

Nordic Trip, Aboard the Zuiderdam, Holland American Lines

July 1-24, 2017.

July 1. Leave Dulles. Arrive Copenhagen 7:30 a.m. July 2. Left bags at hotel, got coffee at tourist info. Checked in for short nap. Walked pedestrian street next to Palace Hotel.

July 3. Coffee and rolls at restaurant. Train ride to Kronborg Castle. Great train/bus service. Took video of the excerpts from Hamlet. On the way back. walked to Karin Blixen's home. Lovely film about her life, gardens, rooms. Bought a felt hat made locally in honor of one she wore. **Surprise? She was an excellent painter. Did portraits.** Dinner to celebrate Harley and Sadie anniversary. NIMB? Restaurant. Grilled food. Took picture. Walked back. **Action: watch *Out of Africa* and *Babette's Feast* again.**

July 4. Taken to the port in Copenhagen by bus. Were in our rooms by noon. Three adjoining rooms with decks that connected to each other. [Spent less time there than we thought we might. Pretty chilly. But nice to see arrival and launches from there. Enjoyed our first lunch in the Lido. Safety drill with lifeboat instructions. Formal dinner at the aft with the sea to gaze at during the meal. Met our two waiters. Marty (means second son).

July 5. Kiel, Germany. Took the tour of Lubeck, a major city of the Hanseatic League fifteenth and sixteenth century trade network, the NAFTA of its time. Pre-colonial, pre-nationalism era. City-states. Saw early hospitals, homeless shelters. The Marzipan cake at the historical Niederegger Café was delicious. Not too sweet. Mostly almond paste and whipped cream. Served with good hot coffee and cream. **Surprise: more social services long ago than I had imagined. The Hanseatic League seems like a bit of a golden age before the extended religious wars of the 16th and 17th centuries.**

Literary note: Thomas Mann was born in this city. Brother Henry Mann was also a writer. TM's first novel was about his merchant family. Made him very unpopular – until he became famous and made his city more famous also. A familiar story. **Action. Find and read that first novel. Download and watch *The Blue Angel* with Marlene Dietrich.**

July 6. At sea.

July 7. Tallinn, Estonia. Walked off the boat early in the morning. Walked through the city on our own. Looked at real icons in an Antik Store. They sell for about \$500-\$1,000, depending on quality. Estonia sells them to tourists after buying them from individual Russian families who used to have altars in their homes in the right-hand corner of the house. Now it is illegal for old icons to leave Russia. The market in the square of this city was a fun place to shop. I got a grey wool top made of wool. Sadie got a bright blue linen top. Stuart bought a belt. **Surprise: this was one of our favorite stops. No guide but lots of tourist services very close to the dock. Beautiful Old Town. Friendly people.**

July 8. St. Petersburg, Russia. Long lines at immigration. Grim people. We took a two-day tour of the highlights. First: The Hermitage. Young woman guide was so stressed by counting us constantly and keeping us together. It felt like she was under great pressure to control our experience. She seemed afraid of losing her job. The Hermitage and the Catherine Palace in Pushkin were like cattle cars. Hundreds of tourists all herded past the same treasures Rembrandt's *The Prodigal Son*, many other works of the great masters. People got lost from each other and from the group. The palace was very ornate. Reminded me of Trump's style of gold everywhere and heavy draperies. The czarist period of Russia also reminded me of current Russia ruled by oligarchy. The one percent. So sad that we are so close to the same kind of government in our country. **Sadly, this insight was not a surprise, but it was visceral when gazing upon all the czarist era splendor and hearing about all the plots used by both kings and queens to stay in power. Killing husbands, sons, etc., in order to stay in power was quite common. Catherine the Great was one of the worst. Since she invited Mennonites to Russia, and since we all had just heard Ben Goossen's talk on the history of Russian Mennonites, and were reading his book *Chosen Nation*, this way of looking at Catherine was even more interesting/troubling.**

All through the trip, the impact of World War II ("the darkest hour of Russian history" when 22 million people were killed, for example] on the whole region was an underlying theme. Our new awareness of Mennonite complicity with Nazism then and the rising of oligarchy all around the world now [the G20 Meeting was taking place in Hamburg the day after we left that same region] and Mennonite support of Donald Trump now was never far from our minds. We watched MSNBC and had New York Times news summaries available all the time.

