

Eastern Europe Part 7: Germany – East and West

Eastern Europe

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September 22, 2008

Dateline: Regensburg, Germany

Latitude at Regensburg 49.01 degrees North, Longitude 12.05 degrees East

Today we took a four hour train trip from Prague to Regensburg, Germany for our final leg of exploration behind the former Iron Curtain in the former East Germany. There didn't seem to be a lot of lingering Communist era structures (for which we and the Germans should be thankful) along our route. We weren't sure if they didn't build them or the Germans tore them down after the collapse of Communism. The day was chilly and overcast, but we enjoyed a nice snooze and some quiet reading (and GAT writing) time as we rolled across prosperous looking farms and woodland to find ourselves once again in a city on the Danube (or the Donau as the Germans call it). We had reservations at the Hotel Maximilian and hopped in a cab as soon as we arrived to be taken there. Much to our chagrin, the cabbie pointed to it, sitting there just across the street. However, since our bags were already loaded in the cab, we asked him to take us any way and gave him a fare commensurate with a more distant destination.



Old City Walls of Regensburg

We set out on a self-guided walking tour in search of lunch just as the skies opened up, so we pretty much ruled out our original idea of eating outdoors in a picturesque town square. Regensburg is a lovely old city – rain or shine- in south eastern Germany in the state of Bavaria. Bavaria was at one time an independent kingdom, as were most of the German states, prior to the formation of a “Reich” in 1871 formed by Otto von Bismarck and the King of Prussia. (A note on Reichs – the word translates as “kingdom” or “empire” in German). Bismarck was the Prime Minister of Prussia, which was where most of Poland is today. This was actually the Second Reich. The First Reich (although it wasn’t called that at the time, because, one assumes, they didn’t have any idea other reichs were going to be coming along) was in the 1700’s when the assorted German states were brought together under Frederick the Great (a Prussian King). Things were going along pretty well until they tangled with Napoleon and came out on the short end of the stick several times until 1815, when Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo (now in modern day Belgium) setting the stage for the Second Reich.

Over the years of battles in the Napoleonic Wars, a sense of German unity and nationalism developed and Germans got to be rather fond of this war business and proved to be disturbingly good at it. So when Bismarck came along with this New Reich idea, the Germans were all for it and the German empire was born. The good news for the Germans, was that the individual kingdoms were no longer fighting among themselves. The bad

news for the Germans, not to mention the rest of the world, was they would be fighting against everyone else—and thus WWI unfolded, resulting in a disastrous defeat for Germany and the end of that reich. This defeat, of course, set the stage for Hitler to introduce the Third Reich and we all know how badly that turned out.



The Regensburg
Town Square

Regensburg (called Ratisbon in German) is known as the city of churches and like every other place we visited, had been unwilling hosts to both the Celts and the Romans, but this was more of an encampment than a town so the elaborate ruins we had seen elsewhere were largely absent. The city was not damaged in WWII since it was not invaded by any Allied armies and the Communists mostly left it alone. The city's most important role was in the Middle Ages when it was a commercial and cultural center under the Holy Roman Empire. The main sight in Regensburg is the Dom (Church) of St. Peter, It is reputed to have a statue of the Devil's grandmother, but we'll have to save that for a future visit. I only saw the picture of it in which the devil looks downright cherubic. Well, okay he does have a smirk on his face, but Granny seems woefully miscast. It looks like she has a WWII era helmet on her head and has one hand slapped to her face as if saying "Oy Vey". And then there's the angel pulling Jesus out of a sandcastle and tearing its turrets loose. It makes you wonder what was in the mead they drank back in those days. The Dom is a massive cathedral built between 1250 and 1525 in the Gothic style, with a number of additions over the centuries, as is the case

with most cathedrals we've encountered.



