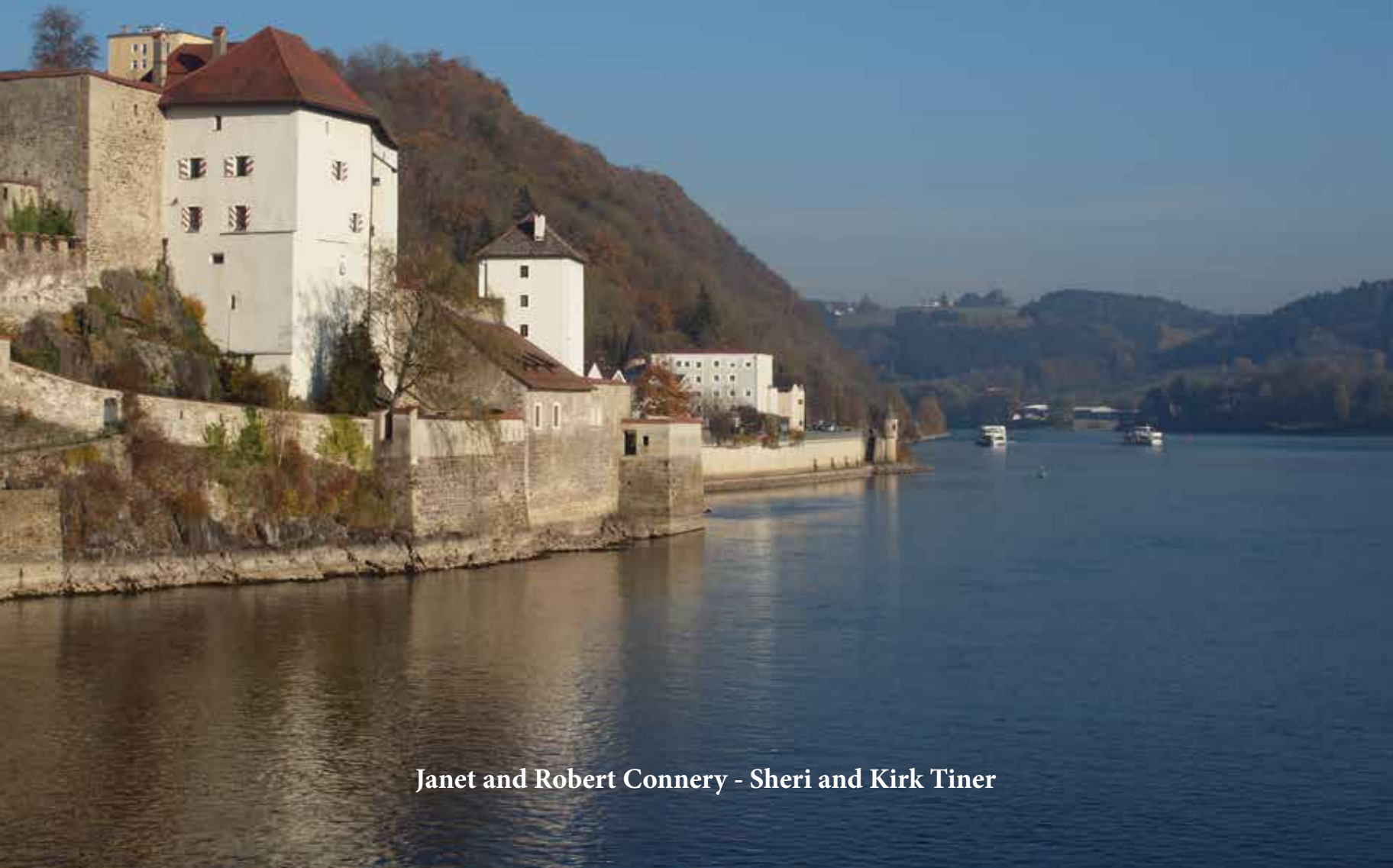


# Europe 2015

## River Life on the Danube



Janet and Robert Connery - Sheri and Kirk Tiner

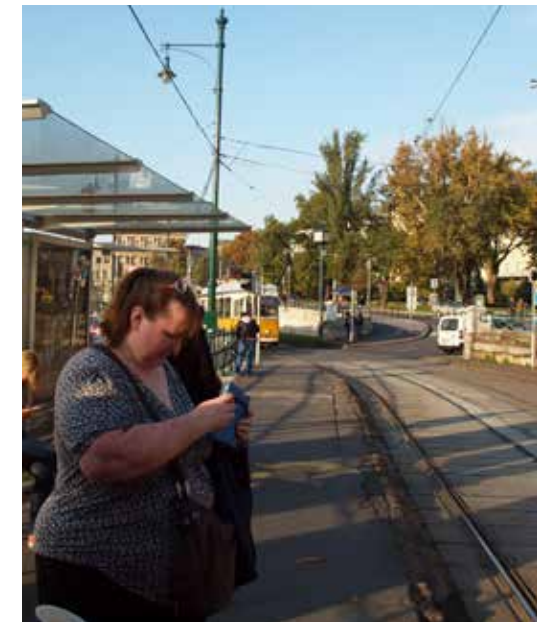


# Day 1 - Budapest, Hungary

Having booked this trip in May, we were all looking forward to the adventure but were dreading the three separate flights it would take to get to our destination. Everyone met up in Minneapolis and Kirk and Sheri went from the worst seats on the plane (stuck right smack in the middle of the 5-person row of seats) to the best seats in the plane, the ones behind Rob and Janet!

After an inhumane long flight we regrouped in Amsterdam for the final flight to Hungary. We groaned, we grunted, we complained about our flight-cramped legs, which eventually complied and we were off! Sheri found a people aquarium to grab a cigarette in and Kirk, Janet and Rob enjoyed some locally procured airport grub then we grabbed our final flight to Hungary.

After four airports and way too many hours flying we finally made it to Budapest! City of wonder, Budapest! City of history! BUDAPEST! City of bridges, lights sights smells, and sounds!. We were greeted at the airport by the Viking staff who were happy to relieve us of a large part of our baggage and we stumbled off, dizzy from jet lag and boarded our first of many Viking busses. The picture taking started immediately, Janet on one side of the bus and Sheri on the other. We were going to make sure we captured everything.





Budapest is the combination of two cities, Buda on the uphill side of the Danube and Pest on the opposite, much flatter side with beautiful bridges connecting the two. We had researched how to get around and what to see in our limited free time, we even bought our tram tickets before leaving the airport.

A certain amount of research really pays off when planning a trip, even one where everything is taken care of for you like on a Viking cruise. Janet and Sheri had found out about what things cost in Budapest and brought just enough Hungarian Forints (15,000 Forints = 60 Dollars) to cover the 24 hours we would spend there.



After a quick lunch on the ship we located the tram station and we were off! In a swaying, rumbling relic of the Soviet era, down the streets of Budapest, visiting local bridges and landmarks and accomplished preliminary shopping objectives. First stop, the Great Market Hall, a massive Victorian-era construct of wrought iron and steel, rivets and wood built in 1897 and filled with meats, produce, spices and liquor. We explored, bought some souvenirs and liquor then sampled the local cuisine.

The Fearless Four found the food stalls on the second floor and sat down for some local cuisine in the form of a kielbasa-like paprika sausage in a paprika sauce. This is where it became clear that Janet does not like mushrooms, she declined to taste the ratatouille, (mushrooms, onions, green peppers, and a sauce heavy with paprika). Sheri shared her bounty after a frantic exchange with the locals involving gesturing, pointing and smiling. Janet found a local favorite that was a flat bread and it did not have any mushrooms in or on it. Everything smelled so good we wished we hadn't grabbed lunch on the ship.







There were so many options for liquor, pastries and sweets it was hard to decide what to pick. Janet decided on several small samples of local specialty liquors and Kirk and Rob purchased bottles of Palinka, a local rotgut that could very easily strip the barnacles off a submarine. They would pay for it by day seven!

Once all selections were made and photo opportunities taken, we headed across the river on the Liberty Bridge to Gellért Hill where the churches are carved into the rock. Plenty of time for more pictures as the guys followed and chatted.

Janet promised the uphill walk to the Cave Church inside the Gellért Hill wasn't too bad and she was right. Unfortunately services were in progress so we didn't get to see inside the church, just the entrance. After a rest and a few photos we started across the river to catch the tram back to the ship.

On the way back to the ship we encountered the Terrible Tram Trolls! This round little man approached Sheri just before our stop and demanded to see





her ticket which she handed him. He took a quick look and pronounced, “You failed stamp your tickets. 40,000 Forint fine!” He then wanted to see everyone else’s tickets in the group and as we produce properly stamped tickets his story started changing and he ordered us off the tram. This is when the surreal part started. He took all our tickets and told us we had to pay fines. At first it was for one, then for all then the amount changed again and again.

“You have your passports? Cash? Bank Card?” - “No, not on us.” We lie. He can’t believe we have no money, we tell him we spent it all at the market. He can’t believe we have no credit cards or passports, we tell him they are on the ship across the street. That’s when the threats started. “8,000 Forint fine, you pay or we call the Police!” We responded, “OK call them, and why does the fine amount keep changing?”



“You pay or we call the Police” he said for the third time. Someone in the group said, “You said that already. This is boring, let’s go back to the ship” and away we went. He followed us for about half the distance to the ship then disappeared. This is how we learned that Tram Trolls cannot board a cruise ship and we were free!

One fabulous dinner later and we headed up to the top deck as the ship cruised from one end of the city to the other with commentary from our Cruise Director, Sorin.

As we cruised along the river at night the already magnificent buildings of Budapest were illuminated and had become spectacular!



On the Pest side of the city is the Hungarian Parliament building which looks more like a fairy tale palace than a government building.

