

Baltic Cruise – June 2017

Friday 2 June 2017 - Copenhagen



Downtown



Passing the old Stock Exchange

Got as far as Arundel when we had to turn back and swap the Frelander for the Discovery as there was a smell of burning rubber – new alternator needed.

The Danes have a special word "Hugge" meaning a cozy feeling of togetherness and maybe that's why Denmark is one of the happiest countries in the world. The city was founded by Bishop Absalon in 1160/67 and coincidentally our first night is being spent in the Hotel Absalon. First impressions of our journey to the hotel from the airport was that the scenery was flat and uninteresting. Our hotel looked fine but outside the entrance there were a couple of broken vodka bottles and the pavements were littered with cigarette ends and rubbish, not what I was expecting.



Numerous bars and cafés line the waterways



Passing the Palace grounds

Very disappointed with Red Bus Tour, the commentary was poor and difficult to hear. Things looked up when we took a boat trip, that is apart from Rick dropping off to sleep all the time. When he did eventually wake up the sun came out. During 1728 -1795 most of the medieval parts of the town were destroyed by fire.

There are more bikes than people, 5 bikes for every 4 persons, cycling being the first choice of transport for 50% of commuters. Free high speed internet is found nearly everywhere. We didn't realize that they use the Krone and not the Euro, it's about 7 Krone to the £. They take cards nearly everywhere as it's almost a cashless society.



Watched Dimbleby on “Question Time” with May and Corbyn. Very worried about the possibility of Labour winning. He's offering free University tuition and to top that he's saying he'll sort out the student debt. If were younger I would also want to believe in the "Money Tree".

The food is quite expensive, we ordered tortillas with chicken (cockerel) but the portion was so large that we didn't need a main course. Unlimited food and drink as from tomorrow.

Saturday 3 June



Hotel Absalon



One of the many bars near our hotel

Very good breakfast. Turned out we were staying in one of the roughest areas that used to be the red light district which explains the erotic clubs all around us. Perhaps that's why there was so much rubbish by us when Denmark is known as a clean country. Last night we saw quite a few hard drinking tramps and what looked like Bulgarians and migrants hanging around. The taxi driver said they can get by living out of the bins. Our lasting impression of Copenhagen is that they are friendly, very European and like to have good quality food and consumer goods. Oh, and they drink a lot of coffee!



So impressed with the Norwegian embarking process, it knocks spots off all the other cruise lines we have been on. We last cruised with Norwegian about eighteen months ago and found the dining options suited us well but this time we made sure that we also had the drinks package. We are really in the holiday spirit so we started as we mean to go on by working out way through the Mojito menu. Had one of the best ever meals at Le Bistro and finished off the evening listening to some American guys playing rock on pianos and drums. Lots of Americans on board in fact many nationalities but few Brits.



Sunday 4 June
Warnemunde Germany



Rostock



Warnemunde

Heavy rain so we took the train to Rostock for two euros each way. It was a twenty-five minute journey but once we got there it was too wet to go into town. Had a coffee and caught up with the dreadful news of the terrorist attacks on London Bridge and Borough Market.



Warnemunde is a busy cruise terminal with us and another cruise ship docked today and ferries and boats aplenty. It stopped raining about 4pm and the sun came out. We thought it was going to be a one road town to the beach and lighthouses but it was quite a big, busy, very pretty town. It was absolutely packed with tourists and locals. The wide sandy beach is especially good for kite and windsurfing. The whole place was buzzing with shops and cafes either side of the river.



Back on the boat we had a few sundowners, want to make use of our drinks package but don't know how long we will be able to keep up this pace. In fact the sun didn't go down until about 21.45 by which time we were enjoying our Brazilian supper in the Moderno restaurant. Very nice but for big meat eaters.