The Regensburg
Rathaus (City
Hall)

We also walked through the Rathausplatz where the old 15th Century town hall stands. The town hall in Germany is called the Rathaus and the platz is the town hall square or plaza. We were sorry we had already had lunch because we stopped by to see the famous Wurstkuche (Sausage Kitchen) which is roughly the medieval equivalent of a hot dog stand on the banks of the Danube, They have been selling sausages and locally brewed beer here since the 12th Century in the same location. Nearby is the Steinerne Brucke, which translates as Old Stone Bridge and dates back to the 12th Century. We also walked to see a palace called the Schloss Thurn und Taxis (Schloss being the German word for castle and "Thurn und Taxis is a family name of ancient dukes.(No connection to taxi cabs that we could ascertain. The palace also housed a Gothic cloister, chapel and library. The rain continued and intensified so we called a halt to our touring, but not as it turned out to our adventures.



A Trip to DHL to Lighten Our Load

Gary and Stu concluded that we had too much stuff to be hauling around Germany for a week and decided to ship a box home. We learned there was a DHL service center adjacent to the train station across the street and we were able to mooch a box and tape from the hotel. It was a largish box so we put in all sorts of stuff we didn't need anymore, including several pounds of guide books. In an act of sartorial rebellion, Stu and Gary threw in their sports coats which they had to wear to a couple of dinners on the river boat. Unfortunately, there was so much stuff it was too heavy for one person to carry and too awkward for two. And so we borrowed the luggage trolley from the hotel bellman and trundled the box across the street – actually more of a boulevard than a street – it was 3 lanes in each direction separated by landscaped medians. By this time we were trotting/jogging across the street with the cobblestones rumbling beneath the trolley wheels since we learned that DHL closed at 6:00 p.m. and it was 5:45.

We made it at 5:55, but alas our box was too heavy at the weigh-in and so we decided to open it and take out some of the smaller heavier things (like books) Stu sat down to fill out the paperwork and Gary got busy with his Swiss Army knife while I bought a new roll of tape. Unfortunately, Stu's custom made silk sports coat with the custom made silk lining just happened to be on top and when we got the box open we saw that the lining had been perforated (or maybe slashed is a better

word – Gary was in a hurry) in about half a dozen places. Well we all had a brief semi-hysterical laugh over this, but the clock was still ticking so we slapped the new tape on and weighed in – just under the limit. We were still laughing as we retraced our steps back to the hotel to turn in the trolley and order up the Stoli. You know you have a good friend when you can poke his new coat full of holes and he's still your friend.

September 23, 2008

Dateline: Munich, Germany

Latitude at Munich 48.08 degrees North, Longitude 11.34 degrees East



A Gat to the
Old City –
Munich

Today, we again boarded the train, this time to travel into the former West Germany, to make our way to Munich and the Oktoberfest. Munich sits on the Isar River (not a major waterway), just north of the Alps, which are visible in the distance when the weather is fair, but this did not happen while we were there. Munich is an ancient city, most famous for beer and those leather shorts called *lederhosen*. They had beer halls here before there even was a town here, dating



Carousel at
Oktoberfest

back to the 1300's. Gary and I have friends, Klaus and Inge, whom we met on the QE2 Cruise in 2006, who live in Munich and they offered to take us to the Oktoberfest. We splurged on our hotel for the two days we are to be here with reservations at the Bayerischerhof (which translates as the Bavarian House) Hotel. It is 165 years old, and has been privately owned and managed for 4 generations. It is located right in the heart of the old city and is a perfect base for exploring. The rooms there were pretty pricey, but this was before the big Wall Street implosion, so we were pretty much in big spender mode, even with the really lop-sided



An Open Air
Market in Old
Munich

exchange rate, since this was a once-in-a lifetime experience. Klaus and Inge had a welcoming gift for us including Oktoberfest steins and big gingerbread cookies cut in the shape of a heart. They are called *lebkuchenherzen* (literal translation is gingerbread heart). They have decorative ribbons attached and are worn as adornment at the Oktoberfest

– they make better adornment than sustenance since they are baked to the very well done stage – *i.e.*, the approximate hardness of a Pyrex pie plate.

