

Germany, Austria, Budapest and Prague - Slow Travel Style

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Munich

Visiting fairytale castles, reaching mountain highs, strolling in the alluring Tyrolean Alps, enjoying fantastic art, music and culture, sipping unique beers, and eating delicious apple strudel along the way from Munich, through Austria, into Budapest and onto Prague, made for a glorious month – Slow Travel style.

Daughter Pam and I had a wonderful month of traveling in Germany, Austria, Hungary, and the Czech Republic using the trains and local public transportation, as well as a direct flight from Budapest to Prague. Pre-planning enabled us to snag great hotel deals in the internet. We used our frequent flyer miles on American Airlines to book our flights Phoenix to Munich with a return from Prague. I was able to use my limited knowledge of German. (Guten Tag) and carried Hungarian and Czech for Travelers books.





Munich

The train from the Munich airport went directly to the Hauptbahnhof where we switched to the Underground. Transit passes and U-Bahn tickets can be purchased at the airport. Like other seasoned travelers, we only take carry-on luggage. YES, it is possible! Our first hotel was a short walk from the Arabella Park U-Bahn Station. All U-Bahn stations are clearly marked, so it is easy for any novice. We knew the trip would be wonderful, since we were given an upgrade upon arriving at the Westin Grand Hotel. We took it as a sign :-)

The business center at the hotel offered internet at a nominal rate.

After settling in, we decided to walk around the old town (Alt Stadt) and visit the main sights: Glockenspiel, Hofbrau Haus, St Michael's church where King Ludwig is buried and to St Paul's, a Baroque masterpiece. We stopped for lunch at the Augustiner, an old established beer hall.

The next day we visited both major art museums: the Alt Pinotek and Neu Pinotek. They are located directly across from each other. The collections were impressive. Photographing the art works without a flash is permitted.



Glockenspiel - Munich

Munich offers something for every traveler. One of the main attractions in Munich is the Glockenspiel which graces the pedestrian only Marienplatz. On any given day, tourists from all over the world gather to watch the brief show. It's a fun happening for old and young alike.



Bavaria - Germany

I had not been to this part of Germany for quite some time. The sense of familiarity was amazing.





Linderhof Castle Gardens



Neuschwanstein Castle - Germany

The following day we took a most enjoyable bus tour to the castles of King Ludwig (the Mad King): Linderhof with its fabulous gardens and fountains and Neuschwanstein with its ornately decorated rooms. There was a stop in the picturesque village of Oberammergau which is famous for its passion plays. We had exceptionally good sunny weather.

By taking the castle tour, we avoided the hassle of dealing with the time consuming route via public transportation and the long ticket lines, as tourists were plentiful.



Innsbruck, Austria

After four nights in Munich, we headed for Innsbruck. The Hilton Hotel was a short walk from the main train station. At eight stories, it is one of the tallest buildings in the city. We walked around the old town which is absolutely charming; it is a designated pedestrian only zone.

My Austrian friend Christian met us for dinner which we had at the Stifskeller, a recommendation from the hotel. It was fun to see him again (we met in Sicily two years ago). He also provided us with insight into the Austrian ways which is something that one cannot learn from guide books.

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Zugspitze, Germany at 9,717ft.

We understood that it was easier to get to the Zugspitze in Germany from Innsbruck, Austria. So, the next morning we headed to the Zugspitze, the highest point in the Garmish region of Germany (9,717 ft) which is located near the Austrian border. Boy, were we lucky - the weather was perfect and the visibility was excellent. Getting there requires a regular train, a cog wheel train and a cable ride (suspended gondola). If you are in the area, make sure you go.

It was a totally awesome experience to have been at the Top of Germany where we also enjoyed magnificent views – of Germany, Austria, Italy, and Switzerland. Needless to say, we spent a few hours “close to heaven” a true natural high.



Sacher Cafe, Innsbruck



Garni Gruber - St Johann in Tirol, Austria

We took the afternoon train to St Johann in Tirol for a three night stay at the Garni Gruber chalet type hotel which is featured in Karen Brown's book. The Austrian born hotelier/owner, Franz Gruber, is a Cornell graduate who spent twenty years managing hotels in England, Italy and Spain before opening his own.

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Gruber, is a Cornell graduate who spent twenty years managing hotels in England, Italy and Spain before opening his own.

We selected this town, as it sits half way between Innsbruck and Salzburg and we wanted to do some hiking in the Tyrolean Alps. Mission accomplished; we hiked on a beautiful sunny afternoon for about four hours. It was delightful...so idyllic. Our room had a private balcony and we were lulled to sleep by the sounds of the running creek; it was just heavenly.

St Johann hosts a famous annual Knodle festival (who knew!); and so; we tried the version with wild mushrooms at the Mauther Restaurant. Of course, we had to also try their warm apple strudel. Yum!

We decided to visit Kitzbühel, another town in the Tyrol. So we took the 12:30pm bus and walked around the charming village town which is also popular with European tourists and winter skiers. We returned on the train.



View of Salzburg, Austria

Off to Salzburg by train, we stayed at the new (and hip) Amedia Hotel (for three nights); it reminded us of the W in NYC. The hotel opened last month and the staff was eager to please. The business center wasn't ready, so we found an internet cafe nearby. Salzburg is a great city. The old center has been kept intact and is now a pedestrian only zone.

Visiting the house where Mozart was born and seeing his violin was a thrill. There is a high energy level in this city where music is everywhere. Speaking of which, we took the Sound of Music Tour - beautiful scenery and great fun. I didn't realize that there is such an international cult following for both the SoM and Julie Andrews. We even visited the church in Mondsee where the wedding scene took place. It was a wonderful day. The bus passed by the town of Fuschl am See, the headquarters of Red Bull.

