

Baltic Sea Cruise – Denmark, Norway, Germany, Estonia, Russia, Finland, & Sweden
(August 8, 2015 – August 20, 2015)

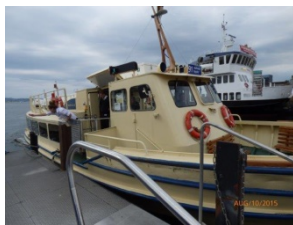
I always begin these reports with an explanation as to why we picked this particular trip itinerary and location. In this case it was very simple – we’ve never been to this area of the world and it was a much cooler climate than spending early August in the El Paso area heat. We chose to do this on a cruise because it gave us an excellent sampling of the culture and history of the Scandinavian countries. Furthermore, we were overdue to go on a cruise – our last one being to Tahiti in February of 2013.

After flying from El Paso through Dallas and London, we boarded our ship, the Regal Princess, in Copenhagen, Denmark. This is the newest ship in the Princess fleet, having been christened in May 2014. It carried 3500 passengers, plus a large crew. Read more about it at this website:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regal_Princess_%282014%29



We didn’t have time to do any sightseeing in Copenhagen, due to our late arrival and early ship departure to the first port – Oslo, Norway. On Monday, August 10 our ship docked and allowed us 8 hours to tour the city and surrounding area. We decided to make the best of it by purchasing an Oslo Pass which gave us unlimited transportation on ferries, buses, and the subway within the city, plus admission to several key museums, for one low price. After boarding a ferry, our first stop was the Viking Ship Museum where the world’s best preserved Viking ships are on display, together with priceless artifacts from the burial ships near the Oslo Fjord.



Ferry to the Museums



Viking Ship Museum



The Osberg Burial Ship



Wagon from Oseberg



The Gokstad Burial Ship



Animal head post from Oseberg

After touring the Viking Museum we headed to the Maritime Museum followed by the Fram Museum which houses the world's most famous polar expedition ship – the Fram, and tells the story of Norwegian polar exploration. See this website for more information: <http://www.frammuseum.no/>



Norway Maritime Museum / Fram Museum (A-Frame)



The Fram Ship

We eventually made our way back to the ferry then headed to the Nobel Peace Center which was located near our cruise ship. The Nobel Peace Center is a showcase for the Nobel Peace Prize and the ideals it represents. The Center is also an arena where culture and politics merge to promote involvement, debate and reflection around topics such as war, peace and conflict resolution. The highlight was an exhibition about the most recent prize winners: Malala Yousafzai and Kailash Satyarthi's unstoppable fight for children's rights. They also had displays for all previous winners – like Mother Teresa, Teddy Roosevelt, Mikhail Gorbachev, Barrack Obama, Nelson Mandela, etc.



In the afternoon we decided to visit one of Norway famous Ski Jumps – Holmenkollen, which was used in the 1952 Winter Olympics. Crowds in excess of 100,000 greeted the ski jumpers as they competed in what was officially known as the **VI Olympic Winter Games**. We took a subway and met some interesting people on route, and toured the museum at the base of the ski jump.



We returned to the ship on the same subway and walked around the pier area before re-boarding the ship. It was a good day.



Back on the ship we took a few photos and had dinner. This is a beautiful ship and the food was excellent. Whenever we go on a cruise ship we always book an inside cabin because it's less expensive and we spend the bulk of our time enjoying the rest of the ship or on tour in a port.

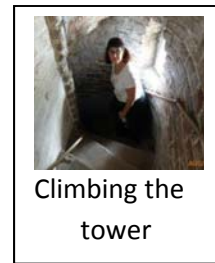


Atrium & Piazza area of the ship Deck 16 – Pools and Fountains Sea Walk - Glass bottom walkway

The centerpiece of the ship is the glass-enclosed central atrium, where glass elevators give you a bird's eye view of the vessel. The top pool deck is the place to gather after hours, where you can see water and light shows and experience the Sea Walk, a glass-bottom walkway that extends 28 feet beyond the ship's deck.