We were in search of a light lunch and had a fantastic bowl of soup at the hotel. We know it must have been fantastic since the price certainly was at \$24 per bowl, and then there was the wine. Our friends from Munich met us at the hotel, all dressed for Oktoberfest, he in lederhosen (translates as “leather britches”) and she in peasant blouse, apron and skirt. We thought they had just dressed up for us, but once we got to Oktoberfest, we realized that the lederhosen and dirndl skirts far outnumbered the blue jeans.



The Paulaner
Beer Hall
“Tent”

Oktoberfest originated in Munich at the meadow called Theresienwiese. The original event was a betrothal celebration for Princess Theresa from a noble German family and Bavarian Crown Prince Ludwig in 1810 and it involved a horse race. Everyone had so much fun, they decided to keep it going and eventually the beer drinking got to be the essence of the party and the *uber biergarten* (that is the ultimate beer garden) was born. Its hallmark is lots of boisterous strangers from around the world becoming new best friends in a matter of hours. Oktoberfest lasts for 16 days, beginning with a 7,000 person



Pualaner on
Draft

parade. Today there are 12 tents holding 6 to 10 thousand people each, plus countless thousands on the midway and the farm exhibits (Called the *Landwirtschafts Fest*) which is very much like our state fairs. All beer served is German beer, specifically Bavarian beer. Bavaria boasts more than one-sixth of the world's breweries, each with their own beer wagon and draft horses (Budweiser copied them). In addition to tents, there are food stands, shooting galleries, thrill rides, and calliope music. While there are plenty of "oompah" bands, most tents are actually featuring American golden oldies – everything from Elvis



Hofbrau Draft
Horses

to Martha and the Vandellas. The real hoot is when the singers translate the lyrics into German. Supposedly 6 million people attend Oktoberfest and consume 5 million gallons of beer – the 6 million includes small children so you know many people are drinking more than a gallon. In Munich, they heartily

embrace the words of Ben Franklin: “Beer is proof that God loves us and wants us to prosper”.

So you may wonder why Oktoberfest starts in September – The short answer is because it’s too cold to start later and it could put a damper on the beer drinking. In the spirit of Oktoberfest I tried a stein of my own since our hosts and the beer connoisseurs (Gary, Stu and Sharon) proclaimed the beer to be *wunderbar*, but I have to confess it was not sufficiently so to make me convert. Having said that, it did taste wonderful compared to the wine. I think they serve bad wine on purpose to make you drink more beer. All beer is served in glass mugs, or steins as they call them – plastic is strictly *verboten* as far as this particular liquid national treasure is concerned.



The Main Gate
of Oktoberfest

We entered the fair grounds under a huge arch with a “*Willkommen*” (welcome) on one side and “*Auf Wiedersehen*” (goodbye) on the other. We strolled the midway full of laughter, music and neon, and visited several beer tents to sample the local brew. We stopped at the Hofbrau Haus, where suspended from the ceiling is a giant Cupid like figure with a Harp, but whose features are more Cabbage Patch than celestial. It was festooned with female lingerie, particularly brassieres launched slingshot style with their own elastic toward the Cupid with the hopes of sticking a landing. As I understand it, if your bra stays



Inside the
Lowenbrau
“Tent”

you will be lucky at love (as opposed to drinking too much beer and just getting lucky). I am pleased to report that all bras in our party stayed firmly in place in this tent (and all other tents for that matter). We also stopped at the Augustiner Tent where we sampled their brew and had a local treat of *bier radi*, (beer radishes) which look like giant fat white carrots, but are sliced paper thin and salted and served up with beer. And of course the salt increases the thirst, so it's a vicious cycle, but it's all good. We admired the animated Lowenbrau Lion, who is not only about twenty feet high, but also talks and moves his head, taking the



The Lowenbrau
Lion

occasional swig of beer from a giant mug. In the late afternoon we settled at our own table at

