royalty as you survey grand portraits, weaponry, tableware and personal love letters from the Lobkowitz family archives. As a special treat, you can trace Mozart's red-inked annotations to Handel's Messiah and study Beethoven's Fourth and Fifth Symphony manuscripts. Your visit includes an elegant lunch in the Lobkowitz family's original living quarters and a private concert in the baroque concert hall.

### **Wed Mar 20 – Day 8 and Day 3 of Tour**

Prague, Czech Republic

Enjoy your final morning in Prague at leisure, or join an optional excursion to discover the city's rich Jewish heritage in the Josefov Quarter. This afternoon, continue to Děčín to embark your ship. (B, D)

AM – Jewish Prague – 3 hours - Optional tour at \$69 each – NOT booked - MODERATE - Sightseeing

Immerse yourself in the Josefov, or Jewish Quarter, of Prague during an enlightening walking tour. Jews are thought to have settled in the city as early as the 10th century. Today, the small district lies within the larger Old Town and is a rich repository of history. With your guide, you will visit the Maisel Synagogue museum, built during the 16th-century Golden Age of the Jewish Ghetto, and the Pinkas Synagogue, a memorial to Holocaust victims. Peruse the historic Old Jewish Cemetery, the largest of its kind on the continent, before continuing to the elegant, baroque Klaus Synagogue and the neo-Renaissance Ceremonial Hall. Marvel at the Moorish styles of the Spanish Synagogue and the Gothic exterior of the Old New Synagogue, the oldest active synagogue in Europe. Note that this excursion requires the ability to navigate many stairs and that synagogues are closed to the public on Jewish holidays.

3:00pm Ship available for embarkation. Lunch available mid-day.

Destination Information - Located at the confluence of the Elbe and Ploučnice Rivers, the Czech town of Děčín enjoys a pastoral setting amid green hills. The 13th-century King Ottokar II of Bohemia invited northern neighbors to settle here, forever giving the town a German flair. Though the 1945 Potsdam Agreement expelled postwar Germans, Děčín embraces its rich heritage in many of its architectural treasures, including its namesake castle, grandly overlooking the Elbe, and the 1906 buttercream- and azure-colored synagogue, the only surviving structure of its kind in the former Sudetenland. Děčín's elegant beauty was inspiration for Polish composer Frédéric Chopin.

### **Thu Mar 21 – Day 9 and Day 4 of Tour**

Saxon Switzerland, Germany, i.e., Bad Schandau, Germany

After breakfast, dock at the spa town of Bad Schandau. From here we make our way to the famous rock tower known as the Bastei (bastion), formed by water a million years ago, to enjoy stunning panoramic views of the Elbe. Return on board for lunch and afternoon cruising through the magnificent, soaring rock formations of the Saxon Switzerland region. (B, L, D)

AM - The Bastei – included and booked for 2 – 3 ½ hours – EASY – Natural World

See the graceful path of the Elbe from the most dramatic lookout point. Journey with your guide to the breathtaking Bastei. These towering rocks soar above the river like jagged teeth and offer sweeping vistas from the footbridge that connects them. These massive walls once formed a natural defense around the adjacent rock castle of Neurathen, hence their name Bastei, meaning "Bastion." The bridge that you will cross to reach the castle's remains was originally built of wood in 1824 and was replaced with a sandstone structure just 27 years later. It spans 250 feet and boasts seven arches. Throughout your visit, you will see evidence of Germany's pride on the grounds of this natural wonder: rock tablets commemorate the first mention of Bastei by a travel writer in 1797, the first

landscape photographs taken in 1853 and the first pioneers of tourism who introduced the world to this wondrous sight.

Destination Information - One of the oldest and most important spa resorts in Saxon Switzerland, this beautiful resort city among lush hills and deep gorges has retained much of the splendor and charm of bygone ages. After iron-rich springs were discovered here in the mid-18th century, hotels and spa houses soon dotted the landscape. In 1920, the town (then Schandau) was awarded the right to use the prefix "Bad," meaning "Spa." For refugees and emigrants during World War II, this was a place of hope. Many were helped to safety by climbers who knew secret passes through the mountains and out of Germany.

