

Travelogue for our cruise from Copenhagen, Denmark to St. Petersburg, Russia, and return. June, 2011

Sunday, June 12. We took a cab to the airport. When going around the curve to enter the interstate highway to the airport, the vehicle in front of us stopped in the merge lane, so our cab driver stopped. A few seconds later we were rear-ended by a young man driving the car behind us. The cab and car were both drivable, but had significant damage, and apparently no one was injured. Sometimes neck injuries show up the next day, but nothing here; yea! As a follow-up to this, the owner of the cab company (Rainbow Cab) did nothing to compensate us for this experience.

United has a "puddle jumper" company as a vendor for flights between Philadelphia and Washington, Dulles airports. On a prior cruise about 3-4 years ago, that "puddle jumper" airline was so late in getting to Dulles that we missed our international flight. To make matters worse, the airline blamed the delay on weather when there weren't any weather issues. Delta, at Dulles Airport, told us it was a crew problem. Today, we were told the plane from Dulles to Philadelphia was delayed but we would make our connection, so the gate agent refused to book us on another plane. After we waited at the gate for several hours and it was obvious that we couldn't make the connection to our international flight, the gate agent relented and changed our flight to US Air from Philadelphia to Frankfurt, and Lufthansa from Frankfurt to Copenhagen. While we were waiting at the gate, we met a woman who was also flying to Copenhagen, and was cruising on the same ship. She also had the gate agent make the same flight changes. The gate agent said that our luggage was changing flights as we were talking.

The three of us needed to hustle from one end of the Philadelphia airport to the other end. While the three of us were walking to the gate for the flight to Frankfurt, the woman (walking behind me), fainted, stiffened, and fell backwards, hitting her head on the granite floor. The impact of her head on the floor was so great that her glasses broke (without her glasses hitting the floor). The airport police came and took her to a medical room. We continued to the plane. We did not see her on the ship so we don't know her medical condition.

The flights to Frankfurt and Copenhagen went well.

Monday, June 13. We arrived in Copenhagen, Denmark, at about 9am. Neither of our checked bags made it to Copenhagen on our flight. The Star Alliance (includes Lufthansa) representative assured us the luggage would arrive, and she would have them sent to our hotel. She gave us two bags of toiletry items.

We exchanged some U.S. Dollars into Denmark Kroners, then took a train from the airport to Copenhagen's Central Station. The train station is a beautiful, clean, and a wonderful old structure. It is a hub of activity, with numerous trains coming and going.

Fortunately for us, we had reservations at a hotel only two blocks from Central Station. We checked in, left our backpacks in our room, and walked around part of the central area of Copenhagen. We also took a sight-seeing boat ride on canals. There are several cruise ships at two piers. We saw several town squares that are so typical in Europe; each has lots of space, beautiful stonework, a fountain, and people enjoying the day.

When we arrived back at the hotel in the late afternoon, our suitcases had been found and would be delivered within two hours. We were overjoyed when they arrived! This meant that we didn't need to spend the next day shopping for clothes, and we wouldn't have lost items that would have been difficult and/or expensive to replace.

We have often remarked that a person needs to be flexible if they are going to travel.

Tuesday, June 14. We took a long walk on Ostergade, one of the four streets in the Stroget pedestrian shopping area. Many people; some tourists and some locals. We saw fountains, entertainers, and mimes. While walking we met people from Canada. The couple of homeless people and couple of beggars we saw were a very small number especially considering the size of Copenhagen.

We walked to Nyhavn, a 17th century waterfront, canal and entertainment district. Nyhavn was constructed by King Christian V from 1670-73, dug by Swedish war prisoners from the Dano-Swedish War 1658–1660. Nyhavn has colorful buildings, outdoor cafes, and a canal with small boats.

The hotel doesn't have air conditioning, probably because the average high temperature during July and August is 70F. Our room faces the street on the west side, so our room is too warm most of the time. The only way to cool the room is to open the windows, so we have vehicle and people noise day and night. It reminds me of movies of New York City decades ago with brownstones with open windows admitting the noise of the city.

Wednesday, June 15. We had breakfast in the hotel. The hotel's dining area has a wide diversity of foreigners, including oriental.

After breakfast at the hotel, we walked to the train station and admired the architecture, structure, and lines and curves of the station's interior. There was a lot of people-traffic in the station, some with dogs or bikes.

We walked along Hans Christian Andersen Boulevard, across a bridge (Copenhagen is built on islands) to an old-town area. Our Savior's Church is beautiful and is a popular sight for tourists. The church has a spiral spire (with 400 steps; we didn't climb them). There is also a very ornate altar and large pipe organ.