On Tuesday, August 11 we arrived in Aarhus, the second-largest city in Denmark. The history of Aarhus began as a fortified Viking settlement founded in the 8th century. The city was founded on the northern shores of a fjord at a natural coastal harbor and the primary driver of growth was seaborne trade in agricultural products. Today Aarhus is at the cultural and economic core of the region and the largest center for trade, services and industry in Jutland.

We walked off the ship to the center of the historic district and spent the few hours we had in the morning touring the Aarhus Cathedral – Denmark’s longest and tallest cathedral, completed in the 16th century. It cost us \$6.00 to climb to the top of the tower.



Climbing the tower



Tower – Midway Point



Top – Bell Tower



View from the top

After our cathedral tour we headed back to the ship to relax for a few hours and prepare for our next port – Warnemunde, Germany. Our early morning departure from the ship on Wednesday, August 12th found us on a 3-hour train ride from the port at Warnemunde to Berlin. Our first stop after leaving the train was the infamous Berlin Wall.



Train Ride from Warnemunde to Berlin



Inside the train



Berlin Wall



No Man's Land – Berlin Wall



Graffiti everywhere on the wall

Next stop – Checkpoint Charlie – This was the name given by the Western Allies to the best-known Berlin Wall crossing point between East Berlin and West Berlin, during the Cold War. Checkpoint Charlie became a symbol of the Cold War, representing the separation of East and West. Soviet and American tanks briefly faced each other at the location during the Berlin Crisis of 1961.



After a lunch at a local restaurant we visited the Brandenburg Gate which was formerly used to represent the separation between East and West Berlin. After a quick stop we proceeded to the Allied Museum.



Brandenburg Gate



We spent a few minutes visiting the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church which was left standing during the war even though much of the building had been bombed. We also made a photo stop at the German Parliament Building – the Reichstag – one of Berlin’s most historical landmarks.



Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church



The Reichstag

Learn more about this landmark at the following link:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reichstag_building

After our 3-hour return trip by train to the ship we spent a few hours relaxing, had dinner & went to a show in the Theater before heading to our cabin for the night. We saw a beautiful sunset on the way.



Thursday, August 13th was a “day at sea” – the first of two during this cruise. There is always something to do during these days, including trivia contests, sunbathing, pools and hot tubs, music, spectacular Broadway shows, comedians, magicians, jogging or walking on the track, etc. We did all these things.

On Friday, August 14th we arrived in Tallin, Estonia. Tallin is situated on the northern coast of the country, on the shore of the Gulf of Finland, 50 miles south of Helsinki, east of Stockholm and west of Saint Petersburg. Tallinn's Old Town is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is ranked as a global city and has been listed among the top 10 digital cities in the world.



Tallin, Estonia – View from the ship

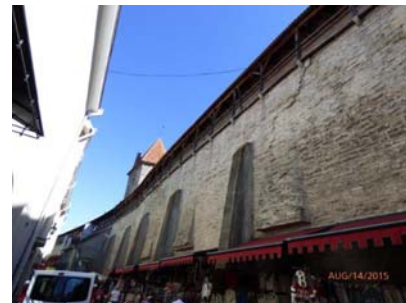


Alexander Nevsky Cathedral



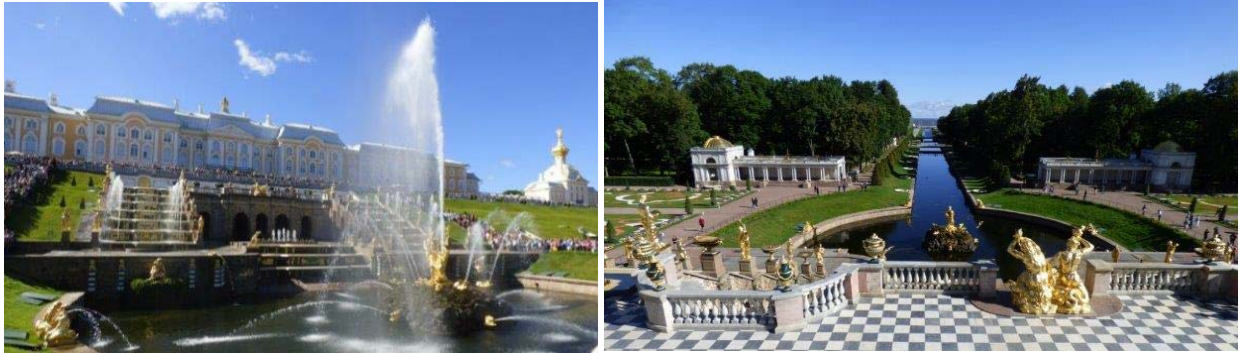
Toomkirik (Dome Church) – Oldest Church in the City – Also known as St. Mary's Cathedral