We spent the early afternoon in Mirabell Gardens. The flowers and fountains and the sculptures are fabulous. The visit to the Salzburg Marionette Theater to hear the Magi Flute - Der Zauberflöte was such fun and so incredible. Each marionette has ten strings; and after a while they actually come alive.

We visited the Hohenschloss Fortress ...up and down via the cable car. There were fabulous views of the city from every angle. We also visited the St Sebastian church and the cemetery where Mozart's father and wife are buried.

We had some food and drink at the Augustiner Brau Haus where we met a group of retired Austrian gals having a fun time. What a great way to retire!!!





Vienna - Shonbrunn Palace and Gardens

Shortly after we arrived in Vienna, one of the top most visited cities in the world, we had a overview of the city with the Hop On Hop Off bus system. Our hotel was near the Opera House which seems to be a central meaning point. From there it was easy to walk about the city. We visited the Shonbrunn Palace and its magnificent gardens which are open to the public free of charge. We spent a leisurely three hours wandering about, but could have stayed all day. About half of greater Vienna is actually green. Parks are plentiful and almost all buildings are under six stories.

We had dinner at Figlmuller, one of the oldest standing restaurants, which serves a huge wiener schnitzel. Although mighty tasty, and try as I might, I could not finish it. Our trip continued with an amazing number of new and exciting experiences. It was wonderful.

Four nights in the fabulous city of Vienna, including a Lipizzaner horse show at the Spanish Riding School and a day of waltzing through the Vienna Woods which we thoroughly enjoyed, were not nearly enough for us. We made a visit to the Seegrotte near Hinterbrühl - once an underground gypsum mine (dedicated chapel to St Barbara), it was turned into an airplane factory during WWII. When it became partially flooded, boat rides for tourists were added.

My rudimentary knowledge of German was passable. Most everyone in Austria and Germany speaks English, so it is very easy to get around.



On the Danube River - Budapest, Hungary

We took the train to Budapest where we spent four nights at the Kempinski Corvinus Hotel - one of the Leading Hotels in the World ... I picked another winner. Budapest is a real charmer. Like all major European cities, it also has an extensive and efficient public transportation system and several pedestrian friendly bridges; we walked across three of them, and took a boat ride on the Danube when there was a full moon. We took a side trip into the countryside for a taste of traditions.

Steeped in history, Hungary is a fascinating country. Who knew that King Stephen became a saint and has a magnificent cathedral named for him. A visit to the world's oldest synagogue was a very moving experience. Tony Curtis ...aka Bernard Schwartz ...funded an impressive memorial.



Szechenyi Baths - Budapest - It's your move!

Budapest is home to the world's first Metro which stops at the Szechenyi Thermal Baths and swimming pool. The locals have ongoing games of chess in the outdoor pool. Having more fun than we anticipated, we stayed for several hours. Budapest is an all-round great city.

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Prague - along the Vltava River

In order to save time, we flew to Prague and spent five nights at the Crowne Plaza Castle Hotel situated on one of the seven hills in a huge park with beautiful rose gardens. This park – a UNESCO site includes the Strahov Monastery and Prague Castle, along with five of the oldest and best restaurants in the city. The hotel is perched on a hill with an outstanding view of the city below.

We were surrounded by plenty of greenery, old walls, plenty of history and close to the Petrin Towner – modeled after the Eiffel Tower.

The energy level is high in this world class city. BTW: the hotel offered free unlimited internet use which is rare. I must admit that both the Hungarian and Czech languages were a challenge ...even the basic phrases were hard to remember. We encountered many European tourists on this trip ...mostly Italians, Germans, French and Spanish; hardly any Americans.



Charles Bridge - Prague, Czech Republic

Crossing the Charles Bridge was an experience ... plenty of tourists and artists selling their wares.

We spent a great deal of time walking around the city which is the best way to get a good feel for any city. It is amazing to see the number of tourists here ...from everywhere. The food is excellent and cheap. Both the goose and the duck dinners which I enjoyed were not fatty, a testament to the way they are fed and raised. I am sure they receive a great deal of exercise in the fresh air.

Prague seems to be the beer capitol of the world. Every restaurant, especially those within the monastery walls where we are staying, is proud of their own brews. Beer is served cold and is mighty tasty and cheap. The food servings are more than plentiful and very reasonable.

The old restaurants have long wooden tables and chairs and are frequented by the locals who know a good thing. I have been tracking on apple strudel – in Germany, across Austria, in Budapest and Prague. There have been no disappointments, as I have loved every one.





John Lennon Tribute Wall

Prague is awesome; steeped in history, it has a number of pedestrian friendly bridges which we enjoyed crossing. The boat ride on the Vltava River was such fun and we were the only passengers in the small motor boat.

We enjoyed home hospitality - dinner with my brother's long-time friend Jacob and his lovely family. We also took a day trip into the countryside to the historic city of Kutna Hora founded in the 13th century which gained importance for its silver mines. I also memorized a few useful phrases in Czech. (Dobry Den)

We found that five nights was just not enough for a visit to a very exciting city steeped in history.

Prague is a feast for the eyes. The sculptures and architectural features on the buildings are awesome and amazing. The John Lennon Wall, a graffiti tribute to Lennon and the Beatles, was another surprise

We must also mention the friendly people, the fabulous and easy to navigate public transportation systems, the wonderful hotels and the trains the food and the beer... the fabulous churches, synagogues and other architectural wonders ... and the entrepreneurs who still maintain the internet cafes. All of our flights were on time - two were early. We paced ourselves well during an unforgettable month.

We wish you a Bon Voyage ... Happy Travels to You!