Armbrusterschutzenszelt (translates as the Bow and Arrow Tent) owned by the Paulaner Brewery. We were awed by the waitresses who can carry 12 to 16 full steins at a time. They are sturdy, but not big women, but I must say that after seeing them haul the beer around, you wouldn't want to arm wrestle one of them. Beer is kept outside to keep it cold so there is a whole lot of hauling going on. While there is lots of beer consumed, there is no violence, probably due to the presence lots of undercover people, who not only keep the patrons under



A Beer Tent
Waitress with
Half a Load of
Beer

control, they also keep the beer mugs from leaving the beer halls with those same patrons. We did see a lot of happy people, pledging vows of eternal friendship and the occasional blubbering drunk bear-hugging a friend and mumbling incoherent words, but they seemed to be very “kumbaya” event as best we could tell. The festivities are punctuated by the occasional toast of “*Prost*” which translates as “Cheers”. There was also the occasional strange battle cry (or in this case a drinking cry) that sounds something like “Wicky Wocky- Wicky Wocky – oy, oy oy.” I asked Klaus for a translation, but it seems there is not one – it must be something along the lines of Yale’s “boola boola” fight song in that it’s not meant to have meaning. The festivities ended at 11:00 p.m. so we made our exit shortly before then while we could still get a cab.

September 24, 2008

Dateline: Munich, Germany



The Munich
Rathaus on the
Marienplatz

This morning we decided to explore the Altstadt (old town) on foot, before taking a cab to Klaus and Inge's house to have lunch. Novelist Thomas Wolfe described Munich as "a German dream translated into life" and it certainly does have the fairy tale aspect to it. Streets are spotless, graffiti absent (at least in the Altstadt, elsewhere it's pretty prevalent). It's like you have stepped back in time into a Disney landscape, except real people live and work here. Our first stop was the Marienplatz (the central square in the heart of the old town) which has the town hall, a huge neo-gothic structure that far outshines most cathedrals with the abundance of statues, gargoyles and curlicues. The town hall is of course called the *Rathaus*, but this is the new one (*Neues Rathaus*), which is only a stone's throw from the old one (the *Altes Rathaus*). The Old Town Hall was built in 1470 and remodeled several times before the decision was made to build the new one. The new town hall was built in 1867-1909 with a façade that is 330 feet high and a clock tower which is 260 feet high with a fabulous "*Glockenspiele*". Each day at 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. carillon bells ring, followed by performing mechanical figures: knights on horseback jousting, people dancing with various other figures appearing in different windows and waving at the crowds below, along with a town

guardsman carrying a lantern and an angel blessing a child.



The Augustiner
Brewery

We also saw the downtown location of the Augustine Brewery – the oldest in Munich, which began operation in 1328, founded by Augustinian monks. We visited the Hofbrau House, the most popular beer hall in Munich. There was some serious beer drinking underway, although it was not yet 9:00 a.m. They have a beer garden shaded with ancient chestnut trees, but most of the patrons were inside due to the chill in the air. The beer garden was filled mostly with smokers and cell phone users. The Hofbrau House was established in 1589 and has been in the current location since 1654. The main hall is called the *Schwemme* (it



The Courtyard
of the Old
Hofbrau House

translates as public bar, but the word also means “watering place”). It can accommodate about 1,000 people. On the floor above, in the Festhall (Party Hall) another 1,300 can be

served. We also visited the *Viktualienmarkt* (victuals market) which is a large square that has been in operation for over 200 years. In addition to fresh victuals and all sorts of ethnic restaurants, we located a *weinmarkt* (yes it is a wine market) to get some wine for our lunch.