We chose to do a walking tour of the city and visited many of the historical landmarks as well as the Town Hall Square and Kiek en de Kok fortification – one of the era's strongest defensive bastions, with walls 3 yards thick.



The town wall dates from the 13-14th century. This small country of Estonia was conquered and ruled by Teutonic Knights, Polish princes, and Russian Tsars. For 51 years, Estonia was part of the Soviet empire until their independence in 1991. Estonia maintained its ties to the Western tradition with Catholic and Protestant faiths.

On Saturday, August 15th we reached St. Petersburg, Russia and proceeded on a 2-day adventure in this famous Russian city. It is located on the Neva River at the head of the Gulf of Finland on the Baltic Sea. In 1914 the name of the city was changed from Saint Petersburg to Petrograd, in 1924 to Leningrad and in 1991, back to Saint Petersburg. Our tour, on day 1, began at the Peterhof Palace - a series of palaces and gardens laid out on the orders of Peter the Great. These Palaces and gardens are sometimes referred as the "Russian Versailles". The palace along with the city center is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



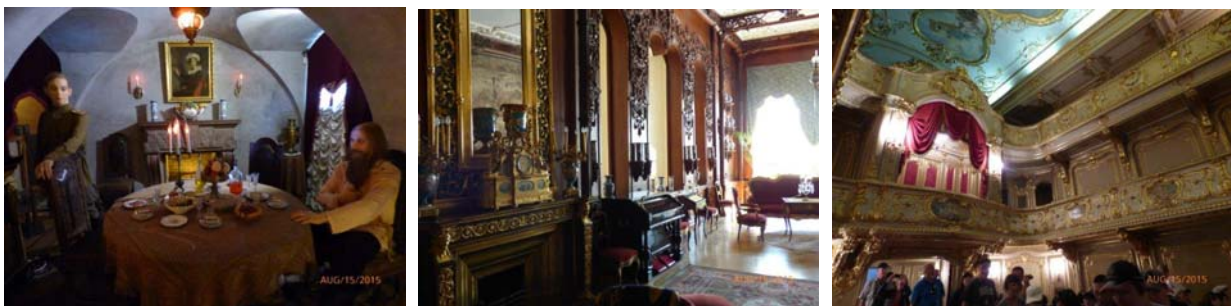
Peterhof Palace and Gardens



Various fountains throughout the Grand Palace Gardens

Our next stop was the Youssoupoff Palace. Prince Felix Yusupov, was a Russian aristocrat, a prince and count, best known for participating in the assassination of Rasputin who was a peasant and self-proclaimed holy man. He had gradually won favor with the Tsar's family through his alleged supernatural powers. His control over the decisions of the family and the Russian ruler himself, put him in a potentially manipulative position and posed a very real threat to their power. Consequently, Rasputin was murdered at the Yusupov Palace on the night of December 16-17, 1916, and his death proved to be an almost greater mystery than his life had been.

The palace houses one of the most beautiful theaters in all of Europe.



Prince Yusupov with Rasputin

Inside one of the palace rooms

Palace Theater

Our next stop was for lunch at a local restaurant; complete with Russian musicians, champagne, stroganoff, and of course, the infamous Russian drink - vodka.