After visiting the church, we met a college student whom we talked with about Danish society. She gave us directions to the Christiania area of this island. Christiania, also known as Freetown Christiania, is a self-proclaimed autonomous neighborhood of about 850 residents, covering 85 acres in the borough of Christianshavn (in Copenhagen). Civic authorities in Copenhagen regard Christiania as a large commune, but the area has a unique status in that it is regulated by a special law, the Christiania Law of 1989 which transfers parts of the supervision of the area from the municipality of Copenhagen to the state. There are on-going discussions with the Danish government as to its future, what laws do or do not apply, and whether or not the residents will pay taxes.

Christiania is a hippie counterculture squatter's colony of dilapidated living structures with colorful graffiti color. We saw and smelled drug use, and large signs proclaiming no cameras or pictures. We sat at a picnic table and had a lunch of sandwiches we made from the hotel's breakfast rolls, ham, and cheese.

In the early afternoon we walked back to the hotel and picked up our luggage that we had stored in a locked room. We had the hotel call a cab for taking us to our cruise ship, making certain that the driver would accept our American credit card without the European electronic chip and PIN code. The Pakistani driver joked with us that the U.S. is backwards in its credit cards because the country is so young; just a baby. Our ship left the port in the late afternoon.

Thursday, June 16. At sea. Another beautiful, cool, day. I had no idea what time it was when I awoke (7:45am) because the drapes make the room dark even though sunrise is about 4am. Today is a day sailing the Baltic Sea, on our way to Stockholm, Sweden. The Sweden Archipelago has 30,000 islands. It takes 4 ½ hours to sail through the islands to get to Stockholm. We attended port talks describing the history and sights of Stockholm and of St Petersburg, Russia.

Being on this ship is like walking through the U.N. building. Much more foreign languages being spoken than English. It reminds me of the “tower of babble”.

Friday, June 17. Sunrise was at 3:30am. Our ship took aboard a local pilot to guide us (4 hours) to Stockholm, Sweden, through the numerous thousands of islands that make up the Stockholm Archipelago. Some of the islands are very small and uninhabitable, but most have trees and many are inhabited.

Stockholm is built on 14 islands. After the ship docked, and Swedish authorities gave the ship's passengers clearance to enter Sweden, we took a Hop On - Hop Off boat a short distance to another island where we went through the Vasa Museum. The Vasa was a 17-century Swedish warship that was built against ship-builder's knowledge and plans, at the direction of the Swedish King Gustavas Adolphus. The king demanded that the ship have a second gun deck that put the center of gravity too high. Twenty minutes into the maiden voyage the sails were raised and the wind rolled the ship over, sinking the ship. The ship remained on the bottom of the sea until 1961. The ship was cleaned and restored and is now displayed in its own museum.

We then took another Hop On - Hop Off boat a short distance to Gamla Stan, or Stockholm's Old Town (on the same island as our ship is docked). Until the 1600s, all of Stockholm fit onto Gamla Stan. The narrow cobblestone streets are lined with old buildings and churches. The town square has the (large) water fountain that all distances to Stockholm are measured from. Also in that square is the Nobel Museum, where all but one of the Nobel prizes are awarded.

We then walked back to our ship. It rained lightly all day but that didn't stop us from sightseeing and walking.

Swedish law used to state that when a father died, his land would be divided among his sons. In the 1800s, the law was changed to state that his land would be divided among his sons and daughters. This, over a couple of generations, meant that there wasn't enough land to sustain life. That prompted the Swedes to go to America/Minnesota, to obtain large parcels of land.

Saturday, June 18. Sweden, in the 1700s, was the dominant power in Scandinavia, and controlled most of the land in Scandinavia. In 1809 Russia took Finland from Sweden, and in 1917 Finland gained its independence from Russia.

Today we walked around the central part of Helsinki, Finland. It's clean and prosperous. Public transportation is sleek trains, trams, and buses. I saw only a few bicycles; very different from Copenhagen and Stockholm. We saw the market square (flea market), very nice City Hall, the huge Lutheran Cathedral, the ornate Russian Orthodox Uspenski Cathedral, the Central Railway Station, and the Esplanade (Helsinki's top shopping boulevard). We saw a statue and fountain that caused a bit of an uproar when it was unveiled in about 1930. It is a nude 19-year-old woman (not the sculpture's wife) surrounded by several sea lions with their tongues hanging out. Art is in the eyes of the beholder. We also

saw several "green" displays each showing an old car partially covered with grass, and with small, old, household appliances around it.

Last night we set our clocks one hour ahead, so we are now in the same time zone as Cairo and Istanbul (I didn't think we were that far east). Tonight we set our clocks ahead again, so tomorrow, in St Petersburg, Russia, we will be in the same time zone as Baghdad, Kuwait, and Iran.