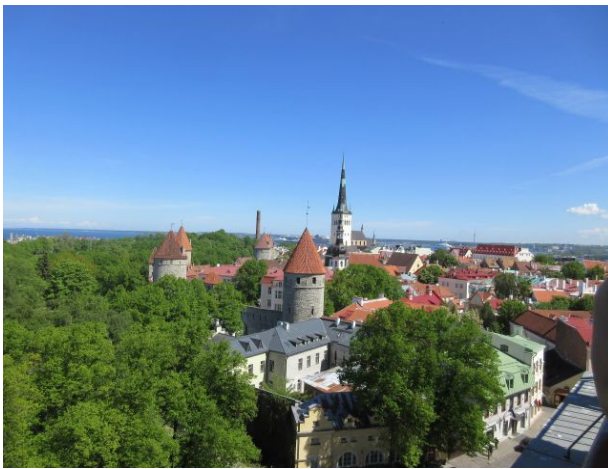


Monday 5 June At Sea

Clocks have gone forward by one hour. Cruising has changed so much since our first one about 11 years ago. I remember then just seeing a sea of grey hair and mobility scooters but now it is enjoyed by all ages, there are even lots of children and babies on board. They have a special room for teenage discos and huge water slides and rock climbing activities.

It's been a bit chilly so far but today we found a sheltered spot where I could strip down to my bathing costume and enjoy the sun. A day at sea is a day off and we probably needed it as Rick kept falling asleep. I think the cocktails are a bit too watered down with all the ice, much better value is beer or wine. Dinner show at Cirque Dreams and Steams where we chatted to a couple of ladies who fled Cuba for Miami and definitely don't want to go back.

Tuesday 6 June Tallinn, Estonia. Sunrise 4.11. Sunset 22.33. Lovely sunny day



Tallinn was brilliant. It's a very busy passenger port and half the Estonian GDP is created in this the capital of Estonia. Being the birthplace of Skype it's sometimes known as the Silicone Valley of Europe and it's going to be the EU's IT headquarters to NATO's Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence.



Tallinn is known as the Singing Nation and the Estonian Song Festival is one of the largest choral events in the world. National songs and hymns were forbidden during Soviet occupation. From 1987 until independence in 1991 mass demonstrations featuring spontaneous singing took place. The fortified city wasn't like the French medieval cities we are used to, it was colourful, quite big but very relaxed.



We climbed round and round about 60 metres up the spire. Sticking . I was terrified and we were both breathless.

Back on the boat Rick said that the cocktails are too watered down so he was going to sort it. A few more watery cocktails and a glass of wine later we found ourselves enjoying a spa. Supper in the Italian restaurant but after one cocktail too many I found I couldn't remember much about it. Afterwards we somehow managed to listen to someone covering Adele.

Wednesday 7 June

St Petersburg, Russia Sunrise 3.41. Sunset



The Hermitage Museum -The Winter Palace

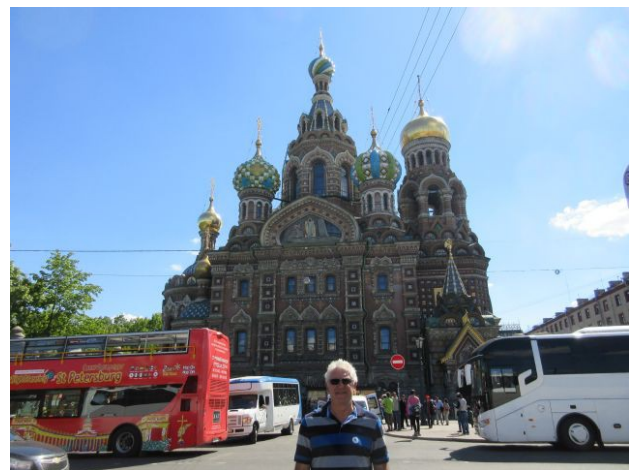


Gold everywhere



It must be about twenty years ago that we last visited St Petersburg on an IPC Conference. Our memories are that there were no shops and during the interval at the Ballet and Opera there was just a decorating table with a few Mars Bars spread out. On the last day we asked our guide to take us to a local restaurant where we were served a lot of dumplings in a thin gravy and they didn't have any red wine only red Martini.

