

## OUR UPCOMING TRIP

In February (2014) I wrote a piece called “Still Travelling at 86?” in which I reviewed all the places I had seen, and concluded, like Bugs Bunny, “That’s All, Folks!” Then, a month later, Fran said, “Let’s take a river cruise. It should be easy. Very little walking.” I said I would look into it. Fran suggested a trip she had heard about: Paris to the Normandy Beaches. It is the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the D-Day invasion, and lots of people are going. I looked into it and found that there were lots of such cruises, but the summer and early fall trips were sold out. (We were not going to go between September 25 and October 4, Rosh Hashanah-Yom Kippur. The Boston Workmen’s Circle calls it HI HO, High Holidays. Then we learned that to see the beaches required a lot of walking. Besides, those cruises were six or seven days. If we were going to fly to Europe, let’s give it a little more time.

Back to the Internet. After reviewing hundreds of river cruises listed by Vacations to Go, we were intrigued by one that was called “Magnificent Europe 2014 (Budapest to Amsterdam).” Or Amsterdam to Budapest. Cruise operators seem to prefer that you book through agents. In fact, Vacations to Go is really a giant agent. When Fran and I took our Alaska cruise on Regent, we found an agent who was very helpful. I called him and he made several suggestions. We finally agreed on the cruise we first identified. How the cruise operators price their cruises intriguing. They set an exorbitant starting or price, and then slowly come down. This is separate from the highest price when most people want to go. They also discount the price to get people to book in advance, if you had previously sailed with them, or just before sailing, if they haven’t sold out. Your agent also claims that he can get you a break.

Unfortunately, the cruise we chose was almost sold out, for real. There were no deals, so our agent simply promised us a couple hundred dollars off the final cost, which was a lot. We are talking big bucks. Per person: \$5,149 for the cruise, \$989--air, \$359—insurance, \$185—gratuities, \$252—land taxes, \$161—government taxes. Still, it is a once in lifetime trip.

So when are we going and where? We leave from Boston at 4:40 pm October 9 and arrive in Frankfurt 5:40 am October 10, where we connect with our flight to Budapest, arriving 10 am October 10. We have the day to explore Budapest and then board our brand new ship, the Avalon Illumination, and meet the crew and the other passengers, at an evening reception. I believe there are only 160 cabins, which are referred to as Staterooms and Suites. We have a Stateroom. Fortunately, we have the following day to explore Budapest as well, on a guided tour. Then back on board, and the next day we arrive in Bratislava “the dynamic capital of Slovakia, at the foothills of the Carpathian mountains.” Another guided tour and a visit to St. Martin’s Cathedral.

On the fourth day, we visit Vienna. In 1997, after David and I spent two weeks in Romania and Kishinev, David flew home, and I, travelling by train, visiting Prague, Budapest and Vienna, three days each. It will be interesting to see how much I remember, and how much may have changed in 17 years.

From the beginning of World War II, and before, I had an aversion to anything German. In the late 1930s, I wore a button that said “Boycott Nazi Germany.” I blamed the Germans for Hitler, and for the Holocaust. They were anti-Semites and I wanted nothing to do with them. So I felt uncomfortable that our cruise goes from the Danube to the Main Danube Canal, to the Main River, to the Rhine Gorge, and finally to the Rhine River. That means that after Vienna and two cities in Austria I have never heard of-- Durnstein and Melk— we arrive at Passau Germany. It is where the Inn, Ilz and Danube Rivers converge, two other rivers I never heard of. I wondered what role did Passau and the next day’s city, Regensburg, play in Nazi Germany. Nice to know that Regensburg is one of Germany’s best preserved medieval cities. Does that mean we did not bomb it?

Day eight and Nuremburg. I associate this city with “Judgment at Nuremburg.” The Avalon River Cruise blurb does not mention the trial but states that “90% of Nuremburg’s Old Town suffered extensive damage during World War II.” Then Bamberg, Wurzburg, Miltenberg, Rudesheim-Rhine Gorge, and Cologne: a lot of German cities. By this time I hope I will have reconciled myself to this German immersion. I was touched by the fact that in Cologne we can take a Jewish Heritage Walk.

Finally, on day14, we arrive in Amsterdam, and a canal cruise, which I did not do the last time I was in Amsterdam in 1975. Nor did I know that the city has the highest museum density in the world. On day 15, the cruise ends, and we disembark. It will be Friday October 24, at 2:50 pm when we fly out of Amsterdam, and, thanks to the time change, we arrive at Logan at 7:55 pm. We get through customs, and I am sure it will feel good to be home, despite jet lag and disorientation. When we enter our apartment, do we make Shabbos, have something to eat, or go directly to bed?

I certainly will have taken hundreds of pictures, we hopefully will have seen memorable sights, and met interesting people, and we will be able to look back with pleasure at this “trip of a lifetime.”

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