On the uphill Buda side of the city and atop Gellért Hill are Buda Castle, Matthias Church and Fisherman’s Bastion.

Down at river level is the Gellért Spa and all of the bridges, beautifully lit. All of these lights reflect in the river doubling the sparkling effect.

The beauty of Budapest shining at night is something we will never forget.









## Day 2 - Budapest and Cruising the Danube



In the morning came a tour of Budapest. We saw the palaces of Andrássy Ave and the National Opera House. We stopped at Hero's Square and saw the massive outdoor ice skating rink. On this tour we learned about the many times Hungary had been invaded over the centuries, and how those invaders often forgot to leave afterwards.

We also learned that tour guides in this area of the world have no idea how to correctly use the phrase "so-called". Once so-called Sheri pointed this out we couldn't help but notice the so-called guides use this term incorrectly over and over and over again.

Then on to the Castle District. The first stop was our first of many encounters with hunting for change to use the toilet. For us Americans where





pay toilets were mostly nonexistent by 1980, this was completely frustrating.

Our walking tour started after everyone had sufficient time for a potty break with a walk around the castle district to the Mat-



thias Church. The church was built in the 14th century and during a Turkish occupation, was temporarily a Mosque, then finally restored to its present state in the 19th century. Janet and Sheri climbed the tower of the church for some great views and a look in the attic. Then we met back up with Rob and Kirk to



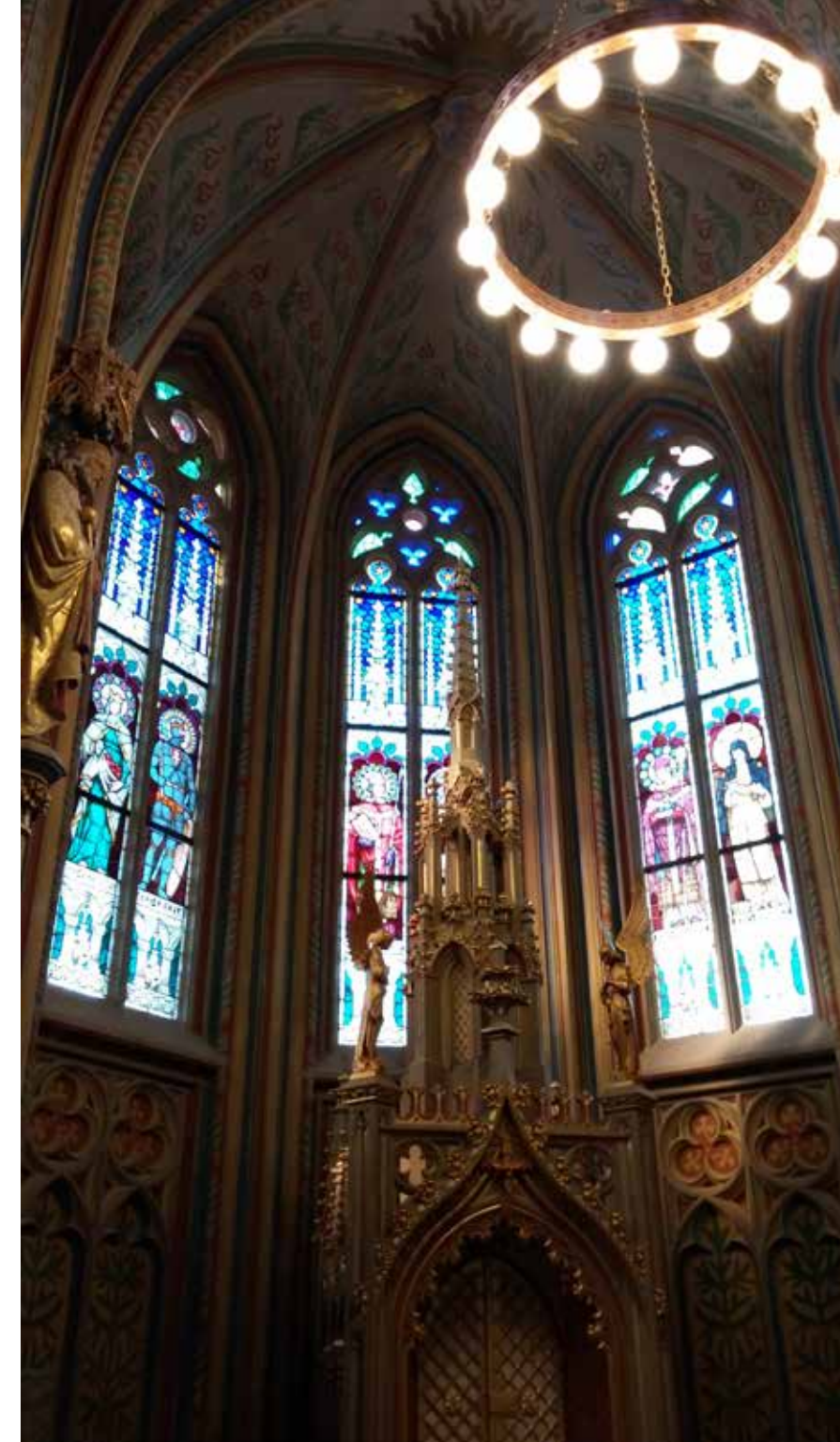




check out the Fisherman's Bastion with fabulous views of the city below.

After photo ops and another paid potty stop, we wandered leisurely around the area, which was filled with cafes and shops. We stopped for hot drinks and a slice of delicious orange/chocolate cake then hit the shops where we purchased magnets and plenty of paprika.

Sheri and Janet soaked in the sites and snapped picture after picture. All the while the gulls followed and chatted.

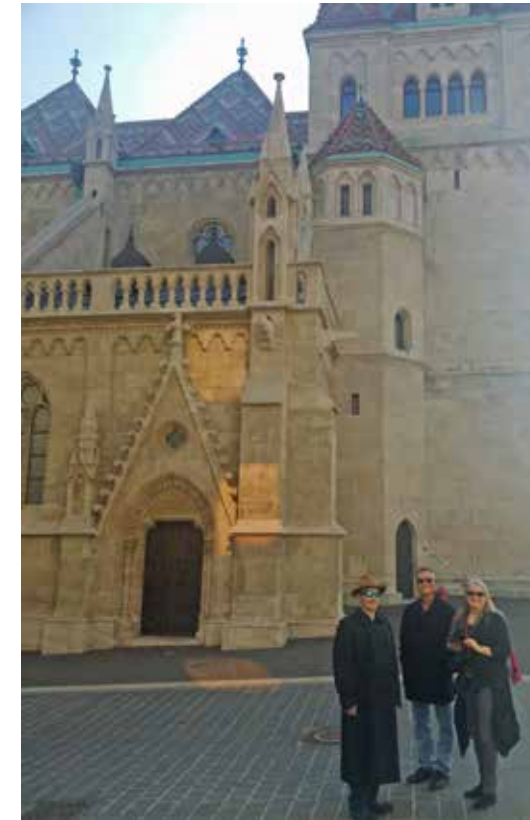






Fisherman's Bastion is just a viewing terrace built at the end of the 19th century. It has seven towers representing the original seven tribes of Hungary. The name comes from this section of the city wall having been defended by the fishermen's guild.

Our Cruise Director, Sorin, had asked us to look upon Budapest and then look upon Vienna when we arrived there and compare the two cities and choose a favorite. We'll get back to that. Budapest had grand sights; monuments and statues, bridges and cathedrals, and palaces.









We met back up with our bus for a ride along the Danube to meet our ship at the former capital city of Hungary, Ezstergom.

We stayed up on deck to watch the sunset and to peek in for part of the ships bridge tour. Then down to the dining room for another delicious dinner.

Of course both Kirk and Rob managed to lock themselves out of their rooms. Thankfully it was easy to find Sheri and Janet to let them in for their keys.



## Day 3 - Vienna, Austria







At breakfast on the morning we were to arrive in Vienna it was announced that due to low water we were going to be late and we had a choice to make between the elective tour of Schönbrunn Palace and the city walking tour. Also, because of the inconvenience, Viking invited everyone to attend the evening concert free of charge. We abandoned the idea of Schönbrunn Palace in favor of exploring the city.

A truly beautiful city we wished we had more time to enjoy. The bus tour of the city around the Ringstasse presented to us the Parliament Building, many museums, the massive Ferris wheel and the State Opera House.

When we exited the bus we were told if we were in ‘emergency’ status as far as bathroom breaks go, we could use the miniscule toilet on the bus. As far as we could see, no one had an ‘emergency’. It turned out we toured the Hofburg Palace and St. Stephan’s Cathedral under the dominion of the Toilet Tyrant, who refused to tell us when the next bathroom break would be other than to say “When we get to the Cathedral” and ignore us when we would ask when that was.

After the first forty-five minutes of the walking tour, Sheri, tired of trying to walk





with her legs crossed, demanded to know where the nearest toilet was. You see, we in the US of A take our freedoms for granted. The freedom to express yourself (and we're not talking about the 1st Amendment) is a right we enjoy for free domestically at most any convenience store, restaurant, bar or fast food joint. But in Europe, that right comes at a cost. A cost of approximately .50 Euro and you had damn well better have exact change, too! If you have to go at any time other than a specifically designated (but not clearly defined) rest room break designated by your tour guide (AKA the Toilet Tyrant) then you will cost everyone else valuable souvenir shopping time!