Scenic Cruising on the Elbe River – One of Central Europe’s most important waterways, the Elbe River traverses much of Germany and has long provided an inland trade route to Prague. As you cruise, you will admire an extraordinarily beautiful landscape, with stunning views of lush forests, rolling hills blanketed with vineyards and dramatic mountains that have hardly changed in centuries. The remarkably natural course of the river, unaltered by human technology, means you will see wetlands and woodlands virtually untouched, and wholly protected as a biosphere reserve. From wetlands to woodlands, you may see hundreds of bird species such as storks, cranes and red and black kites.

Scenic Cruising: Saxon Switzerland – Cruise through magnificent, soaring rock formations of Saxon Switzerland. This spectacular region earned its name from two Swiss painters who were reminded of their home while visiting. You will witness some of the wildest cliff formations imaginable, with nicknames such as Catapult, Locomotive and Wolf’s Ravine. Cruising past these chalk sandstone monoliths is sure to be a highlight of your cruise. As you pass, marvel at the fact that these mountains were quarried to build some of Germany’s grand buildings. From the ship, you will also gaze up at the Bastei, a 1,000-foot spectacle of tooth-like rocks connected by a footbridge.

### **Fri Mar 22 – Day 10 and Day 5 of Tour**

Dresden, Germany

After breakfast, disembark in Dresden, nicknamed “Florence on the Elbe.” Drive through the 19th-century residential area to the Dresden Castle complex; enter the Green Vault to see a comprehensive collection that houses what many claim is the world's largest collection of treasures, including priceless jewels and emeralds. Continue on foot to see Zwinger Palace, Semper Opera House and the Frauenkirche (Cathedral of Our Lady) with its distinctive bell-shaped dome that survived World War II bombings but collapsed the following day. Later, it was rebuilt. Alternatively, enjoy more of Dresden on our optional tour with visits to Dresden’s baroque castles, sweeping wine estate and opulent palace, once home to royal and lavish banquets.

Dinner is served on board your ship; after, feel free to enjoy Dresden’s many charms and attractions as we remain docked until early morning. (B, L, D)

AM - Panoramic Dresden – Included and booked for 2 – 4 hours - **MODERATE** - Sightseeing  
Witness the breathtaking baroque beauty of Dresden by motor coach and by foot, gloriously revived after 50 years of restoration. Begin with a panoramic drive to the Neustadt district on the right bank of the Elbe to admire beautiful 19th-century residences and cultural institutions. Then, visit the Grünes Gewölbe, the Green Vault museum that houses what many claim is the largest collection of treasures in the world, including priceless jewels and emeralds. Afterward, take a stroll among splendid architectural wonders. Marvel at the magnificent Semper Opera House, with its several stories gracefully layered like a wedding cake. And see the spectacular Zwinger Palace, a rococo-style complex that was once an exhibition court for royalty. Today, it houses several museums. Note: On Tuesdays, the Green Vault museum is closed; you will instead visit Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister (Old Masters Picture Gallery) to view magnificent masterpieces of Raphael, Vermeer, Rubens, Rembrandt and others.

PM - Semper Opera House – optional and booked at \$39 Per Person for 2 – Easy  
Enjoy a private visit to the Semper Opera House, one of Dresden’s finest examples of High Renaissance architecture. A magnificent venue and one of the most prestigious opera houses in the world, it is home to the Saxon State Opera, Saxon State Orchestra and Semperoper ballet. During your tour, you will explore its opulent interiors and learn about its rich history, having hosted premier performances by some of the world’s most revered composers including Wagner and Strauss. See the beautifully painted ceilings and captivating concert hall, with its tiered balconies and stunning chandelier. Learn about the many restoration projects that have taken place over centuries to return the building to its former glory. As you explore the grand halls, your guide will regale you with stories of the scandals and anecdotes surrounding some of the artists who have performed here. Following your tour, you will return to your awaiting ship.

\*Please note: If you are in Dresden on a Tuesday, the Green Vault is closed; instead, enjoy a visit to the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister (Old Masters Picture Gallery) to view some of the world’s great masterpieces, including works by Raphael, Vermeer, Rubens and Rembrandt.

Destination Information - Known as the "Florence on the Elbe," Dresden is awash in artistic treasures and baroque splendor. The city is blessed with water meadows and green parks near the center, giving it a wide-open feeling and making it easy to focus on the beautiful sandstone buildings that line the river. It took Dresden more than 50 years to rebuild after it was devastated during Allied bombing. Most agree it was certainly worth the wait. The city has been lovingly restored to its original glory, from the ornate Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady) and grand Semper Opera House to the shining Zwinger Palace.

