

Danube River Cruise 2009



If you don't want to read the narrative about our trip, skip ahead to the pictures.

Carolyn had been wanting to go on a river cruise because we had heard how good they are. A few months ago I began poking around on the Internet, looking for a river cruise for next year, when I discovered a deal too good to pass up. I guess because of the recession/depression and the swine flu, people are not travelling as much as they used to, so one of the tour operators was offering a 2-for-1 deal on an 11-day Danube river cruise, starting in Ruse, Bulgaria, and terminating in Passau, Germany. On 9/30 we flew Phoenix-Chicago-Frankfurt-Bucharest (with many flight problems along the way); rode a bus from Bucharest, Romania to Ruse, Bulgaria; and then got on the 146-passenger Amadeus Diamond ship on 10/1, around 9 PM.

After flying for seemingly forever and dealing with flight connection problems and airplane maintenance issues, seeing that beautiful ship all lit up at night, and discovering that dinner had been held for us, it was a wonderful end to a long day.

(Scroll Down)

We stopped in the following ports:

- Ruse, Bulgaria
- Vidin, Bulgaria
- Belgrade, Serbia
- Kalocsa, Hungary
- Bratislava, Slovakia
- Vienna, Austria
- Dürnstein, Austria
- Melk, Austria
- Passau, Germany

Life on board the ship became routine, and because of the ship's small size, there wasn't much to do on board except go stand on the top deck and watch the scenery slide past. That was enjoyable, but if the weather had been cold and wet, we would have had to stay inside. Going through the many locks on the river was interesting the first few times, but even that became commonplace after awhile. I could have gone to the small fitness center on board, but ...

I had a wonderful time on the river cruise, and I'm glad that we tried a river cruise, but I prefer the large ships with their many activities.

(Scroll Down)

Food On Board the Ship

Breakfast was a buffet, and I ate more bacon in those 11 days than I would normally eat in 5 years.

Lunch was both a buffet (for the salads) and a menu experience.

Dinner was strictly a sit-down experience. There were always several salads and several soups on the menu. There were two entrees, one of which was always seafood. And there was dessert. At dinner, unlimited red and white wines were available. And the stealthy waiters would sneak up from behind and fill our wine glasses, and of course, not wanting to offend anyone, we felt compelled to drink all the wine in our glasses. Most of the wines were European, but there was an occasional wine from Chile or Argentina.

I had ice cream with EVERY lunch and with EVERY dinner. And one day there was an ice cream social at 10:30 in the morning. That was a 3-ice cream-day.

(Scroll Down)

I think I've had my fill of European cities. Regardless of which country one is in, the large cities all look pretty much alike. I do enjoy walking around the small villages.

Going to Europe, the flight from Chicago to Frankfurt was especially uncomfortable. The fellow sitting in front of me immediately reclined his seat as far back as it would go and left it there all the way to Frankfurt, even during the meal service. I had very little room to move, so I reclined my seat in order to have a little space, but the fellow behind me immediately tapped me on the shoulder and asked me to put my seat forward. I tried to explain to him why it was necessary for me to have my seat back, but I don't think he understood what I was saying; he appeared to be Indian. I imagine he was mad at me for 8 hours.

(End of Narrative)

(Scroll Down to See the Pictures)



On a walking tour in Ruse, Bulgaria, where our river cruise began.

Beautiful fresh fruits and vegetables in Ruse.



Carolyn in Ruse. Note that the Bulgarian language uses Cyrillic script.

From Wikipedia:

“Cyrillic script ... is based on the Early Cyrillic, which was developed in the First Bulgarian Empire during the 9th century CE at the Preslav Literary School. It is the basis of alphabets used in various languages, past and present, in parts of the Balkans and Northern Eurasia. As of 2011 around 252 million people in Eurasia use it as the official alphabet for their national languages. About half of them are in Russia. Cyrillic is one of the most used writing systems in the world.

The script is named in honor of the two Byzantine brothers, Saints Cyril and Methodius, who created the Glagolitic alphabet earlier on. Modern scholars believe that Cyrillic was developed and formalized by early disciples of Cyril and Methodius.”





Inside an old church in Ruse.



A Bulgarian man proudly showing us his car, which is a copy of an East German car. Metal was scarce in Bulgaria, so the body of the car is made of molded wood chips and glue.