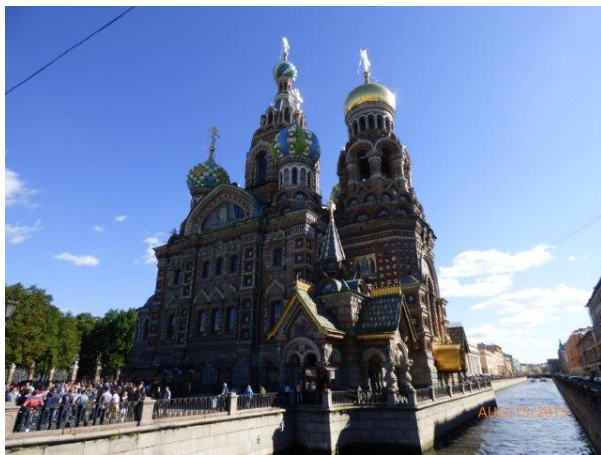
After lunch we toured two cathedrals - St. Isaac's, which dominates the skyline of St. Petersburg. Its gilded cupola can be seen glistening from all over the city; and the Church of the Savior on Spilled Blood – one of the main tourist attractions in all of St. Petersburg.



St Isaac's Cathedral and Monument to Nicholas I



Inside St. Isaac's Cathedral



Church of the Savior on Spilled Blood



On Sunday, August 16th we completed our tour of St. Petersburg with a visit to the Hermitage Museum and the Peter & Paul Fortress. The Hermitage is one of the largest and oldest museums in the world. It

was founded in 1764 by Catherine the Great and has been open to the public since 1852. Its collections, of which only a small part is on permanent display, comprise over three million items, including the largest collection of paintings in the world. The collections occupy a large complex of six historic buildings along Palace Embankment, including the Winter Palace, a former residence of Russian emperors. We spent several hours here and saw only about 10% of its artifacts and treasures, including DaVinci's Madonna.



Hermitage Museum – Winter Palace



Raphael Loggias inside the museum



DaVinci's Madonna



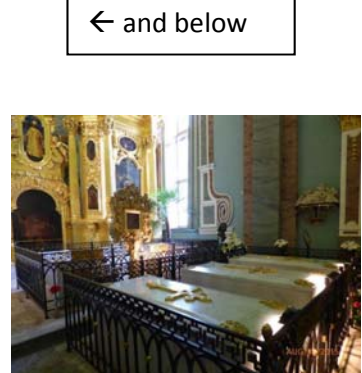
This is a clock



Throne Room

In between visits to the cathedrals we took a canal boat ride on the Neva river. It provided us an opportunity to see and photograph historic sites on both sides of the city.

The Peter & Paul Fortress is the original citadel of St. Petersburg, founded by Peter the Great in 1703.



← and below

After our 2-day tour of St. Petersburg we were back on the ship heading for Helsinki, Finland. The ship berthed around 7:00am and shortly after that we were on our way to Porvoo, the second oldest town in Finland.



The town of Porvoo from the bridge



Devil's Staircase in Porvoo

Later that morning we visited a 100 year old horse breeding farm for a glimpse of the country life in Finland, and a home-cooked lunch.



Lady on left was our farm host

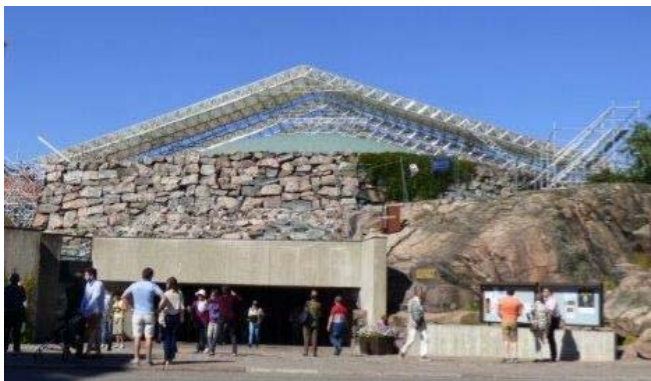


Lunch in her home

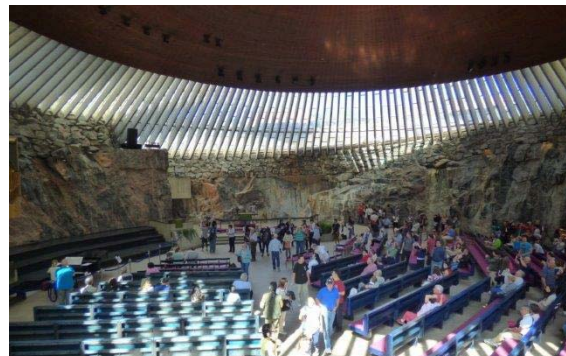


Potatoes, green beans & fish stew

After lunch we headed back to Helsinki to visit the Temppeliaukio Rock Church which is a Lutheran Church built directly into solid rock. It is also known as the Church of the Rock and Rock Church. The interior was excavated and built directly out of solid rock and is bathed in natural light which enters through the skylight surrounding the center copper dome. The church is used frequently as a concert venue due to its excellent acoustics. It was completed in 1969.

