

Hotel Maxim in the town of Oradea, Romania Sunday 21 June. As we arose the rain was coming down in stair-rods, we contemplated a further night in the hotel. We made a decision to wait 'til late morning to see if it brightened up, the rain eased and finally stopped. Meanwhile we researched accommodation and with fingers crossed reserved an apartment in the capital city of Budapest in Hungary. By 11:45 am we had loaded the bike, and just in case, put on our wet weather gear; we were away to the tenth country on this leg of our round the world trip, the currency there the Forint.

Within a few kilometres we had arrived at the Hungarian border, it must have taken at least 2 minutes to cross over into the country. The route took us along a good toll motorway, the distance to Budapest just over 265 km, taking us around 4 hours including a lunch break. The rain clouds looked ominous but we had only a few drops land on us. The landscape in Hungary was flat and fertile, mile after mile either side of the road covered with crops for acres as far as the eye could see. Initially hardly any traffic, towards mid-afternoon it increased, the cars whizzing past us.

The instructions on how to find our digs arrived by e-mail after we had vacated Hotel Maxim, hence with perseverance it took around an hour of searching to find the reception of Trendy Deluxe Apartments. We were soon settled in, the bike safely tucked away in the underground car park. This was to be a two night stay, the first since Zagreb in Croatia. We found a great café bar not more than a few metres from our apartment and spent the afternoon chilling out and enjoying the warm sun whilst watching the world go by. We were both feeling the strain of being on the move every day and so were looking forward to the break. After an early night we spent the next day catching up on emails etc.

Tuesday 23 June, we opted to buy tickets for the "Hop on, Hop off" Budapest City Tour. There were three options available, a mix and match of the 'red line', 'yellow line' on open topped buses, and the 'blue line' river trip. Unfortunately the weather turned grey as the clouds gathered above us, rain was forecast. We hopped on and off at several stops and seemed to do more walking than being transported, The city is split in two by the wide eddying Danube River, on the west side is Buda whilst on the east bank lies Pest. We walked over the Chain Bridge, busy with cars, bicycles and people scurrying to and fro. We strolled around the neoclassical style Royal Palace which has witnessed wars and occupation. The Turks occupied it as did the Habsburgs; it was destroyed three times and then rebuilt, each time in the architectural style of the age. We also visited the largest building in the country, The Parliament, it is the permanent site of the national assembly and has 691 rooms. St Stephen's Crown, the sceptre, orb and Renaissance sword are guarded there.

Budapest is cited as being one of the most beautiful cities in Europe, a huge World Heritage Site. The accolade is richly deserved, the architecture is second to none, bronze sculptures and statues by the score can be seen everywhere. The city attracts around four and a half million visitors a year, thankfully for us, not all at the same time. We loved the hustle and bustle so much so that we reserved our apartment for a third night. Lots of bars, cafés and restaurants

serving delicious Hungarian food. Would thoroughly recommend a visit, its definitely a place worth returning to, just to see all the attractions that we missed out on this time.

We walked along the promenade to see the cast iron 'Shoes on the Banks of the Danube' – the sculpted shoes are there as a memorial to honour the Jews who were murdered by fascist militiamen during World War II. The Jews were ordered to take off their shoes before being shot at the edge of the Danube, their bodies carried away by the water.

The rain now quite persistent we returned to our apartment. We missed out on many fabulous sights but wouldn't have been much fun getting soaked.

Wednesday 24 June. As we exited the city en-route to Slovakia, we stopped to take in Heroes Square. Between the pillars of the colonnade were bronze statues of figures from Hungarian history; the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is also located in front of the monument. In the centre is the Millennium Memorial a 36 metre high column – topped by a statue of the Archangel Gabriel.

The distance to the border didn't take too long, there were no guards or post into Slovakia. The weather was parky, we stopped to don our wet weather gear. We experienced cold wet weather as we travelled through the mountains, Would have enjoyed the forest ride had the heavens not opened. We met many logging trucks along our route.

Our overnight accommodation was in the pretty city of Poprad in northern Slovakia at the foot of the High Tatra Mountains. Poprad is famous for its picturesque historic centre and as a holiday resort which, in the summer attracts visitors due to the many hiking routes and during the winter those wishing to ski the slopes. On our way next day, we noted that large areas of the lower slopes were stripped of the pine forests.

We were now into the final seven days of our trip and heading for the twelfth country of this tour - Poland. Our flights home on Thursday 2 July, hence we had a week to fit in two attractions that we had planned on visiting; together with finding a safe place for the black beauty to rest up before the last leg home, plus arranging to have new panniers and rack fitted on the bike. We thought this could take some time.

We wanted to visit the UNESCO world heritage salt mines so had reserved accommodation at the luxury Hotel Lenart, just a fifteen minute walk away. We had an early dry start from Poprad and crossed the border into Poland in no time, arriving in Wieliczka, southern Poland on the outskirts of Krakow around 1:30 pm. Whilst waiting for access to our room we popped into the on-site supermarket to see if they had an ATM, luckily they did. We both drew out some "Zloty", our final and tenth currency on this trip.

As soon as we had settled into our room we walked to the mines, the weather hot but bearable. We bought our tickets and waited for the call to descend into the depths. Nine centuries of

mining produced 200 km of tunnels together with 2,040 caverns of varying sizes. The tourist route starting at 64 metres down and included 20 chambers ending at 135 metres. Taking around 3 hours, our knowledgeable English speaking guide led the way down a spiral wooden staircase of 380 steps to the first level. Our stunning tour included an underground town complete with a lake lit by subdued lighting, art gallery and St Kinga Chapel, statues and friezes depicted many scenes. There was even a restaurant; the huge chambers are breathtaking with numerous beautiful chandeliers made from salt. The ascent to the surface was interesting to say the least, around 8 people crammed into an unlit fretwork metal cage, clanking and grinding we eventually emerged on the surface .

Next day and we were on the road early once again, I had organised free entry tickets into Auschwitz 1 Concentration Camp and Birkenau. It was astonishing how many coach loads of visitors were there from numerous countries. The grizzly sites a stark reminder of the Holocaust and the brutality of the German Nazi regime, murdering in total, I understand to be 11 million, which included 6 million Jews. At Birkenau the extent of the hundreds of prison huts extended over a huge area, until you have visited it is hard to imagine the horror. A large number of the huts had just the chimney stacks remaining. Was quite a solemn visit.

We had reserved our accommodation for three nights on the outskirts of Wroclaw, and spent the next day organising new panniers and storage. Had we known that it would have been so easy to sort, we could have flown home five days earlier.

We moved into the city centre on Monday 29 June. Our hotel – Wroclaw Centrum was chosen as it was close to the restaurants etc., also had safe underground garaging for the bike, Tuesday was spent cleaning off the grime of the last five plus weeks. I was halted in my tracks, once again, with a bout of food poisoning, so was out of action next day. Meantime Keith rode the bike to its resting place for the next twelve weeks.

Our final day in Wroclaw, the weather a perfect 29°C. The taxi booked for 7:30 am on Thursday, emails etc. caught up, we then opted for a brief afternoon tour of the city in an 8 seater golf buggy type vehicle. With earphones in place to translate the details of the sights into English, our electric buggy took to the streets, a comprehensive tour ensued during which we soaked up the fascinating history and discovered some of the central city's cultural and architectural treasures.

The final leg of our round the world tour begins on 24 September.

Have a great day

Ellen