We had to get up at 5.15 to go through customs and join the two day tour that cost £739.72. You had to join a government tour if you didn't want to get a visa yourself.



We visited the Peter & Paul Cathedral where we saw the tombs of all Imperial Russian rulers including Peter the Great, Catherine the Great and the last Russian monarch Nicholas II. Rick's outside the Church of the Savior on Blood.

Our guide said that the weather in St Petersburg is usually terrible with only approximately 70 days of sunshine a year, they actually have a problem with Rickets. We were so very lucky with sunshine all day and people were stripping off and sunbathing by the river and in the parks.

Met a lovely Chilean couple, she is a Paediatrician and he is an Engineer who works for a forestry company that exports plywood to countries all over the world including B & Q and Travis Perkins.

After dinner in the Tropicana we listened to Raegar in concert, a bit of country and a bit of Rock.

Thursday 8 June

Up at 5.15 again. - Election Day
Sunny again, how lucky is that!



Catherine's Palace in Pushkin has been completely restored after being wrecked during the war. I remember visiting this palace before but the Amber Room has since been restored. You can't take photos of it but it's spectacular.



The Grand Peterhof Palace is known as the most brilliant of all the summer residences of the Russian Tsars. The layout of the 300-acre park and spectacular fountains was designed by Peter

himself. The Grand Cascade consists of three waterfalls, an avenue of 64 fountains and 37 gilded statues. It was amazing, really amazing, so much gold and wonderful gardens.

Met a lady in the lift who husband spent the day in St Petersburg hospital - not to be recommended. Joined an Australian couple for a Beatles Quiz. At home in Adelaide someone put a note through their home door asking if they would like to sell it. They weren't thinking of selling but it was a good price and everything just fell into place. They are fond of Malaysia and a friend of a friend offered to rent them his apartment in Pedang. It's a lovely apartment overlooking the sea and only costs about £4 a week to rent and about £1 a week for services. Food there is cheap , it's a great lifestyle and they are not going to bother to buy another house. Dined in the excellent Ocean Blue seafood restaurant .

Friday 9 June Helsinki

Been awake most of the night watching the results come in. Disastrous result for Teresa May but at least we've got rid of nasty Alex Salmon and moaner Nick Clegg for a while. Corbyn did what he does best, rallying like a student. It's offering free university fees that did it, if I was young I would have voted Labour because of that even though we know its not affordable. May's manifesto was very disappointing, nothing to look forward to, actually completely ridiculous. How was she possibly going to get votes by replacing free school lunches with breakfast and asking people to pay more for their care in old age.



Couldn't get very excited about Helsinki. Did the usual Bus Stop Tour but there wasn't much to see. However, there was a very good market by the waterfront.



Saturday June 10 – Nynashamn, Sweden for Stockholm

We hadn't booked a trip or done any homework so found ourselves travelling for an hour by train from the port to Stockholm. As we entered Stockholm we were surprised how very big it was. A young man (now I do sound old) sitting opposite on the the train took pity on us and escorted us to the underground where our ticket took us one stop to the old city centre. What a lovely surprise, it's a wonderful city.



Rick used this toilet

A very narrow street



Sunday 11 June – At Sea



Most of the day spent catching up with election news but in between managed to visit the Ice Bar where we met a very drunk Australian. Good fun but a bit of gimmick.



Monday 12 June – Copenhagen & Home

Sometime during the St Petersburg excursions a combination of tiredness (those 5.15am starts) and an overdose of the drinks package caused me to lose interest and enthusiasm for keeping up my diary. I started to get all those Russian palaces and churches muddled up and didn't do enough research on Helsinki and Stockholm. We were also overdosed with pre-election, election and post election news, what a fascinating political time we are in. Anyway back to the cruise, we loved it !