Our meal at Klaus and Inge's home was a traditional German lunch with lots of different kinds of wurst, potato dumplings,



Fish Smoked
over an Open
Pit at
Oktoberfest

radishes and beer of course. After lunch we went back to Theresienweise, this time to visit the Landwirtschafts Fest, the farm section of the Oktoberfest. We saw fish (mullet) being cooked over a trench of coals perhaps 30 feet long – each on an individual stake. They looked very unappetizing, but they were going like hotcakes so I may be wrong about that. Regardless of taste, they do get low marks on presentation. We visited several buildings with the requisite fluffy lambs, snuggly bunnies, long-maned ponies, contented milk cows, oblivious pigs and somnolent beef cows along with draft and show horses, chickens, goats pigeons, etc.



The Automatic
Cow Washer

In the farm equipment area, we saw huge log splitters for truly huge logs that would cut one tree into 32 length-wise sections across the butt of the stump. My personal favorite was the automatic cow washers – a drive through model (or more appropriately – a herd through model) with big rotating brushes, not just for show cows, but also to be used to keep your farm cows squeaky clean. John Deere is on display here, but mostly we see German brands.



A City Street
in Old Munich

We had a farewell dinner that evening with our friends in the Altstadt at a restaurant called the Osteria der Katzlmacher (which is a scoop or scuttle like you would use for coal) with lots of good food and good wine. There was much we missed because there is much to see and time is so short. Someday we would like to return to the Marienplatz to see the Christkindlmarkt, a holiday market of stalls selling hand

crafted ornaments and toys at Christmas time. We will have to return to the Residenz with its beautiful theaters and art galleries, and chapel. Many churches and many museums were left for a future visit, as well as the nearby, Schloss Nymphenburg palace.

September 25, 2008

Dateline: Dresden, Germany

Latitude at Dresden 51.03 degrees North, Longitude 13.44 degrees East

This morning we took the ICE train (a high speed train whose initials stand for Inter-City Express) from Munich to Dresden, a journey of about 4 hours, which took us from the state of Bavaria to the state of Saxony to what was once again territory behind the former Iron Curtain. Dresden, situated on the Elbe River, first came to be noted by historians in 1485 when the Albertine Wettins family (quite prominent in circles of the nobility) set up their residence here. Today Dresden is the capital city of Saxony. Like so many other modern day German states, Saxony was once an independent kingdom, often warring with neighbors. Then in 1697, Saxony became united with Poland and came under the rule of Polish Kings, who had the title of Great Elector. The word "elector" is something of a misnomer since they weren't elected as we know it, but they were considered to be elected by God I suppose. Saxony remained Polish for about 60 years under Frederick Augustus the Strong and his son Frederick Augustus II, who was not called the Strong, but then he wasn't called the Weak either. What he did do is engage in the Seven Years War with several neighbors and that ended rather badly for Saxony. They, like Bavaria, in 1806, allied with Napoleon which was okay until Waterloo and Saxony lost a lot of territory to Prussia.

Then in 1871 it became part of the German Empire, and suffered greatly as a result, particularly in WWII. The night of February 13-14, 1945, the City of Dresden was carpet-bombed by the Allies and many centuries old buildings were destroyed. Estimated deaths from this bombing run between 25,000 and 40,000 with 80% of the city in rubble. The only public building left standing was the Dresdener Bank.



The
Tauschenberger
Palace Hotel

We took a taxi to our quite impressive digs at the Tauschenberger Palais Hotel, which was indeed at one time a palace love nest built by Frederick Augustus, the Strong for his mistress, Duchess Cosel in 1705-06. It was located conveniently across a narrow street from the Royal Palace behind a set of fancy wrought iron gates which made any royal dalliances so much easier to pull off. Of course discretion was not possible, nor required since Frederick was the King after all. He must have been pretty much taken with the duchess since two more wings were added in the ensuing years. It was reduced to rubble in the bombing of Dresden, but the good news was, they were able to put in some modern plumbing and lighting as it was restored to its former glory and it is now a Kempinski Hotel.