Carolyn standing in front of our beautiful Amadeus Diamond ship, docked at Ruse, Bulgaria.



Veliko Tarnovo, the ancient capital of Bulgaria, where we had lunch while on a bus tour.



Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria.



The entrance walkway to a castle in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria.

From Wikipedia:

“The Iron Gates is a gorge on the River Danube. It forms part of the boundary between Romania and Serbia.

The gorge lies between Romania in the north and Serbia in the south. At this point, the river separates the southern Carpathian Mountains from the northwestern foothills of the Balkan Mountains.”





In Iron Gates gorge.



In Iron Gates gorge.



Carolyn chatting with our new friend, Vince, while in Iron Gates gorge.



Still in Iron Gates gorge.



Still in Iron Gates gorge.



From the river boat, Richard is looking at what I think is the town of Vidin, Bulgaria.

Carolyn posing in Vidin, Bulgaria.





In Belgrade, Serbia, this is one of the buildings damaged during Bill Clinton's 78 days of continuous cruise missile attacks.



Another Belgrade building damaged by a cruise missile.

While we were visiting Belgrade, a brand new shopping mall was opening in a suburb.

One of the United States' "surgically targeted" cruise missiles had destroyed the original shopping mall on the site.



More cruise missile damage. Our Serbian tour guide did her job, but she was not friendly toward us Americans. I wonder why?

From Wikipedia:

“The NATO bombing of Yugoslavia was not authorized by the United Nations and was the first time that NATO used military force without the approval of the UN Security Council and against a sovereign nation that did not pose a threat to members of the alliance. The strikes lasted from March 24, 1999 to June 10, 1999 (78 days). The United States called it Operation Noble Anvil.

In the course of the campaign, NATO launched 2,300 missiles at 990 targets and dropped 14,000 bombs, including depleted uranium bombs and cluster munitions. Over 2,000 civilians were killed, including 88 children, and thousands more were injured. Over 200,000 ethnic Serbs were forced to leave their homeland in Kosovo. NATO airstrikes destroyed more than 300 schools, libraries, and over 20 hospitals. At least 40,000 homes were either completely eliminated or damaged and about 90 historic and architectural monuments were ruined.”

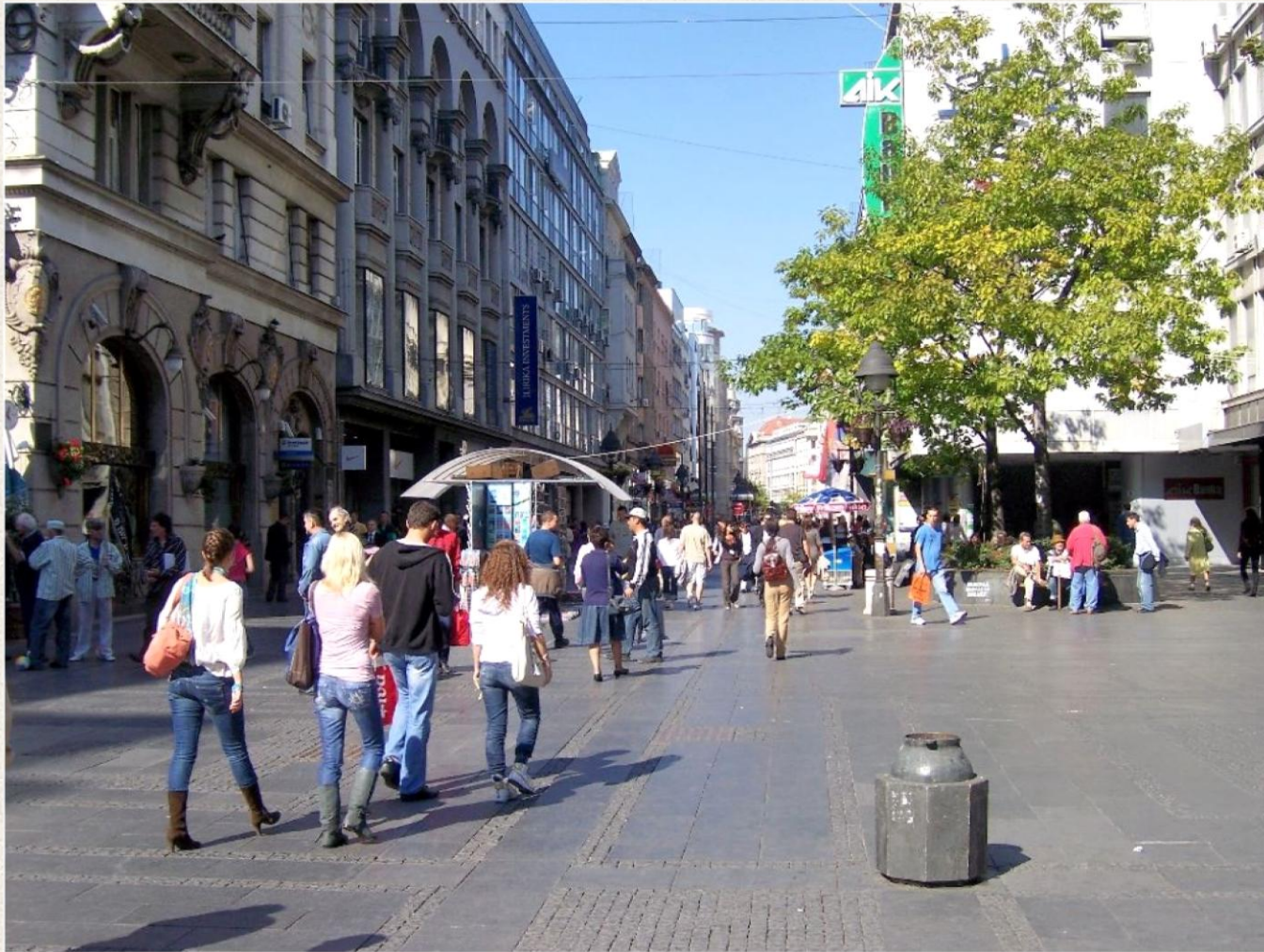
Regarding the United States' cruise missile attack on the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, in which 3 Chinese Journalists were killed, globalresearch.ca reports the following:

“Highly-placed NATO sources have confirmed the reason behind the US air strike - with three Tomahawk cruise missiles - against the Embassy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Belgrade, on May 7, 1999. The then-Clinton Government of the United States said at the time that the strike was accidental, due to faulty maps and intelligence, but this has been disproven by the NATO sources.

The NATO sources told Defense & Foreign Affairs that the attack was based on intelligence that then Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic was to have been in the Embassy at the time of the attack. The attack, then, was deliberately planned to kill Milosevic.”

From Wikipedia:

“The U.S. government made a ‘voluntary humanitarian payment’ of \$4.5 million to the families of the three Chinese nationals who were killed and to the 27 injured in the bombing. The U.S. and Chinese governments reached a settlement under which the United States agreed to pay \$28 million in compensation for damage to the Chinese Embassy facility.”



A walking street in Belgrade. Carolyn and I noticed how tall many of the young Serbs are.

A church alongside the Danube River, somewhere between Belgrade and Budapest.



From the Internet:

“The horses and Magyar cowboys at the Hungarian horse show on a ranch near Kalocsa, Hungary. The Puszta or Great Hungarian Plain is covered with large ranches, and Magyar cowboys demonstrate their equestrian skills in the show.”





Anybody can ride 1 horse. It takes real skill to ride 7.

Carolyn demonstrating some of our bedroom activities.





The Paprika museum in Kalocsa, Hungary. Kalocsa is known for its paprika, which is one of the town's biggest crops.

From Wikipedia:

“Paprika is a spice made from ground, dried fruits of *Capsicum annuum*, either bell pepper or chili pepper varieties, or mixtures thereof. Spain and Portugal introduced *Capsicum annuum* to the Old World from the Americas. In Spanish, paprika has been known as pimentón since the 1500s. The seasoning is used in many cuisines to add color and flavor to dishes, but it is usually associated with Turkey, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Morocco, and South Africa.

The use of paprika expanded from Iberia throughout Africa and Asia, and ultimately reached Central Europe through the Balkans, which were under Ottoman rule, explaining the Hungarian origin of the modern English term.”





From Wikipedia:

“Budapest became a single city occupying both banks of the river Danube with a unification on 17 November 1873 of west-bank Buda and Óbuda with east-bank Pest.”