### **Sat Mar 23 – Day 11 and Day 6 of Tour**

Meissen, Germany

This morning, arrive in Meissen and stop in at the Meissenware factory, producer of fine porcelain since the early 1700s. Discover how this trademarked porcelain is created by hand, then tour the museum. Continue on to Castle Hill for a walking tour through Old Town. Return to your ship for lunch and an afternoon departure.

AM - Meissen Walking Tour & Porcelain Manufacturing – included and booked for 2 – 4 hours - **MODERATE** - Shopping and Free Time - Sightseeing

Visit the famous Meissen porcelain factory, where fine pieces are still made by hand despite the technology of today. En route to the factory in the nearby Triebisch Valley, you will see the Albrechtsburg Castle. Upon the introduction of porcelain by Johann Friedrich Böttger in 1709, August the Strong required that the innovator set up his factory in the imposing structure. Upon arrival at today’s factory, you will see firsthand how Meissen porcelain is made from china clay and potter’s earth and trademarked with the famous crossed swords. Even now, many of the lines and motifs in the pieces have their origin in the baroque and rococo styles that were popular when the “white gold” was first created. Later, you will enjoy a walking tour past the beautiful Meissen castle built in the 15th century. You will have free time in the market square to explore on your own.

Destination Information - Surrounded by idyllic wine villages and set at a rocky spur on the Elbe, Meissen dates back more than a thousand years. The city is dominated by its 13th- and 14th-century Gothic cathedrals and Albrechtsburg Castle, perched on a low hill, considered one of the great achievements of German architecture. The introduction of porcelain here by Johann Friedrich Böttger in the early 18th century made Meissen world-famous. Meissenware has been produced here ever since. With any luck, you will hear the bells of the Gothic Church of Our Lady chime; they were the first church bells made of porcelain.



Later, arrive in Torgau with its remarkable Renaissance houses. Your ship remains docked overnight. (B, L, D)

Torgau, Germany

Situated on the Elbe, Torgau played a key role in the Protestant Reformation. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the city was a hotbed of Protestant activity, resulting in the founding of the Torgauer Bund (Association of Torgau) in 1525, a refuge for Protestants. The first purpose-built Protestant church was built here. The city's fortified Hartenfels Castle, the most important early Renaissance palace in Germany, dominated the city and the riverbank, framed by the spires of St. Mary's Church behind. The most famous residents of the castle, three brown bears, are kept in the dry moat according to a centuries-old tradition.

### **Sun Mar 24 – Day 12 and Day 7 of Tour**

Wittenberg, Germany

Follow in Martin Luther's footsteps to view many of Wittenberg's historic landmarks. Tour inside Luther's House and St. Marien's Church, where he preached. See the Castle Church where Luther posted his "95 Theses"; then enjoy free time. Return to your ship for dinner and a leisurely evening. Your ship remains docked overnight. (B, L, D)

PM - Wittenberg Walking Tour – Included and booked for 2 – 4 hours - **MODERATE** - Shopping and Free Time - Sightseeing

Stroll in the footsteps of Martin Luther, founder of the Protestant Reformation, during a walking tour of his city. Wittenberg's history centers around the courageous actions and teachings of Martin Luther, the Augustinian monk who nailed his "95 Theses" to the door of All Saints' Church, the palace's revered Castle Church. Walk with your guide to this late Gothic gem, which today hosts a Lutheran congregation. Luther preached here, and you will see the "Theses Doors" to which he attached the message that changed the world. After, continue to the Luther House Museum. The famous theologian lived here between 1508 and 1546, and the museum has preserved many of his manuscripts, printed books and paintings from the period. Stroll through his sitting room and his lecture room, which contains his pulpit. In the market square, you can admire the Town Hall and the statue of Luther.

Destination Information - An important center of culture and learning, Wittenberg is a quiet town known mostly as the birthplace of the Protestant Reformation. It was here that the Augustinian monk Martin Luther, in 1517, famously nailed his "95 Theses" against the selling of indulgences to the door of the palace church, launching the spread of a new religious movement throughout Germany, then all of Europe. Wittenberg's incredibly preserved Old Town was spared destruction during World War II, and so its charming houses remain as they have for centuries, with those in the market square huddled around the beloved statue of Luther.