Sunday, June 19. Father's Day. St. Petersburg, Russia. Sweden owned this land, but Czar Peter the Great launched a war in 1700 to take this land. Czar Peter the Great wanted Russia to have access to the Baltic Sea, to make Russia less Asian. The city is named after his patron saint. Thousands of peasants cleared forests and drained swamps. When Russia went to war with Germany in 1914, the German-sounding name of St. Petersburg was replaced with the more Russian Petrograd. The city was renamed Leningrad after Lenin's death in 1924.

During WW II, Hitler's army surrounded Leningrad for 900 days. Over 650,000 people died from fighting or starvation. The citizens voted to restore the St. Petersburg name in 1991. The city has tens of rivers and canals.

Because it is the weekend, we are seeing visitors. The local people are in the countryside, because they want to see some green after being in the city and an apartment during the week.

Many apartments in the city are communal, with one shared bathroom and kitchen for several families.

The sunrise today is 4:40am, and sunset is 11:22pm! The Russians call this the White Night.

Day one of a two-day tour. We had a brief ride around St. Petersburg, prior to a tour of the Hermitage Museum. Cruise ship tours can enter the Hermitage at 9:00am, prior to the 10:30am opening for other tourists. The Hermitage art collection includes Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Rembrandt, Monet, Picasso, and others. The Hermitage Museum used to be the Winter Palace, which, after Peter's death, was built for Peter's daughter Czarina Elizabeth, and for Czarina Catherine II.

We toured St Isaac's Cathedral, with its large dome and many mosaics (because paintings deteriorate in this area's high humidity). After a wonderful lunch with entertainment, our next tour was a canal boat ride on several canals and the Neva River. We went beneath numerous very low bridges. An enterprising young Russian man was on the first bridge, waving to us as we came to that bridge. He then ran to the next bridge and waved to us as we came to that bridge. He continued that for all bridges. He was waiting for us and our tips, when we returned.

Czar Peter the Great had the Peter and Paul Fortress built, to guard the mouth of the Neva River, which was taken from Sweden. We toured the fortress and the Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral (in the fortress).

I have a photo of an old Russian warship that is a floating museum. This ship was built in 1900 and participated in the 1905 Russian-Japanese War. This ship was also used in the 1917 Revolution.

Monday, June 20. St. Petersburg, Russia. Day two of our tour. Czar Peter the Great had the Peterhof Summer Palace built to rival Versailles, with a 300-acre park, and fountains that function on gravity.

Czar Alexander I and his wife had four daughters, but needed a son to continue the family dynasty. Their

fifth child was a son, but he had hemophilia. Czar Alexander I and his wife were desperate to find medical help for their son, who was very ill. They heard about Rasputin, a monk who had a reputation for healing people. Rasputin was asked to heal the hemophiliac son, and Rasputin helped the hemophiliac son. Rasputin was admired by Czar Alexander I and his wife and he started having influence in the governing of Russia. This was not approved by several wealthy and influential men that were relatives of the Czar, so they secretly plotted to kill Rasputin. The poison-laced drink did not kill Rasputin, so he was shot several times and was thrown into the Neva River, hoping his body would be washed out into the Baltic Sea. It was December and Rasputin's body stayed in the icy area it was thrown into. Czar Alexander I and his wife were devastated by the death of Rasputin. It was discovered that Yusupov shot Rasputin, so Yusupov's palace and riches were taken away and Yusupov was sent to Siberia. We toured the Yusupov Palace and saw where Rasputin was poisoned.

The Church of the Spilled Blood is very ornate inside and out. It is a memorial for Czar Alexander II at the place where he was assassinated.

Tuesday, June 21. Tallinn, Estonia. We walked one mile to the Old Town portion of Tallinn. The first inhabitants were here in 3,000 BC. The Old Town actually consists of two towns with a high, very thick, wall between them. The wall, built in medieval times, was between an Estonia town and a Hanseatic trading center, remaining from when Sweden took Estonia from Germany. The town square, with the oldest town hall in northern Europe, must have seen many deaths as countries fought over this land that provides access to the Baltic Sea. Most Estonians don't like the Alexander Nevsky Russian Orthodox Cathedral, built across the street from the Estonia national parliament, because it was an attempt to flex Russian cultural muscles. The upper (Estonian) town has several view points along its outer wall. The very narrow streets are cobblestone. There are numerous outside cafes and craft vendors. Tourism has been very strong after the separation from the Soviet Union. The young Estonian females are all blue-eyed blondes; strongly Scandinavian and northern German.

Wednesday, June 22. At sea. Shore talks; reading. Sunny and 64F.

Thursday, June 23. Our port is Warnemunde, Germany. Our excursion trip to Berlin, Germany, included Checkpoint Charlie, the Brandenburg Gate, several sections of the Berlin Wall, a Russian war memorial, the book-burning memorial, the Reichstag (parliament) building, the Holocaust Memorial, Alexander Platz, Potsdamer Platz (with the Sony Tower), and a Spree River cruise.