What we didn't have, however, was wifi. The ship's internet service was a joke. We paid \$100 for service and expected it to be slow. What we didn't expect was that it wouldn't even download email or allow texts to go through. Nearly worthless.

July 9 was the second day of our tour. This time George was our guide. He was more experienced and courageous than our flustered young woman from the day before. He didn't criticize his government directly, but he seemed quite world-weary. Here is his description of how things have changed in his lifetime: "In the Soviet era, people had money but nothing to buy (stores were empty). Now the stores are full, but 80 percent of the people "have no money." He told us a number of jokes: "Russian to his doctor: if I go to the supermarket every day to buy Vodka, am I a shopaholic?"

We toured the Church of the Spilled Blood, named because Czar Alexander II (?) was assassinated right in the church. Stunning mosaics both inside and outside. Millions of tiny tiles make up the beautiful, colorful, designs.

Then we went to Peterhof. (Peter the Great's summer palace). Lovely gardens, fountains, flowers. Amazing interiors and exteriors. My favorite photo was taken when we walked through a special fountain at 3 p.m. The camera caught the droplets in the air and a purple umbrella at a 45 degree angle. Felt like an impressionist painting. We then walked to the water and took a hovercraft ride back to our boat. Sunny, warm, stimulating day.

Writer's note: Pushkin seems to survive all the political extremes of Russian history since his time. Perhaps because he uses mythology and is considered a poet of childhood?? Unlike Dostoevsky and Tolstoy and definitely Solzhenitzin, he has never been viewed as an enemy of the state. Fierce pride. In Russian writers today. **Action: Read *War and Peace*, *The Brothers Karamazov*.**

July 10 Helsinki

City tour and Sibelius concert. This was one of the tour highlights for Stuart and me. Beautiful Lutheran Church (Lutheranism is the state church of all the Scandinavian countries), the Temppeliaukion Kirkko, blasted from rock and designed as a sanctuary-in-the-round, with copper ceiling and contemporary styling. Sibelius Park contains a monument to the composer made out of thousands of pipes.

We have CDs of the musicians and Sibelius concert music. I made a video of the last segment of the program, "Finlandia." Will put it up on YouTube. We watched images of the sea and of beautiful Finland, especially the Northern Lights, as we listened. The MC was excellent. "Tell American conductors not to take this section too fast." And "when you want to show the most emotion, don't get loud. Get very soft, the way this familiar hymn section of Finlandia should be played."

July 11, Stockholm Sweden

Our tour was mostly a bus ride with the guide pointing out various sites and then an extended visit to the Vasa Museum. The Vasa was a version of the Titanic story. A warship that sank in 1628 without even leaving the harbor. Full of artifacts preserved by sea water. Pulled up in 1960. A great event televised throughout the world.

July 12 Stockholm, Day 2, Drottningholm Palace and Gardens. This is the place where the King and Queen live. Public areas and private areas. Relatively shabby. J But with lovely gardens. Lots of portraits of generals, royalty, etc. The first Facebook. Exchanging portraits was a thing.

July 13 AT SEA. GALA EVENING CELEBRATING HARLEY AND SADIE'S ANNIVERSARY. VIDEO ON YOUTUBE.

July 14, Bastille Day. Docked at Rostock, Germany (instead of Warnemünde), (former EAST Germany). Donald Trump visiting France as new revelations about his campaign ties to Russia make headlines at home.

We took a coach to Wismar, Germany. Had Ulf as our guide. PhD in history who works for a publisher. Lovely Unesco World Heritage Site. Churches –St. Mary's, St. George, and St. Nicholas, now being restored after bombings in WWII. Amazing renovation of the entire city since the end of the Soviet Union in 1990. From boring grey buildings, poorly made, have come carefully restored fronts and modernized interiors. People buy the shell for \$50,000 or less and then have to spend at least \$150,000 to make it modern. Sounded very familiar. J We took a picture to send to Kate and Nik about how to become poor: buy an old house and renovate it.

July 15, back to Copenhagen. We stayed on board the ship, reading, writing, exercising, and -- of course -- eating and drinking.