Sheri bravely defied the system, took Rob and Kirk in arm and headed off to the nearest rest room as the so-called Toilet Tyrant scolded and chastised “the lady who couldn't hold it in and wait and was costing everyone shopping time”. We knew this was the case because our radio headsets allowed the Toilet Tyrant's voice to join us in the rest room during our hard-won break, letting the rest of our tour group know just how horrible of a person “the lady who couldn't wait” was. The rest of the tour group voiced their displeasure by saying, “there was a rest room break? We need to go, too!” Rob and Kirk enjoyed a guilt-free, cost-free freshening up. Sheri took the blame, (and the unofficial European record) for getting a bunch of change in the fastest time to pay the rest room attendant. Note: The Toilet Tyrant is pictured below in the black hat and holding the paddle.



We did occasionally stop for photos of each other. This usually happened when we had no interest in listening to the tour guide. She had quite a lot to say about this building but none of us remember what.

We walked past quite a few “points of interest” that weren't particularly interesting. One of the highlights was the stables for the Spanish Riding School but we couldn't see much, only a few stall windows with glimpses of the famous Lipizzaner horses. We also liked the front of the school, a 450 year old institution in Vienna. The present







home of the school is a part of the Hofburg Palace and was completed in 1735.

We continued our walk on to the main pedestrian street to the elusive St. Stephen's Cathedral and the official potty stop. There was one strangely interesting sculpture along the way that was a tribute to the plague. It was a massive column of people suffering through the worst epidemic of Europe.

Finally we reached St. Stephens and were cut loose to shop as we pleased until the appointed time to meet the Toilet Tyrant. We were sternly warned not to be late, she would not wait!

After snapping a few photos inside and outside the church we went in search of chocolate, magnets and beer.





The chocolate was conveniently right there in front of the church. The magnets were also easily found in one of the many tourist shops on the square. We had to look a little further for the beer but found a street vendor selling sausages and brews just around the corner. Essentially this was the Austrian version of a hot dog stand with way better sausages and sold alcohol. Kirk tried an original Czech Budweiser, he said it was a lot better than the American version.

After a few minutes to rest we rushed off to meet the Toilet Tyrant so she wouldn't go off







and leave us then back to the bus and to the ship for dinner before the opera.

We got a special treat when we boarded the bus to the opera. One of the performers rode along with us and told us about the opera we would see, “Figaro’s Wedding”, and about himself and the life of an opera singer. The performance was at a small venue that is only used for Viking events and the opera was a cut down version



of “The Marriage of Figaro” by Mozart. They did a great job of reducing a long four act opera to something short enough for an audience who might not normally attend an opera. The choice of a comedy was good too. We all had a great time. The free champagne might have helped.

When Sorin, our Cruise Director asked us to tell him which was our favorite- Budapest or Vienna, it wasn’t an easy call. Budapest was an old city, a city conquered by foes and retaken by her people. She is a city who is practical, and yet very beautiful. Vienna in contrast is a city on a pedestal, eye candy at its finest- so Rob told Sorin that Vienna is like a wedding cake, beautiful to look at and perfect for special occasions. Budapest on the other hand is like an apple strudel, still quite pleasing to the eye and the palate but something you can enjoy every day. Sorin enjoyed that.

Afterward we carnivores were treated to Hungarian Goulash back aboard the ship. Janet wasn’t even able to score any cookies from the upstairs lounge Viking dropped the ball, Sheri, Kirk and Rob ate goulash and Janet settled for a box of raisins and stale bread. Prisoners eat better! The mushroom war had not yet begun...





## Day 4 - Wachau Valley and Melk, Austria











The weather was perfect for a glorious morning cruise through the Wachau Valley, Austria's wine country. Terraced vineyards, quaint towns and towering castle ruins dominated the landscape on both sides of the ship.

We arrived in Melk after lunch. As we're walking from the ship to the bus, Kirk says "hey, let's take our photos under the sign." Kirk took Rob and Janet's photo then handed his camera to Rob. Rob proceeded to call out modeling directions to Kirk and Sheri, something about "be the tiger, feel the tiger..." You just never know what's going to happen when Rob is around.

We were in Melk to visit the Benedictine abbey which began in 1089 from the gift of a hundred year old castle. The Baroque portion of the abbey, which we toured, was built between 1702 and 1736.







Fortunately we arrived at the abbey on the uphill side so we only had to walk down sixty-five steps to reach the courtyard. The abbey sits on what is essentially a huge rock overlooking the Danube that must have been great defense when it was a castle. We walked through a series of courtyards to the entrance and up to the first floor for our tour. We really saw less than one fourth of the abbey complex and that was quite a lot.

The tour took us first through a series of color themed rooms with names such as “Listen with Your Heart” for the blue room, A House for God and Man” for the green room and “The Ups and Downs of History” for the gold room. One room







is glass and mirrors and named “Now we are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror.” Each designed and furnished to tell a portion of the history of the abbey.

The ninth room we visited was “The Path to the Future” with an eight panel exhibit then a few more rooms led to the impressive Marble Hall with thirty foot ceilings and beautiful frescos. This was the last room before we went out on to the terrace.

Standing on the terrace in front of the abbey church and between the two wings we had an amazing view of the Danube and the Wachau valley we had sailed through that morning. On the other side we were looking down at the town of Melk which is literally in the shadow of the abbey.











Walking back into the abbey we entered the first room of the twelve room library which contains about 16,000 of the approximately 100,000 books held in the library.

The library was as impressive a room as the Marble Hall with a beautiful fresco ceiling, tall ornate shelves and with a gallery running around the second level.

The end of the tour was the abbey church, which although small for most Eu-







ropean Catholic churches was probably one of the most ornate we saw on the trip. Everything was marble and frescos and gold.

From the church we walked down a beautiful spiral staircase to the Coloman courtyard and then back into the abbey for a visit to the gift shop (of course) where Kirk and Janet purchased samples of the liquors produced by the abbey. They bought Melker Kräuterlikör made of lemon balm, peppermint, vermouth, yarrow and sugar and the Abt Georg's Magensonne made of licorice, lavender, mint, tarragon and honey.







Sheri got her souvenir magnet.

We learned that the monks of the abbey, and a large part of Germany, had realized that the water in most places was lethal. Beer however was boiled as part of the process and therefore, pas-





teurized and safe to drink. The priests also knew that their teachings allowed them their daily bread so they made the obvious connection between bread and beer and there was much rejoicing.

After one last free bathroom stop we made our way down the hill into town and for a beer and a few photos then started on our way back to the ship.

As we crossed the Melk River we noticed the abbey's beautiful yellow-hued reflection in the water. "Get a shot of that view Sheri!" Janet cried, as the guys followed and chatted on. Then we found the giant chair, perfectly positioned for









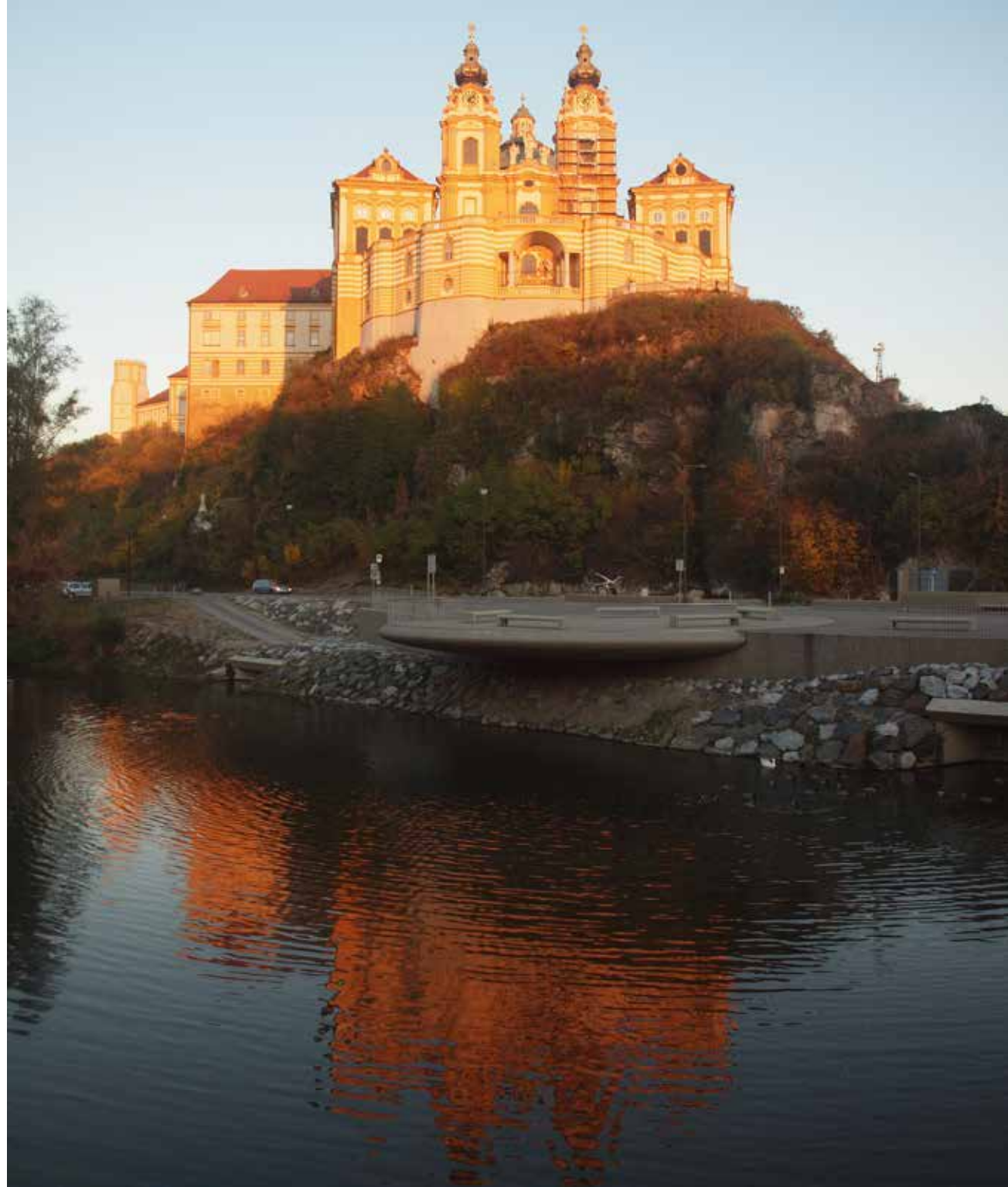


a few last cheesy shots of each of us with the abbey in the background.