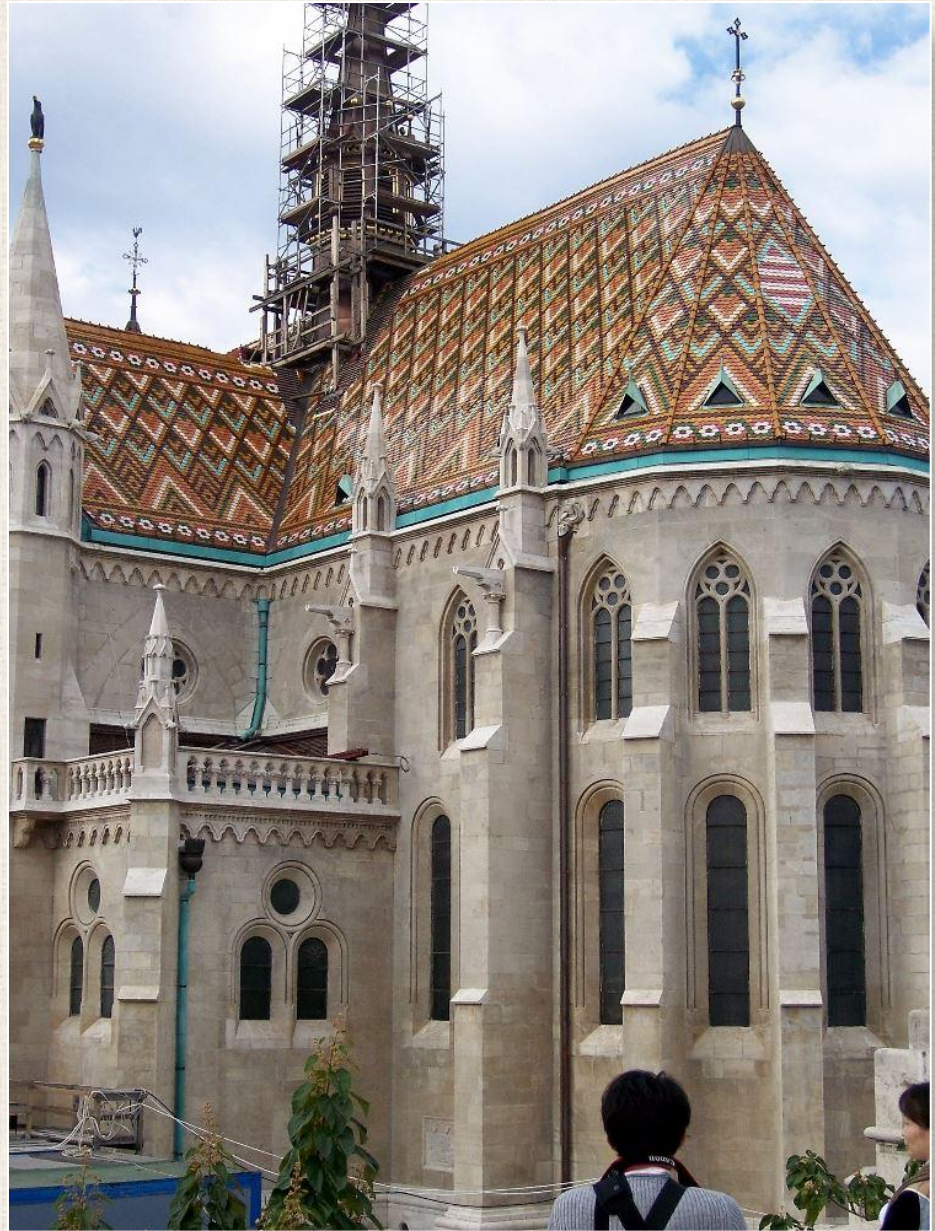


A building in Budapest. I guess it's interesting, but I'm not sure.



Budapest, with the Chain Bridge in the background.

Beautiful roof tiles on a church on a hill overlooking Budapest.





Carolyn on the parapet of a castle, or a fort, or some other building on a hill overlooking Budapest.



Carolyn and Richard on the parapet of a castle, or a fort, or some other building on a hill overlooking Budapest.

In the Great Market Hall in Budapest. This is where we bought bags of paprika to take home with us.