### **Mon Mar 25 – Day 13 and Day 8 of Tour**

Wittenberg, Germany

Disembark and travel to Potsdam. Tour Sanssouci Palace, a perfect example of German rococo architecture, built by Prussian king Frederick the Great in the 18th century. Built as a summer retreat, it became his personal sanctuary and place to relax in the company of his beloved dogs. Wander through the rooms of the elegant palace and stroll through the magnificent gardens. Enjoy free time and lunch on your own, then transfer to your hotel in Berlin in the afternoon. (B)

AM and PM - Potsdam Walk & Sanssouci Palace – Included and booked for 2 – 7 hours – **EASY** - Shopping and Free Time - Sightseeing - UNESCO

Marvel at one of Germany's most magnificent palaces, elegant in design and rich in history. Drive from your hotel to Potsdam, home to no fewer than 16 castles, palaces and beautifully landscaped

parks. Stop to explore the summer home of Frederick the Great, the magnificent rococo palace of Sanssouci. This yellow confection and its glorious garden were built to rival the palatial Château de Versailles. Designed to his ideal of “living without a care,” or sans souci, it became more than his residence for the warmer months—he retreated here in times of difficulty to relax in the company of his beloved dogs. Enjoy a guided tour of the elegant rooms and stroll through the stunning grounds and gardens. (On Mondays, you will visit the spectacular New Palace instead.) After your tour, enjoy lunch on your own before transferring to your hotel in Berlin.

Hotel Grand Hyatt Berlin – 1<sup>st</sup> of 2 nights with Viking – then 3 nights on own  
Marlene-Dietrich-Platz 2, Berlin, 10785 Tele: +49 30 2553 1234  
[Berlin.grand@hyatt.com](mailto:Berlin.grand@hyatt.com)

Hotel details - A 4-minute walk from concerts at the Berliner Philharmonie, this upscale hotel is a 6-minute walk from Mendelssohn-Bartholdy-Park U- Bahn station and 1.1 km from the 18th-century Brandenburg Gate. Offering city or park views, the chic rooms include free Wi-Fi and flat-screen TVs, plus minibars, and tea and coffeemakers. Upgraded rooms add access to a club lounge. Suites have kitchenettes, and upgraded suites feature pianos and conference rooms. Room service is available 24/7. There's a cozy Italian eatery, a posh restaurant with a sushi bar, a show kitchen and a terrace, and a funky 1980's-inspired cocktail bar. There's also a gym and a spa.

### **Tue Mar 26 – Day 14 and Day 9 of Tour**

Berlin, Germany

After breakfast, enjoy a panoramic tour of the vibrant German capital, which has seen its fair share of dramatic changes in the last century. See the Reichstag with its spectacular glass dome, the historic Brandenburg Gate, Checkpoint Charlie and many other iconic sites. Enjoy the remainder of your day at leisure. (B)

AM - Panoramic Berlin – 4 hours - Included and booked for 2 - **MODERATE** - Sightseeing  
Witness Berlin's resurgence as you tour its highlights, an intriguing blend of modern sophistication and sobering reminders of the past. You will meet your guide and travel along Berlin's Unter den Linden, a lovely boulevard lined with Linden trees. Cross the Spree River over the restored Schlossbrücke, or Palace Bridge, and see the Berlin Cathedral, a breathtaking neo-Renaissance masterwork. You will also stop at the East Side Gallery, a section of the Berlin Wall where 106 paintings by international artists are on display. Continue with a drive into the older part of Berlin, past the New Synagogue, an imposing Moorish Revival structure topped with ornately gilded domes. After time to admire the many historic buildings in this part of town, stop to see the Brandenburg Gate, an entry into the city through which Napoleon once marched. Conclude your excursion at Checkpoint Charlie, once the only crossing point between East and West Berlin.

Destination Information - After a decades-long postwar rift both between Berlin and the world and within the city itself, Germany's capital has been reunified and undergone a remarkable rebirth as a center of art, culture and great architecture. It is still riding the wave of its newfound energy, and exploring its streets feels akin to browsing a newly opened museum. Risen from the ashes of war, many of its buildings that once stood for division now embrace unity. Among them, the Reichstag parliament building embodies a new transparency with its glass dome, and the city's Museum Island celebrates self-expression and creativity.