We enjoyed a leisurely walk through the woods to the ship to rest up for the next day. This was nice, relaxing day after the bustle of Budapest and Vienna.













## Day 5 - Passau, Germany







We got off the ship somewhere in Austria and rode into Passau, Germany because the water was so low in the Danube that the ship couldn't take us all the way. Passau is at the conjunction of three rivers; the Danube, the Inn which originates in Switzerland and Ilz which originates in the Bavarian forest.

When the bus dropped us all we all immediately got in line for the public toilet since everyone had now experienced the lack of availability of toilets on the first couple of days of the trip. Sheri was at the end of the line and eventually gave up and walked across the street to the hotel and used their facilities.

The town was dominated by the Veste Oberhaus, which was perfectly reflected in the Danube so we snapped a few photos while waiting for our tour to start. We had a very nice

tour guide who was originally from eastern Germany and she made interesting comparisons between her home state and Bavaria and about life in Germany.

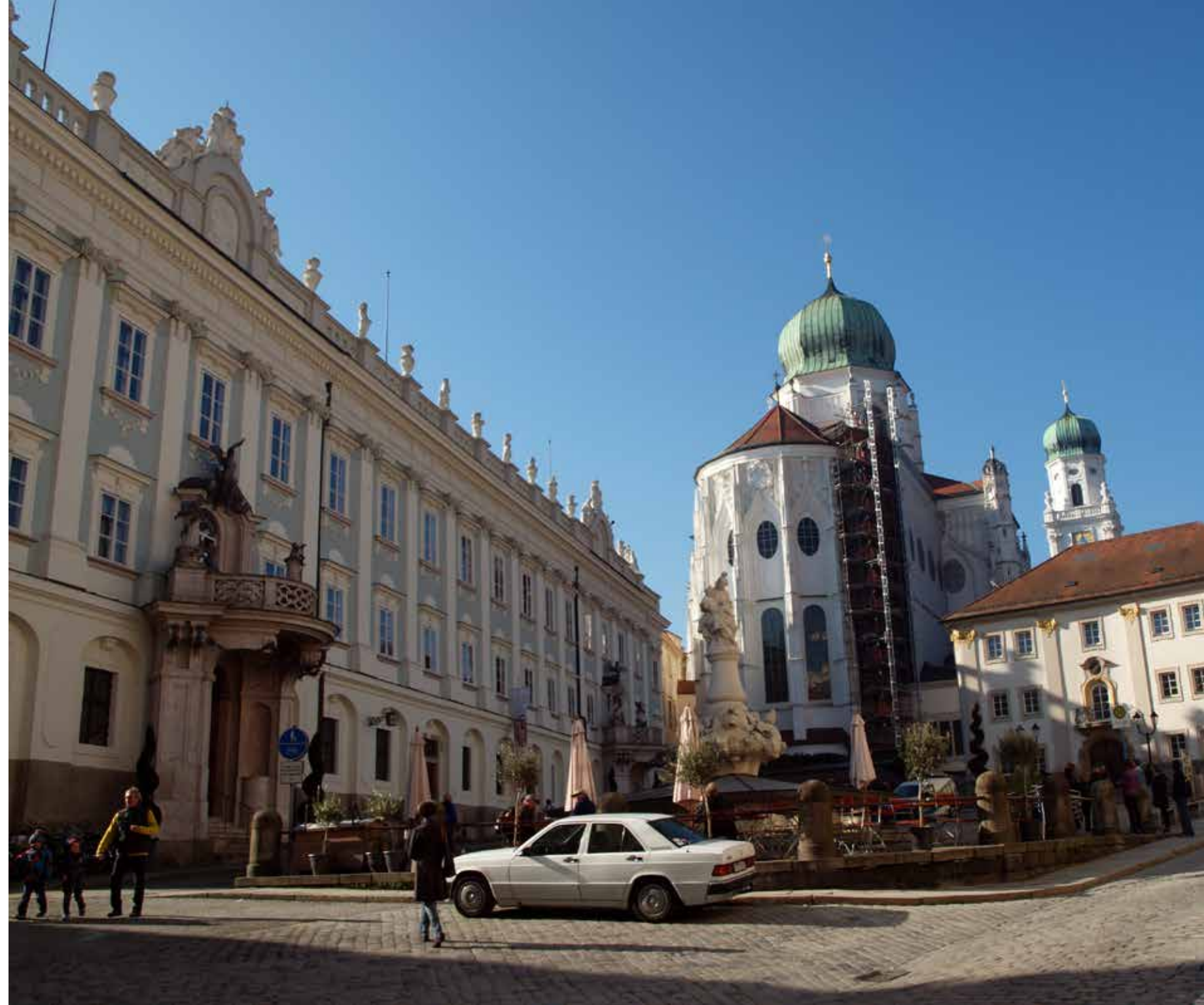
Passau is another beautiful town on the Danube, a river that brought wealth and prosperity much of the time but could also bring extreme flooding. Our guide frequently pointed far above our heads to the water marks on the walls that showed various historical flood levels when the river peaked.



Our first stop was the Old Town Hall (Rathaus) built in the 14th century which had a great medieval mural on the side and could easily be mistaken as a church by the tall clock tower.



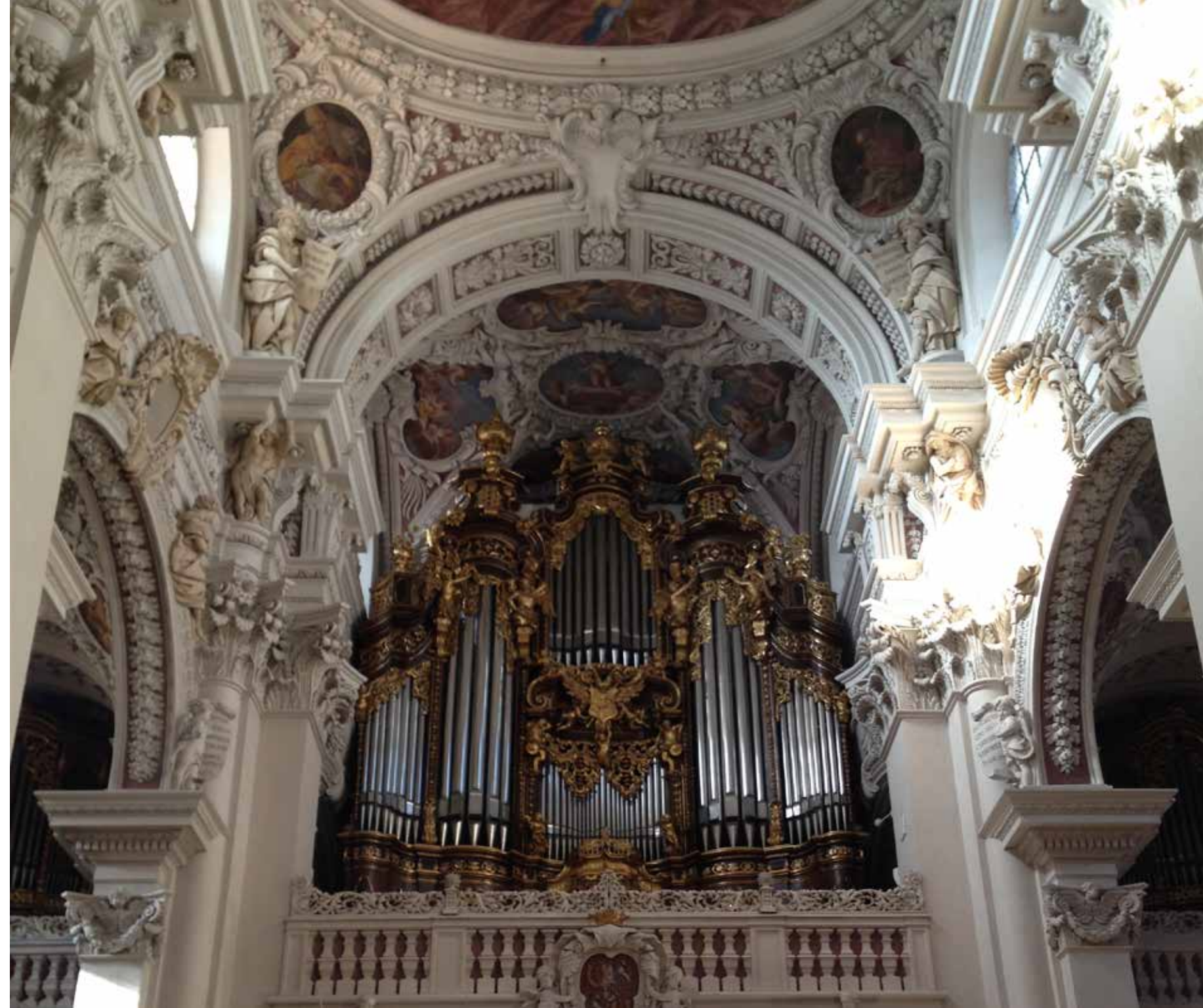








We wandered the narrow twisty streets of the old town until we reach the Inn River passing several churches, museums and schools along the way. We stopped by the Bishop's Residnz built about 1720 in the rococo style, and then on to yet another Saint Steven's Cathedral. This one had burned in 1662 and was rebuilt in the baroque style. It was the different from most of the other churches we saw because it was all white inside making it very bright and cheerful. Saint Steven's







has the largest pipe organ in Europe with 17,974 pipes.