The Frauenkirche Dresden

We set out on foot to explore the old part of the city and our first stop was one of the premier sights of the city, the Frauenkirche (which translates as Church of Our Lady). It is a protestant church, built in 1726-43 with a giant dome and cupola standing 95 meters high, and beautiful pastel frescoes, along with gold leaf on white, with so much more light inside than most old churches. It was totally destroyed in the bombing and was only a burned out shell in 1945, but it is now fully restored. There is an interesting architectural aspect to the outside. It has a checkered look due to the re-used old stone amid the new predominantly clean limestone. Reconstruction did not start until 1993 after the Communists left. The church is situated on Neumarkt (New Market) Square which was once lined with elegant baroque houses, looking quite Parisian, perhaps due to Napoleonic influence.



A Chunk of the
Old Dome from
the 1945
Bombing WWII

Outside the Church there was a bus-sized chunk of the original dome on the spot where it landed after the dome collapsed, two days after the WWII bombing raid. It has been preserved and made into a monument to the war victims. Beside it were many 3 wheeled vehicles used for guided tours for two. They were a bicycle-like contraption with a fiberglass shell pedaled by the guide sitting in front – sort of like a Chinese rickshaw.



The Furstenzug

We had a stroll past the Furstenzug (translates as procession of dukes) Langer Gang (long walk) which is a frieze (like a mural) on a long building built in 1586. The building connects the Residenzschloss (Castle residence) with the Johanneum (now a museum), which was a stable in the olden days. The frieze is over 100 yards long and depicts a procession of many Saxon rulers over the centuries. It was originally done in the *sgraffito* style, which is a technique of painting which involves using the wrong end of the brush to scratch images on wet paint to reveal surface below. (In Italian, the word means “to scratch”).The frieze was re-worked in 1907 by craftsmen using 24,000 tiles made at the porcelain factories at nearby Meissen and was done quite skillfully and tastefully in shades of yellow and charcoal.



The Palace of
Frederick, the
Great on the
Elbe River

The Old Market Square (Altmarkt) goes back the 1300's and was the site of markets, meetings and festivals. It is still undergoing renovation today, but a few of the old churches that surround it have been restored and are open. Altstadt, the old town took the brunt of the damage from the bombing. The New Town (Neustadt) is across the river. We left the Altmarkt area and walked down the Bruhl Terrace, which is an embankment along the Elbe that once was used as a fortification. We ate dinner outside at the Down Under Restaurant (more German than Australian we thought) under little space heaters in a narrow lane off the Neumarkt Square. We then had a leisurely walk back to the hotel for drinks and dessert enjoying the Frauenkirche again, this time softly lit from a dozen strategically placed flood lights.

September 26, 2008

Dateline: Dresden, Germany



The Semper
Opera House

Today, we took a bus ride around town on the *Stadtrundfahrt* which is basically a hop on hop off bus that circles around the major sights of the city. We got on at the Semper Opera House It is also called the *Sächsische Staatsoper* – Semper is the name of the architect who created it. It's had a rough time staying intact. It was built in 1838-41 and burned to the ground in 1869. It was rebuilt in 1869-1878, only to be destroyed in the bombing in WWII and was not fully restored until 1985. We decided to keep our distance just in case it's time for another disaster to befall it and thus we only saw from the outside.

We also did a drive by the the Hofkirche, a baroque church which still serves as the Church for the Dresden-Meissen Diocese. It has a four story tower with an open work single tower which is one of the tallest buildings of Dresden's skyline. The church is adjacent to the *Residenzschloss* (home of the Albertine Wettin family) which we only saw from the outside as well.



The Brauhaus
Biergarten –
Dresden

There are several small breweries in Dresden and we decided to sample one at lunch time. We chose the. Biergarten at the Brauhaus (Beer Garden at the Brewhouse) at a place called *Waldschlosschen* (little forest manor) on the heights across the Elbe from Old Town Dresden. It was built on the site of an old hunting lodge in 1790. We hopped off the *Stadtrundfahrt* and had *Waldschlosschen* beer and a light lunch here on a

terrace overlooking the city across the river. We also drank some local beer at another small brewery – a light Pilsner called Radeberger, which is pretty much an upstart on the German Beer scene since the brewery was only started in 1872.