A close-up picture of the Chain Bridge in Budapest. We walked across the bridge, back to our river boat, after a walking tour of Budapest.



Our nighttime departure from Budapest. What a beautiful city, especially at night. Not bad with a point-and-shoot camera from a moving boat.



Enjoying the Budapest departure with our Colorado friends Vince and Ann, whom we met on the river cruise. It was early October, and the temperatures were surprisingly warm.



Another Budapest departure picture.



Another Budapest departure picture.



Another Budapest departure picture.



Another Budapest departure picture.



Entering one of the 37 locks we passed through.



In one of the locks. Note our sister river boat.



Enjoying a warm, sunny day, cruisin' up the Danube with Vince and Ann. That was the day when there was an ice cream sundae bar at 10:30 AM.



Overlooking Bratislava, Slovakia.



Touring Bratislava, Slovakia. Not particularly interesting, but the old town is nice.

An interesting juxtaposition of buildings in Bratislava.





Carolyn standing in the town square in Bratislava.

Street sculpture in Bratislava.
Note the live human in the
background, emulating the
sculpture. He was accepting
donations, of course.



A narrow street in Bratislava.
Note the ubiquitous McDonald's
on the corner.



Interesting decoration on top of a building in Vienna, Austria. Some big dude is carrying what appears to be a basketball



While in Vienna, we saw the Lipizzaner Stallions being escorted across a city street into their sumptuous digs.

From the Internet:

“The History of the Lipizzaner Stallions

It is believed that the forerunner of the Lipizzan was bred in Carthage, more than 2,000 years ago. The Carthaginian stock was bred to the Vilano, a sturdy Pyrenees horse, and with Arab and Barbary strains. The result became the fabled Andalusian of ancient Spain.

The horses at the Spanish Riding School are trained using traditional methods based on classical dressage that date back hundreds of years.”

Blah, blah, blah. Another hobby of the wealthy.



Whimsical buildings in Vienna.
Seeing these surprised me
because I don't think of Austrians
as being whimsical.