We enjoyed lunch at a local restaurant where we were served pork and spätzle and when Janet requested the vegetarian option we placed bets on whether it would have mushrooms. Janet lost, twice, the bet and her lunch. They served her some kind of dish just loaded with mushrooms, almost made entirely of them. Well, at least she got to eat the dessert and to enjoy more good German beer.





We then wandered aimlessly for a while, checking out the local shops and picking up some more samples of liquor and some souvenirs. It was too far to go up to the castle so we settled for taking photos from the bridge and letting the boys enjoy the playground in a small park.

We eventually stopped at a café for hot cocoa and sacher torte, a specialty of the area, chocolate cake layered with apricot jam. Very yummy! Then back to the bus to go meet our new ship.

The evening featured shots of Aquivit, Viking’s signature liquor made in Scandinavia and flavored with herbs and spices, usually caraway or dill. Good company and a game of Trivial Pursuit. Rob and Kirk continue late into the night enjoying way too much cherry schnapps.





## Day 6 -Regensburg and Kelheim, Germany





Our day in Regensburg was the coldest of the trip. It stayed mostly overcast and chilly through the afternoon. It's just as well that Rob slept in this morning nursing a hang-over while everyone else went into town.

Our tour guide was Klaus, Gandalf's long lost brother, a tall charming man who was popular with the locals. He would pop in to the various stores and shops and say hello. Also drop some hits on where to go for the best shopping. He was very easy to spot with his height and bright green jacket.



The tour of Regensburg started on the street that paralleled the river and we heard about the original town fortifications and gates, several of which are still guarding the old town. The old town or “Aldstadt” is a UNESCO world heritage site. The town was founded in 179 AD by the Romans who built a fortress. From about 530 to the first half of the 13th century Regensburg was the capital of Bavaria.

Just outside one of the gates and next to the Old Stone Bridge is the Wurstkuchl Tavern (Sausage House) by the Danube. It's a small kitchen building where they cook up the sausage made down the street and serve it with their own sweet mustard on sandwiches and most important to Janet, they have





beer. The site has been a restaurant since 1146 when the bridge was built, they served hot lunches to the builders. It's understood to be the oldest continuously open public cookshop in the world. It smelled amazing but we didn't have time to sample the sausage.

Our tour continued toward the center of the old town passing ruins of the old Roman fortress and buildings of all colors and styles representing the long history of the



town. Many of the buildings showed their history as the sturdy Roman walls were used as a basis for more modern buildings. We walked through narrow passages and through courtyards in the center of medieval buildings and houses built of stone and huge wooden beams.

The walking tour ended at St. Peter's Cathedral so we went in and snapped some photos then went on the usual souvenir hunt for magnets.

It was pretty cold still so we headed back toward the ship. On our way we made a point to pass the Sausage House for a snack. None of us knew how to order so we asked a lady eating a sandwich what it was called,







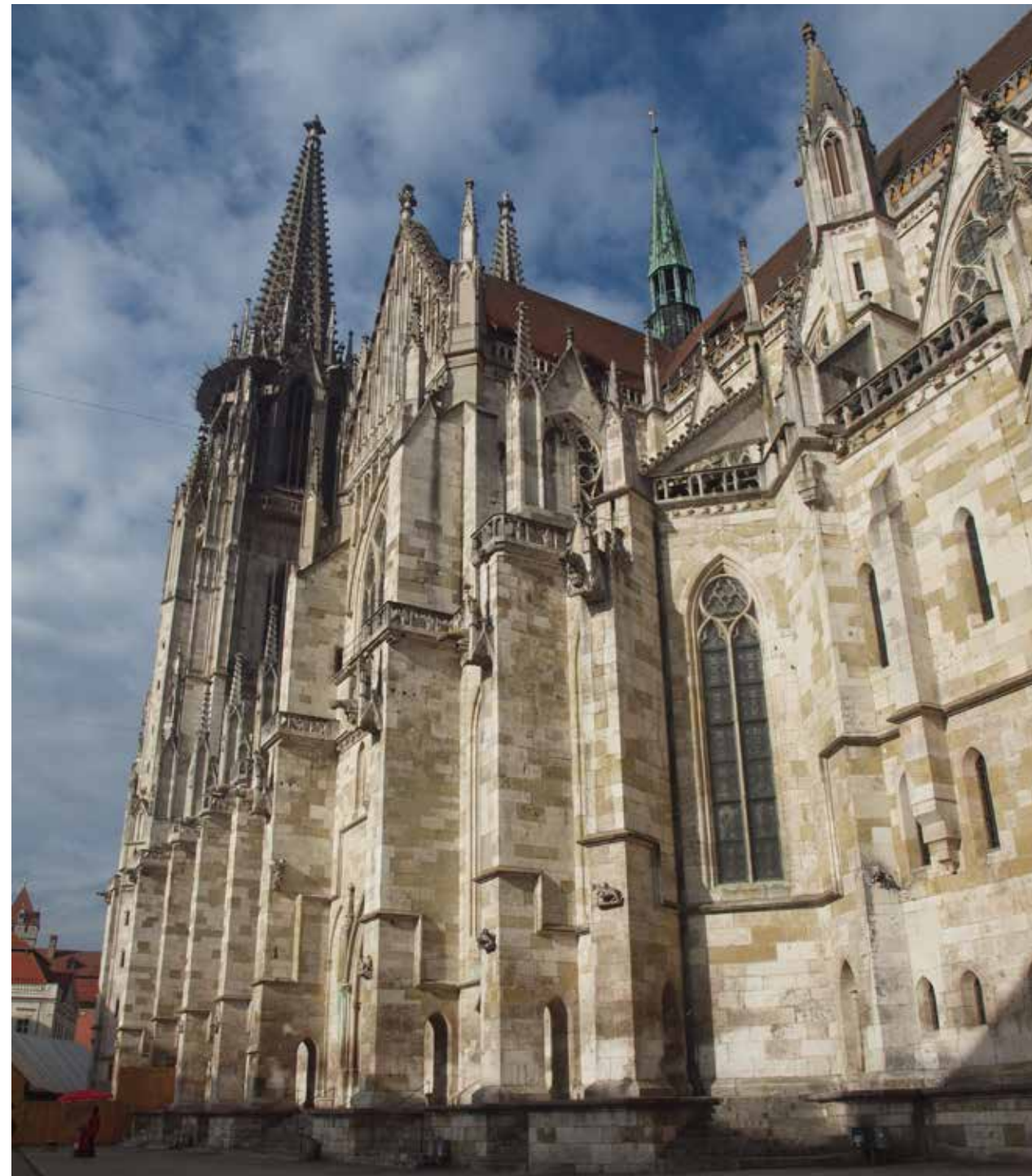
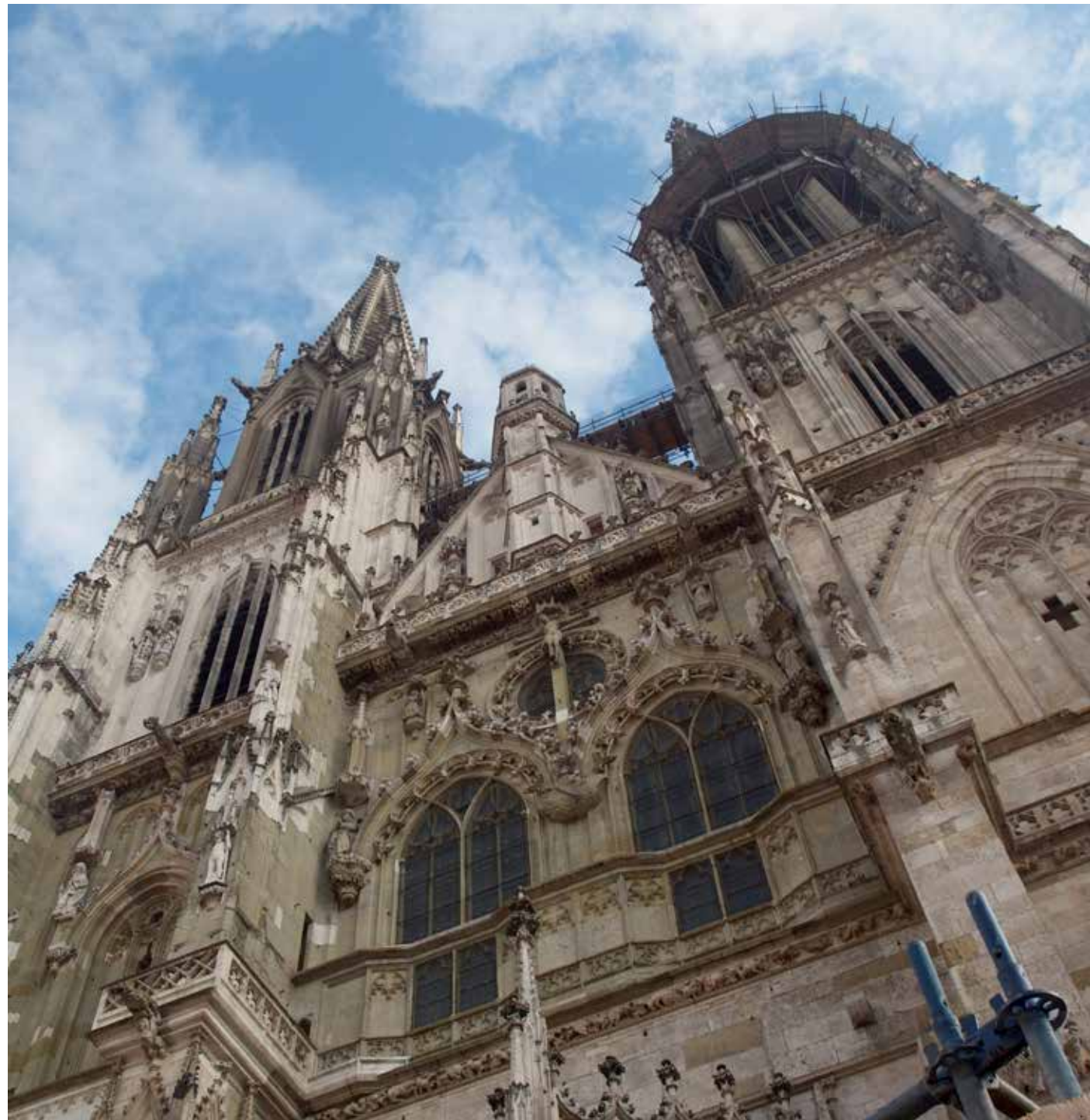
she pointed to a sign so Sheri took a photo of the sign and showed it to the waitress. It worked, we got three sausage sandwiches and with some pointing, two jars of their special sweet mustard. The smell of the sandwich we brought back to the ship was enough to rouse Rob's appetite again.