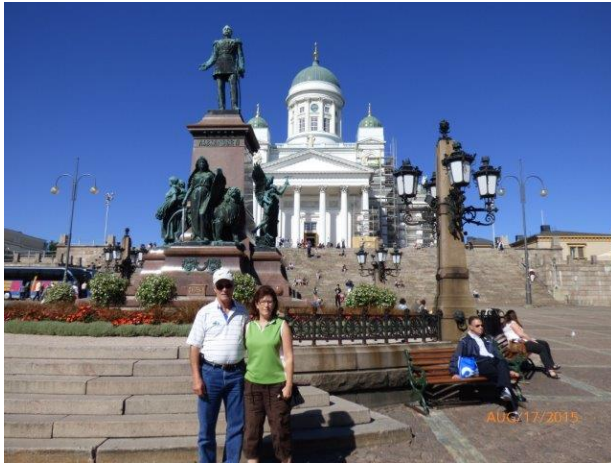


Temppeliaukio Rock Church



Inside the church

Our final stop for the day was at Senate Square in Helsinki. It is the center for arts, culture, religion, politics and education. The four main buildings were designed and built in the early 19th century. We also had a chance to visit an open flea market in the area.



On Tuesday, August 18th the ship docked at Nynashamm, Sweden, a port within 50 miles of the city of Stockholm. A city of nearly a million people, Stockholm is one of the world's most beautiful, clean and orderly metropolitan areas. It is also Sweden's center for arts and culture. We booked a tour to visit the Stockholm Ice Bar. Kept at 23 degrees F all year round, the interior, including the glasses you drink from, is made of pure, clear ice from the Torne River in northern Sweden.



Later that same day we were dropped off at Gamla Stan, the Old Town, one of the largest and best preserved medieval city centers in Europe, and one of the foremost attractions in Stockholm. This is where Stockholm was founded in 1252. Gamla Stan is like a living pedestrian-friendly museum full of sights, attractions, restaurants, cafés, bars and places to shop. The narrow winding cobblestone streets, with their buildings in so many different shades of gold, give Gamla Stan its unique character. We witnessed a military parade and visited the Nobel Museum and the Royal Palace – one of the largest palaces in the world.

This is the only port we had to be “tendered” into the dock. Tendered means we were transported by a smaller boat into the dock, rather than walking onto it.



“Tender” from the ship



Traditional palace military marching guard and band



Nobel Museum where prizes for Peace, Economics, Literature, Chemistry & Physics are awarded



----- Inside the Royal Palace -----

This was our last Port of Call. The following day was a “Day at Sea,” which gave us a chance to relax before our long journey home on Thursday, August 20. Here are a few more memories of the trip:



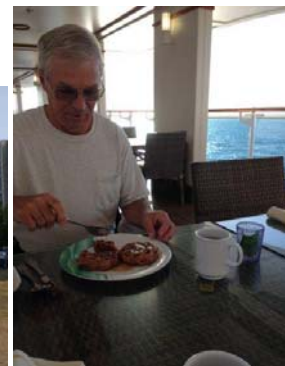
Acrobats on board



Apple Strudel



Teddy Bear in Berlin



Breakfast on board



Windmills near Copenhagen



Polar Explorers at Fram Museum in Oslo



Hanging out on board near sunset



Shopping in Tallin



Beatlemaniacs Show on board



Street in St. Petersburg



Neva River Tower



Peter the Great (Above :->)



Dome in Issac's



Neva river ferry ride



Selfie on river ride

It was a wonderful trip. We arrived home late on Thursday, August 20. Thanks to the captain and crew of the Regal Princess for a job well done. We'll be back! - *Carey & Donna Beamesderfer*