Sightseeing
Tour Cars – an
Alternative to
the Bus

In the course of our bus ride, we went by what for all intents and purposes looked like a mosque, but it was actually a former cigarette factory called the Yenidze Tobacco House. It has a glass Moorish-looking dome and a chimney made to look like a minaret. Dresden was once the cigarette capital of Germany, but today that honor has apparently gone elsewhere and this factory is now a tourist site. It seemed rather jarringly out of place here, but not perhaps so much as the next sight we saw from the Stadtrundfahrt. It was a sign (in English) indicating that we should turn immediately and go to the Erotic Car Wash. We did not have an actual sighting, so we could only imagine what was happening on the other side of the fence, but we did speculate that English speaking drivers are the target consumers for this rather unusual service.



A Dresden
Vineyard

We also saw several buildings of historical interest in other drive-bys such as the synagogue that was burned by the Nazi's in 1938. The Jews managed to continue for some time to worship there by erecting a tent inside the walls of the ruins. We also drove by the headquarters of the Stasi, the East German Secret Police, which looks harmless from the outside, but the horrors that went on inside are unimaginable. We also saw the Volkswagen factory – a marvel of auto production with few employees and many robots. It has glass tower where new cars are showcased. We were somewhat underwhelmed by the Blue Wonder (*Blaues Wunder*) suspension bridge– lots of steel, not much art, but since it was built in 1890-93 it probably was a wonder at the time and it is most definitely blue.



The Zwinger

Our last stop of the afternoon was the Zwinger which is a complex of galleries and pavilions built around a courtyard with dramatic fountains and statuary – little cherubs, cupids and nymphs everywhere, many engaging in decidedly naughty acts of flirtation with occasional displays of lust. One of the fountains there is actually named the Nymphenbad, which

translates as the Bath of the Nymphs. There are staircases and ramparts that offer any number of places to view the splendor of the place. It was built in the 18th Century in the Baroque style by Frederick Augustus, the Strong, more or less intended as a pleasure



The Fountains
of the Zwinger

palace. Frederick Augustus the Strong was apparently quite the Swinger at the Zwinger, since in addition to his mistress, the Duchess Cosel, he reportedly had as many as 300 ladies on the side, no doubt re-enforcing his nickname.

Today the Zwinger is a fabulous treasury, full of old masters, armor and weaponry. Fortunately, much of the artwork was sent to Russia for safe-keeping during the war, and was actually returned to Dresden by the Communists. Sadly enough the name of the place has nothing to do with romance or kings who are swingers. It is an old military term that refers to the space between the inner and outer walls of a fortification called the *zwinger*.



The Wehlin on

the Elbe

We boarded a boat named the *Wehlen*, a paddle wheeler which actually had a working paddle wheel, for a river tour just before sunset. Gary and Stu got an engine room tour and Sharon and I enjoyed seeing the Old City and then the country villas (more the size of palaces than houses) go by. We also saw the Bruhl Terrace from the water. It once had great buildings and gardens, but only one fountain, the Delphinbrunnen (Dolphin Fountain) survived the 1945 bombing. The sunset was very dramatic outlining the now restored domes and steeples of the city in one of the most picturesque scenes we have seen.



A Dresden
Sunset

There is much to see on a future visit (like the insides of at least a half a dozen museums). I especially want to go into the vault at the Albertinum museum called the called the Grunes Gewolbe (that would be the Green Vault) to see the many treasures collected over the years by the Wettins family. One of the highlights is a centerpiece made by 16 or so artisans that has 132 figurines and thousands of precious gems with close to 5,000 diamonds 160 rubies and 164 emeralds. I will probably have to wear my sunglasses to protect my eyes from the sparkle coming off all that bling.