After lunch on the ship we again boarded a bus for a tour of the Thurn und Taxis Palace, where not a single taxi could be found. Instead it was another beautiful and massive residence for the rich and royal.

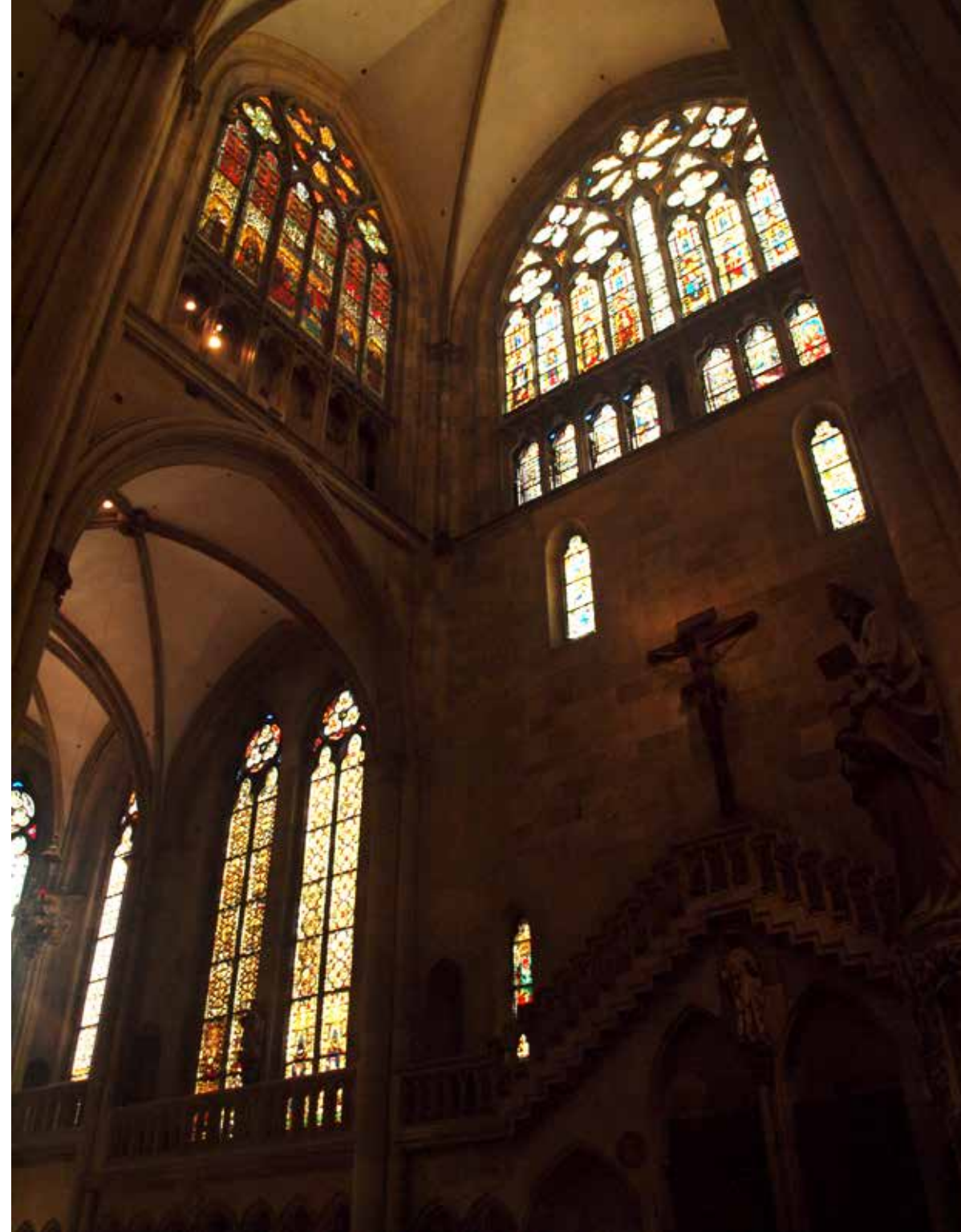
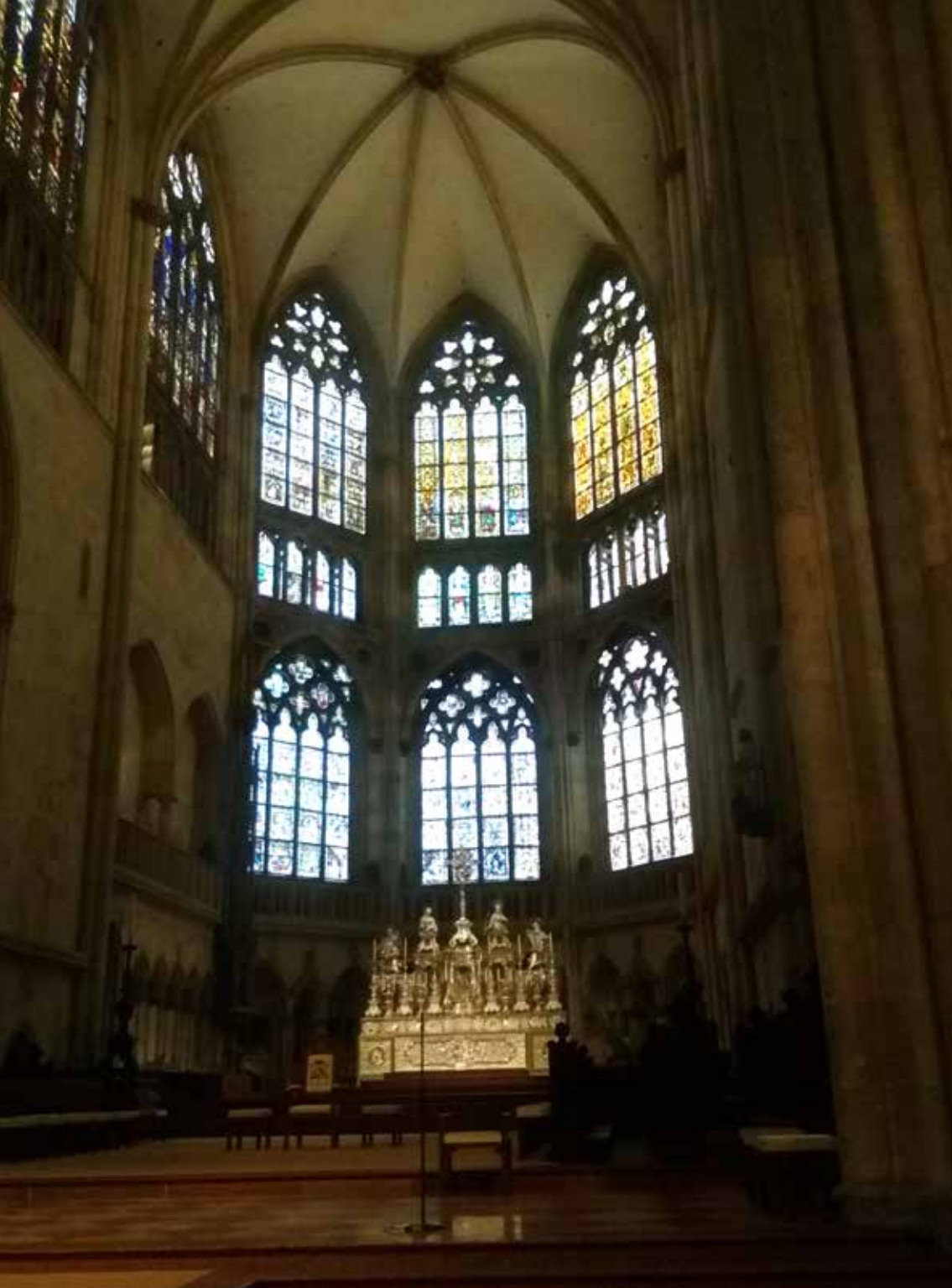
The Thurn und Taxis palace is the home of a family that originated as Tasso in It-















aly. The earliest ancestor of note was Omodeo Tasso who became rich by creating postal routes around Italy in the 1200's. His descendant, Ruggiero Tassis had expanded the family business to the rest of Europe by the mid 1400's and eventually the family was awarded "princely" status and settled in Germany in the mid 1600's when they adopted a German version of their name becoming Thurn und Taxis.