Hotel Grand Hyatt Berlin – 2<sup>nd</sup> night with Viking

### **Wed Mar 27 – Day 15 and Day 10 End of Tour**

Berlin, Germany

After breakfast, check out of your hotel and proceed to the airport for your return flight. Or, extend your journey in fascinating Berlin, giving you time to see more of the city's highlights. (B)

Hotel Grand Hyatt Berlin – Added 3 nights on own  
Marlene-Dietrich Platz 2 Berlin, 10785 Germany Tele: +49 30 2553 1234

**Thu, Fri – Days 16 and 17**

To do: Sanssouci and Potsdam again? food tour, walking tour, museum quarter, night lights tour.

**Sat Mar 30 – Day 18**

9:45am Depart Berlin TXL Tegel Germany via UA#963  
2:00pm Arrive Newark EWR

**Emergency numbers:**

Viking Beyla tele: +49 152 225 38 684 or [Viking.beyla@vikingcruises.com](mailto:Viking.beyla@vikingcruises.com)

Sue Ann Martinez	732 236 7651	Has Pandora
Randy Fritts	732 671 5510	Neighbor to the west – has key
Adam Basile	732 673 2582	Helper – knows house and pond
Kathy/Gary Kestler	732 671 5311	Neighbor to the east – has key

More numbers on kitchen counter.

Signed up with travel.state.gov – for both Prague and Berlin

US Embassy Prague  
Tržiště 365/15, 118 00 Malá Strana, Czechia Tele: +420 257 022 000

US Embassy Berlin  
Pariser Platz 2, 10117 Berlin, Germany Tele: +49 30 80 3050

Emergency Assistance Plus Program – 24/7  
United Mileage Plus member #0186014 (card in file and in D's Wallet)  
Tele: 866 816 2073 or 60 328 1752 collect

**Pack**

Bar soap and wash cloth for non-American Prague hotel  
Coffee pot and supplies for shipboard

**Interesting – Helpful Links:**

Sarah Bernhardt restaurant in Prague:  
<https://www.hotel-paris.cz/cs/sarah-bernhardt-restaurant-praha/>

Why Czechs don't speak German -  
[http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20180820-why-czechs-dont-speak-german?ocid=global\\_travel\\_rss&ocid=global\\_bbccom\\_email\\_22082018\\_travel](http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20180820-why-czechs-dont-speak-german?ocid=global_travel_rss&ocid=global_bbccom_email_22082018_travel)

Saxon Switzerland – which is really Germany  
[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saxon\\_Switzerland\\_National\\_Park](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saxon_Switzerland_National_Park)

Sanssouci in Potsdam – Day trip from Berlin included with Viking  
<https://www.spsg.de/en/palaces-gardens/object/sanssouci-palace/>

Swapping a boat for a bus to explore Prague, Vienna and Budapest  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/travel/prague-vienna-and-budapest--by-road-instead-of-river/2018/11/19/d11330f2-e442-11e8-b759-3d88a5ce9e19\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/travel/prague-vienna-and-budapest--by-road-instead-of-river/2018/11/19/d11330f2-e442-11e8-b759-3d88a5ce9e19_story.html)

Scandal Around Billionaire Prime Minister Leaves Czechs in Limbo - The New York Times  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/23/world/europe/andrej-babis-czech-republic.html>

The Rhine, a Lifeline of Germany, Is Crippled by Drought - The New York Times  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/04/world/europe/rhine-drought-water-level.html>

Best of Prague: Prague 2018: Best of Prague, Czech Republic Tourism - TripAdvisor  
[www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com)

[www.LikeaLocalguide.com](http://www.LikeaLocalguide.com)

**Tourist:** 3-Day Dresden, Germany Itinerary - Jetsetting Fools  
<https://jetsettingfools.com/3-day-dresden-germany-itinerary/>

Tour Guide from Dresden that was excellent: Cosima Curth, [www.cosima-curth.de](http://www.cosima-curth.de) at [dresdenguide@cosima-curth.de](mailto:dresdenguide@cosima-curth.de) Tele: 0049 351 441 5211 Cell: -0049 179 130 24 57