Princess Cruises chartered two trains to take excursion passengers to and from Berlin. The train ride was three hours both ways. Our train had ten carriages (cars), each with several rooms holding five people. We sat with a couple who used to live in Freeport, Illinois. He is the brother of a wonderful engineer that I worked with at MicroSwitch. It's a small world; you don't know who you'll run into at some part of the globe.

Berlin is about 800 years old and has a population of 3.4 million people.

The Berlin Wall was up 28 years. 1,068 people were killed while trying to go from East Berlin to West Berlin; 4,500 people were successful. "With the wind to the west" is a movie about a hot-air balloon. We saw several sections of the wall that remain as a monument or memorial to that time and condition. There is a double-row of bricks making a line in the ground where the wall has been taken down. There were two walls with a no-mans land between them, with watch towers and machine guns.

On November 9, 1989, an East German official gave a broadcast speech in which he made a big mistake.

He was supposed to announce that border restrictions were in the process of being revised, but he misinterpreted the information, and instead announced that the border was immediately open to all people. Tens of thousands of East Germans who heard the broadcast went to the border gates. The sheer quantity of people stormed the gates and went through. The wall was now open and soon was taken apart by people. November 9th could not be celebrated by Germans because several bad things happened on that date, so the October, 1990 date of German reunification was chosen as the celebration date. Artists were asked to paint the sections of wall that were left standing.

The division of Berlin into four parts was supposed to be harmonious, so Checkpoint Charlie was a small temporary-style hut to demonstrate the temporary nature of the division. The two “military” men in front of the hut are Berliners trying to make money from tips for posing for photos.

The pathetic East-German-made cars had a 26HP 2-cylinder 2-cycle engine.

East Berlin had a bus that gave rides to handicapped people. The driver sat in a separate compartment, and the engine exhaust was piped into the bus interior, so all the handicapped riders would die. Handicapped people had no value in Soviet society.

The Brandenburg Gate was built in 1789 to celebrate victories of the Prussian army, and has seen the victors of several wars walking through its arches. In WW II everything around the Brandenburg Gate was destroyed, but the Gate was relatively untouched.

The Reichstag (parliament) building was burned by the Nazis, so after the war Germany kept the decorative shell of the building and built a new functional building inside the shell.

The Soviet Union built a tall television tower, with a large spherical observation deck, to dominate the sky in East Berlin. Unfortunately for the Soviet Union, when the sun is shining there is a reflection from the sphere that looks like a cross. The West Berliners call that “The Pope's Revenge”.

The Holocaust Memorial takes much of a city block. It is a pattern of granite blocks of different heights, somewhat like a cemetery. The museum is below the memorial.

All German school children are taken to see the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, which was one of the most notorious death camps and a training center for SS soldiers.

There has been a tremendous amount of building and growth in Berlin after the war, including Alexander Platz (plaza) (named after Russian Czar Alexander I) and Potsdamer Platz (with the highly noticeable architecture of the Sony Tower).

Berlin has 172 museums because many of the buildings could not be used after the war, so they were refurbished and used as museums.

The Spree River runs through Berlin, and at some places was part of the no-mans space between the two walls. We had a river cruise to see the center of Berlin from the river perspective. Berliners are so desperate for being on the beach that they sit and lie on the edge of the river.

Friday, June 24. Aarhus, Denmark. This is Denmark's second-largest city and the largest port. The oldest vaulted building (a church) in Scandinavia is here, with an estimated date of 1060. We visited the Aarhus Cathedral, finished in 1520. It is the longest and highest church in Scandinavia. Aarhus also has an Old Town, with narrow cobblestone streets and buildings dating from 1600 to 1900.

Saturday, June 25. Oslo, Norway. We took a ship excursion to see the Open-Air Folk Museum on the Bygdoy Peninsula, which has an entire village of 150 buildings collected from across Norway. We also saw the Gustav Vigeland Sculpture Park (with 192 statues containing 600 figures, all nude) and the Olympic ski jumping facilities at Holmenkollen.

Norway has the longest coastline in Europe. One in three Norwegians has a boat, usually a sailboat because it is lower cost than a power boat. Norway gets oil from the North Sea. 98% of the oil is government owned, so all of the country benefits from the oil. The resulting high standard of living creates an expensive economy; one of the most expensive in the world.

Norwegians work 9am-3pm or 9am-4pm, and have 5 weeks of vacation per year. One in three Norwegians has a cabin. There is no poverty. The unemployment rate is 1.7%. The hospitals are free. Everyone, including housewives, receives a pension. Gasoline is about \$8/gal.

We are now sailing to Copenhagen.

Sunday, June 26. We arrived in Copenhagen, Denmark, and disembarked the ship. Princess cruises arranged our air itinerary, so they brought us, with other passengers, on buses to the airport.

The trip home was uneventful. ☺