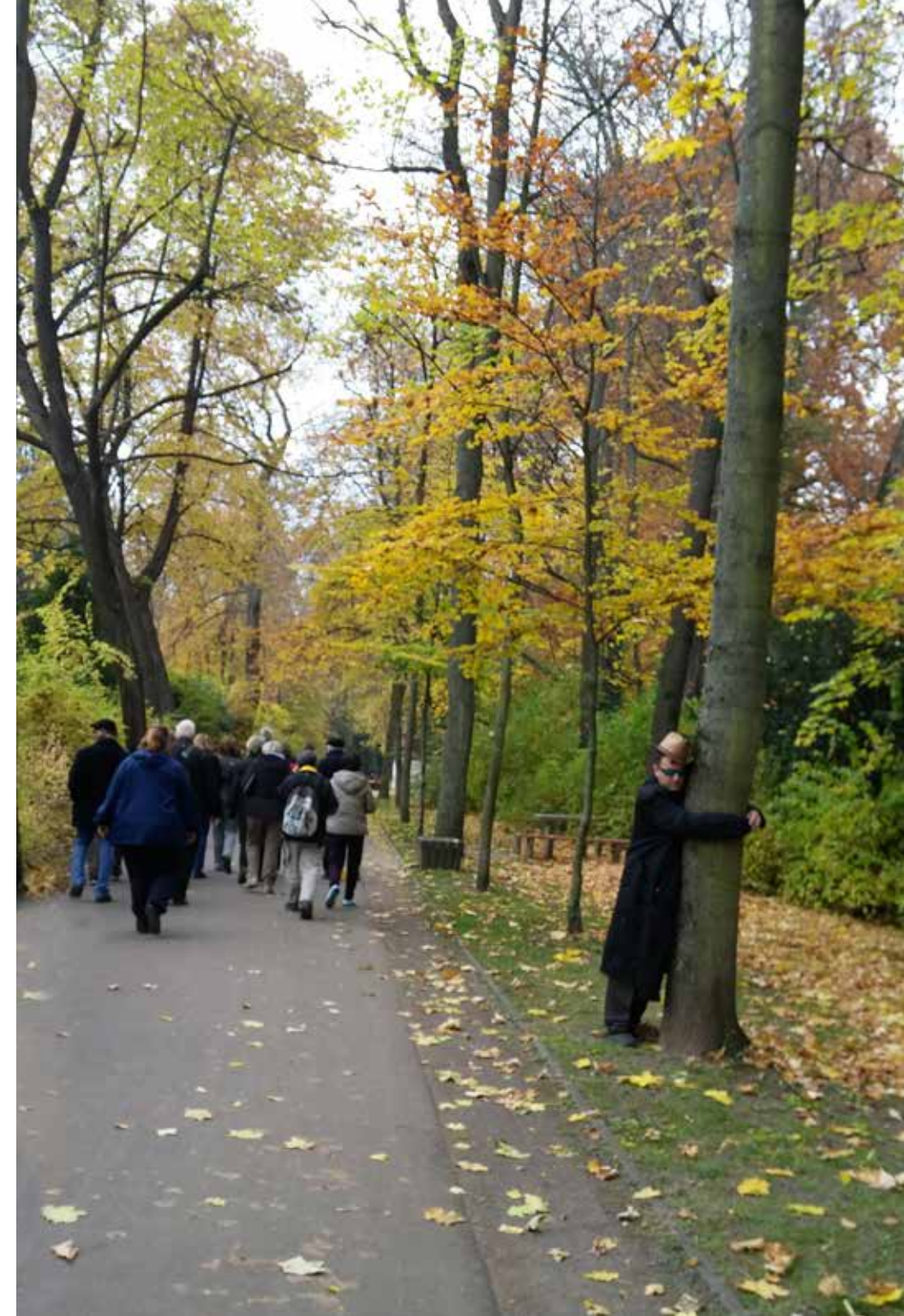
Schloss Thurn und Taxis, also known as Schloss Sankt Emmeram, had been a monastery since the 700's and after being refurbished in the baroque style in the 1700's, was given to the Thurn und Taxis family in 1812 and was converted to a residence.

The palace is adjacent to Schloss Emmeram Park which is where our tour began and where Rob took the opportunity to embrace nature.



As we waited for our official palace tour guide we decorated random statues with The Hat. We discovered that if you don't have The Hat, you might be invisible. We all thought the dog statue was much impressive wearing The Hat.

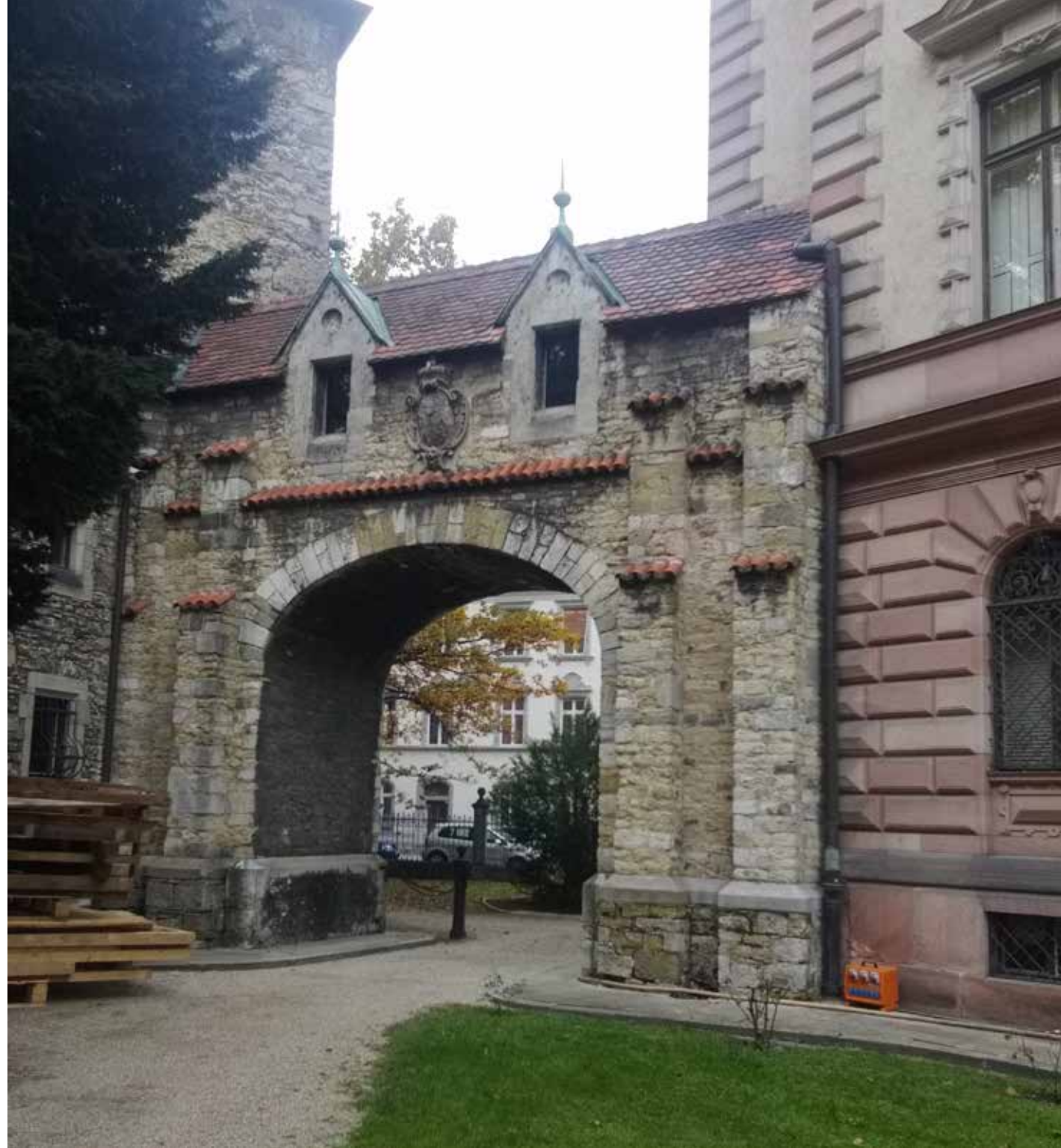
Unfortunately because the palace is still a private residence, we couldn't take pictures inside. It's really too bad because the rooms are amazing. We entered the palace through the carriage way which passed through the house so the guests of the family didn't have to be exposed to bad weather.















We started the tour by ascending the beautiful marble staircase to the first floor (in Europe the first floor is not the same as the ground floor) and through a couple of lovely rooms to the conservatory. This is what those of us who aren't royalty would call a sun room and it was full of beautiful plants.

The most amazing room was probably the ballroom, much like the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles, all windows on one side and mirrors on the other and beautiful baroque decor. There was a silver room, a huge dining room and even a small family chapel.

We went from the residence into the cloister and through the halls next to the church and into the crypt chapel



under which is the burial place of the family. We could see several of the tombs through a grate in the middle of the floor. The chapel was built in the mid 1800's in the Gothic style and was freezing cold inside.





Once again we boarded a bus and were on our way to the town of Kelheim with the Befreiungshalle monument atop a hill above the town. Here, after a brief glimpse of the town center, we visited the oldest wheat beer brewery in Bavaria which opened in 1607. We passed through what would be a lovely beer garden in the summer and into the Bräustüberl, a typical Bavarian taproom where we sampled several of the wheat beers and authentic German pretzels. Janet enjoyed a killer Isenbock, something she can't get in Delaware.

There we were, surrounded on all sides by German beer. There was no way out of this. Making eye contact with our teammates, we all knew there was only one thing to do. We would drink our way out of there...