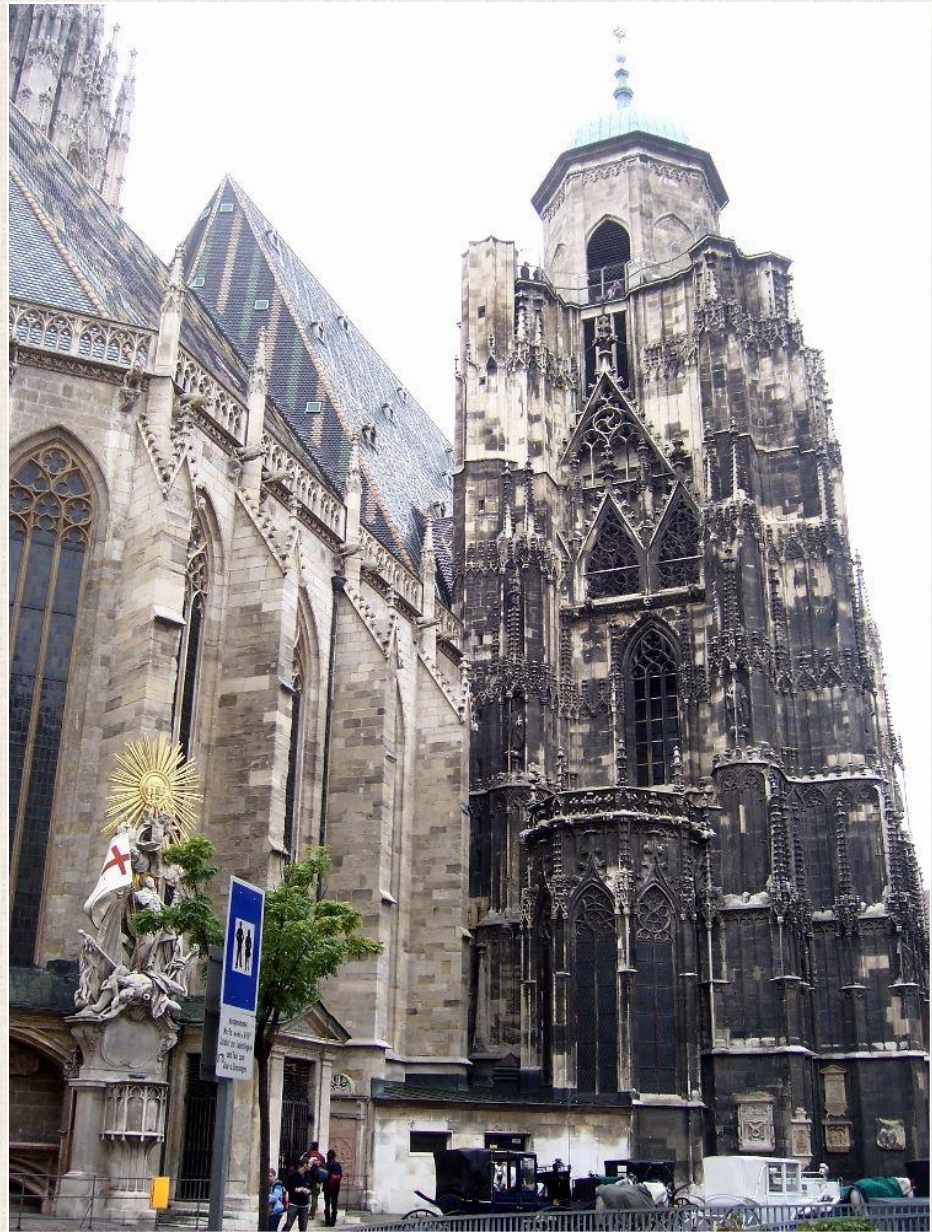


Admission was 1 Euro to enter this interestingly whimsical men's room.

St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna.

Not very impressive.

Just another old, dirty building in another old, dirty European city.





Next to St. Stephen's Cathedral, Vienna. The weather was cold and wet, so we skipped the tour to Schönbrunn Palace and went back to the river boat where lunch was Wiener Schnitzel.



Swans swimming near our river boat.



Vineyard in Dürnstein, Austria, where King Richard the Lion-Heart of England was held captive by Duke Leopold V.



Church steeple and remnants of an old building in Dürnstein.



Our local tour guide in Dürnstein was soooooo boring, that Carolyn and I sneaked away and did a self-guided tour.



On our self-guided tour of Dürnstein, which is in Austria's Wachau Valley, 25 miles in length.



While on our self-guided tour of Dürnstein.

While on our self-guided tour of Dürnstein.



Still on our self-guided tour of Dürnstein. The walkways were so narrow that no cars could drive through here.





The Blue Church in Dürnstein seems to appear in every advertisement for Danube River cruises.



The Blue Church from a different angle.



The Wachau Valley is known for its wine production.

From Wikipedia:

“Melk Abbey is a Benedictine abbey, and one of the world’s most famous monastic sites. It is located above the town of Melk on a granite rocky outcrop at an elevation of 748 ft overlooking the Danube River.

The abbey was founded in 1089 AD, and Monks have lived here since then. A school was founded in the 12th century, and the monastic library soon became renowned for its extensive manuscript collection. The library has a collection of 100,000 books, including manuscripts and 750 volumes printed prior to 1500 AD, described as ‘incunabula’.

Today’s impressive Baroque abbey, seen painted in mustard yellow color, was built between 1702 and 1736.

The abbey complex has been built around seven courtyards, and the main church is described as ‘baroque gone barmy with endless prancing angels and gold swirls’”.



Another part of Melk Abbey.



Inside one of the plain, simple chapels in Melk Abbey. WWJS?



A close-up picture of a plain, simple chapel in Melk Abbey.



We had just finished a wine-tasting in the cellar of a vineyard.





Our last day on the Danube, heading for our disembarkation port, Passau, Germany.



Approaching Passau, Germany.



Approaching the dock in Passau.



We had just disembarked from the beautiful Amadeus Diamond and were waiting to go on a walking tour of Passau before heading off to Munich for our flight home.

Beautiful flowers in Passau.





Our friends Vince and Ann, testing the beer in Passau. Vince is actually a home brewer in Grand Junction, Colorado and makes a damn fine beer.



After getting Vince and Ann's approval, Carolyn decided to have a beer, too. She's not a two-fisted drinker; the other beer she's holding was mine.

**This is the end of the Danube River Cruise
slide show presentation.**

You may close this window.