## Day 7 -Nuremberg, Germany



The last day of our trip everyone was lazy except Janet. Rob and Kirk both slept through breakfast and Sheri chose to stay on the ship and relax rather than take the bus into town. Janet headed off on her own to explore and take some great photos.

We finally all met at lunch and then headed off for our tour of Nuremberg. We boarded our assigned busses and sat wondering where the heck our travel buddies were. For the first time we weren't all four in the same group. Very strange. The busses started and away we went, still wondering.

A town almost completely destroyed by war then restored to pre-war condition. Our tour included Nazi parade grounds and the Palace of Justice. Then the Imperial Castle, Albrecht-Dürer's House and Market Square with its local products and amazing smells.

The first sight on the tour was the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds. Covering an area of eleven square kilometers, it is a clear indicator of the Nazi Party megalomania and was intended











as a backdrop for the party rallies to demonstrate their power. The unfinished Congress Hall was designed to hold 50,000 spectators. The bus drove us first around the outside of the building and then through an archway and into the inner courtyard where it was obvious how much of it was incomplete.

Six Nazi party rallies were held at this location between 1933 and 1938. Nuremberg was chosen because it was easily accessible from all corners of what Hitler considered his empire.

Today the complex is used as a museum and for education events that would have Hitler spinning in his grave. A permanent exhibit is called “Fascination and Terror” and is centered on the causes and consequences of the Nazi reign of terror.



Across a small lake from the Congress Hall is Zeppelin Field which takes its name from the fact that Ferdinand Graf von Zeppelin landed one of his airships here in 1909. The Nazis built the grandstand on this site in the 1930's.

The grandstand once had great columns along each side of the central building but those were removed for safety since they were falling down.

Next we passed by the Palace of Justice where the Nazi war crime trials were held in 1945-1946 and are regarded as a milestone to-





ward the establishment of a permanent international court. We had an option of a special WWII tour but none of us were interested enough to pass up the regular (free) tour.

After a drive along the old town walls we arrived at the Nuremberg Castle. Like the rest of the city, the castle was almost completely destroyed in World War II. Its position on the top of a hill provided a wonderful view of the rest of the city, with tour guides showing pictures of what it looked like right after the war so we could appreciate the restoration efforts.

This is where we found our travel buddies. Janet and Rob abandoned their group and joined with the one Sheri and Kirk were in. The world was right again.

After a half hour or so at the castle (plenty of time for a free bathroom break) we started down the hill into the old town. Fortunately for our vacation tired feet and legs and backs, this walking tour was entirely down hill.

Our first stop was in front of the Albrecht Dürer House where

















there's a statue of Albrecht who was a Renaissance artist, the house is now a museum. The plaza in front of the house is overlooked by one of the towers in the old town wall. Quite a lot of the town's 12th century wall remains, about four kilometers. Some of it has been made into a linear park that's great for walking or bike riding. Some of the pedestrian gates remain but the wall was removed where streets were widened for modern traffic.

As we walked closer to the Market Square we began to smell the sausages cooking in the nearby Bratwursthäusle (sausage house) next to the cathedral, and we lost all interest in the tour. Stopping only long enough to find out when and where to meet our bus back to the ship, we headed off for sausage and beer.

The carnivores among us really enjoyed the sausage sandwiches with sweet mustard and the vegetarian totally enjoyed her beer. No mushrooms in sight, all were happy.

After our little snack we leisurely wandered around the outdoor market where we found all kinds of fruits, veggies, flowers, herbs, meats and cheeses to ogle. Pretty much a little of everything was represented.

The market square is dominated by the Frauenkirche church that dates back to 1352 and features a mechanical clock. We did get to hear the chimes and see the clock movements.

We had just enough time to do a bit of ex-







ploring, purchase magnets and get back to meet the bus for our ride back to the ship and our last dinner together.

That night was Viking's Farewell Dinner, a special dinner the chefs had worked on all day. A German feast of lamb and chateaubriand very much enjoyed by most, but with only one vegetarian option, Mushroom Soup. By this point Janet was sick of picking mushrooms out of her meal and called the waiter over to repeat her request for a vegetarian meal with no mushrooms. Bets were placed. First came a very plain salad with no dressing, yawn. Then the Maître De arrived and proudly presented Janet with specially made gnocchi... covered in mushrooms. We wished we recorded a video of how his face fell as Janet muttered under her breath "fucking mushrooms". Sheri took up the fight and the defeated staff returned to the kitchen to try again. Eventually a satisfactory meal arrived and there was much rejoicing.



# Stories from the Strange

## A Ghost Story

*The following is an account that might have taken place in Regensburg, Germany at the Thurn and Taxis Palace. The names have been changed to protect the innocent.*

It was a typical mid-fall day in Regensburg, Germany. The grounds keepers around the ancestral home of Thurn and Taxis took great care in the landscaping, pruning the trees back to protect them from winter's cruel bite. They uprooted and buried the rosebushes in a large mound of earth that would keep them warm enough to prevent frostbite, protected from the particularly nasty wind chill smothered in the bosom of Mother Earth. Large mounds of leaves, carefully raked in circular mounds, were waiting to be vacuumed up and disposed of, to that place where fallen leaves go.

It wasn't always like that, not in the old days, where they kept to the old ways. 500 years ago the leaves were burned, and that was that. 500 years ago, one would be driven up to the Palace proper, protected from the wind and rain with a sort of drive-in garage to keep one warm and dry, and that was that.

On this particular day in the present Roberto, Janetica, Cheryl and Clark had no idea about how things were done in the old days, or how the family of Thurn and Taxis achieved their fortune and favor delivering crucial letters and papers of importance for the Sovereignty of Europe, especially Italy in the earliest days of the family. They did not know that a certain lady of a wedding age long ago awaited a letter from her suitor, a letter that was delivered but alas- never received. That you see, was most certainly not that.

In the Year of Our Lord 1515 there was a Lady Magdalene of the House Neuhouse. She was a young, attractive woman with golden blonde hair and wide, blue eyes. Her family relied on the delivery of important letters to maintain her family's banking and finance operation. Letters of Deposit and proof of payments required swift and timely updates to maintain an accurate accounting of finances and holdings, without the routine deliveries, her family could soon find themselves in financial ruin and debtor's prison.

Occasionally, the son of Ruggerio della Torre de Tassis, a handsome young man with the family's familiar dark, curly hair and thick beard named Simon von Taxis would come and deliver letters and pick up papers to be sent further off himself. He used the excuse of making sure a family member make the route, to know that the way was safe for the couriers and report the information to his father. In truth he enjoyed the company of Lady Magdalene and looked forward to that particular part of the journey, but Ruggerio della Torre de Tassis knew his son's heart and pretended to know otherwise.

Simon was always courteous and polite to Magdalene, she took a liking to him instantly and he soon found himself the target of her affectations. Her bodice would appear lower and the scent surrounding her more appealing whenever they were mysteriously alone in a room. The servants knew better than to stand around when the Prince visited, and they would hastily spray the air with perfumes

imported from Paris and Vienna, to appeal to the Prince's senses and quickly make excuses to be elsewhere.

Romantic music would play from somewhere within the house, the candles mysteriously lit. Soon they became intimate and in the heat of their passion he soon promised her that he would beg his father for permission to ask her father for Magdalene's hand in marriage, and that was that.

He left her on that November day, heading home to the Palace of Thurn and Taxis. He arrived, begged his father Ruggerio permission to wed the Lady Magdalene and his father of course approved. Ruggerio della Torre de Tassis himself arranged the marriage, and a letter was to be sent. Simon chose to make the journey in disguise to surprise his betrothed and deliver the news himself.

Alas, tragedy struck and Simon was mistaken for a common road brigand and his journey and plans for the future abruptly ended with a crossbow through his heart by Magdalene's own house guard. When she was told of the incident, her pupils went very wide and she walked out into the cold and was last seen headed towards Regensburg, to the Palace of her beloved and never to be seen again.

Roberto, Janetica, Cheryl and Clark entered the Palace of Thurn and Taxis and were greeted by their tour guide who stood in the doorway of the palace, welcoming them. "Hello, my name is Maggie!" she cheerfully said, her pupils large as saucers in her wide, blue eyes. The tourists from America didn't notice at first the fact that Maggie's feet didn't quite touch the floor. They didn't notice the strange way the lights inside the room reflected off of her golden hair. The tour would soon begin, there would be plenty of time to notice such things. And that was that...

## And That Was... Something

I wish we could stay  
I wish we could all be here forever  
Between you and me I could honestly say  
We couldn't ask for better weather

And while we're away  
The ships up the river will be  
And it won't be long until once again  
In search of a rest room we'll flee

And I guess that's why we all river cruise  
Euros in hand could be Euros spent with you  
Laughing like children, drinking like fishes  
Dreading the mushrooms when they serve us dishes  
And I guess that's why we all river cruise!



## Thoughts From the Adventure

How long is our layover in Amsterdam? KT

In Germany apparently the word “no” cannot be understood if it is followed by the word “mushroom”. ST

Palinka, it won’t kill you but you’ll wish it did. RC

Paprika on eggs is nice. JC

Budapest - we discovered there are living, breathing trolley trolls in Hungary. ST

Meat, meat, meat, meat, meat, meat. JC

From transit trolls to beautiful brats, the romantic Danube. KT

Vienna – Use the toilet at every opportunity. There are Toilet Tyrants disguised as tour guides. ST

Beer, it’s what’s for lunch. The only thing served without mushrooms. JC

Fucking mushrooms! JC

Damn, no vegetarian options, liquid lunch again. JC

Fuck a buncha British Trivial Pursuit. RC

Climate change is real! We didn’t have enough water to make a complete trip on the damn River! RC

Busing the Danube. KT

Beware of friendly flashers in the hallways. ST

Let’s do Paris next ST, JC, KT, RC