September 27, 2008

Dateline: Berlin, Germany

Latitude at Berlin 52.50 degrees North, Longitude 13.22

degrees East

This morning we planned to head to Berlin, traveling into the state of Brandenburg from Saxony on the ICE Train, but since it's only a two hour trip, Gary and Stu decided they'd like to take a tour of the Volkswagen factory. Unfortunately the only tour available that morning was conducted in German and the production line was not working since it was Sunday, but they got the gist of the way cars are put together which was reportedly very cool . One fact they were able to garner from the tour was the price of Volkswagen's top of the line car which was around 60k Euros or close to \$80k in US dollars. The guys decided that for \$80k they might be doing business with a different German carmaker.

We arrived in Berlin's fabulous train station, the Hauptbahnhof (translation is central rail house) which looks like something from a Star Wars set – maybe Darth Vader's command center for running the universe. Some detractors have referred to it as the Glass Armadillo, but love it or hate it – it is still spectacular. It was completed in 2006 in time for Germany's hosting of the World Cup at a cost of 700 million dollars. It has a glass ceiling (literally) that has solar receptors so it can generate its own electricity and then some, and all the latest in technology to run the most quiet and efficient train service from the largest railway station in Europe. .



The Spree
River Today

Berlin, like the other places we have visited, is an ancient city, originally started with two market centers being established on islands in the Spree River in 1237 A.D. in a marshy low lying area with many creeks and small lakes. Today Berlin is criss-crossed with many canals made from the creeks and lakes (called sees in German) that have been retained. The Hohenzollern family chose this area as its seat of power and ruled for hundreds of years. Like other German states, the ruler was called an Electorate, but as in other states, there wasn't really any electing going on and Brandenburg made the same poor choices and alliances as its sister states. Berlin rose to become the center of government for the emerging German Republic of the Second Reich and Hitler's Third Reich, and thus its fall was all the more dramatic.



Berlin Rebuilt
on the Spree
River

As WWII drew to a close in the spring of 1945, the Russian Army was converging upon Berlin and Hitler committed suicide in his underground bunker (although there are those who believe he escaped). The War in Europe ended a week later and the four Allies (US, Great Britain, France and Russia) agreed to share governing of the country and its capital by dividing it into quadrants with each country running one quadrant. However Berlin lay in the heart of the Russian Sector of Germany and the Russians planned to keep everything they controlled and taking parts of Berlin controlled by their allies. Their goal was to have the Germans so totally defeated and demoralized that they would instantly turn to Communism

for salvation. In June of 1948, they notified the other Allies that any convoys of food and supplies crossing the Russian Sector (as they would have to do to get to Berlin) would be stopped and searched. The response to this by the Tri-Zone Council (American, British and French) was to institute an Air Lift to Berlin to continue to keep West Berlin free from the Communist threat. The allies succeeded in delivering approximately 5 thousand tons a day and the airlift was so successful, that by May of 1949, the Russians relented and called off the blockade of rail lines and motorways to the city. Thus the first crisis of the cold War was over, but the Russians managed to create many more over the next 40 years.

As soon as the war ended, the women of Berlin went to work immediately clearing rubble. There was no one else to do it since every able bodied man had years before bent sent off to war and toward the end, Hitler drafted even the non-able bodied men and all boys big enough to hold a weapon. And thus the clean-up fell to the women, who were called the "*Trummerfrauen*" (translation is Rubble or Debris Women).



A Chuknk of
the Historic
Berlin Wall
near Potsdamer
Platz

Over the years there was a steady stream of people leaving the Russian Sector for the Western Sectors of Berlin and so Khrushchev ordered the wall erected in 1961, where it continued to generate international incidents and intrigue for decades.

You will recall President Reagan urged Mikhail Gorbachev to "Tear down that wall." Well of course Gorby, didn't exactly tear it down, but rather events took over and the USSR sort of spontaneously disintegrated in a process that the Russians are still scratching their heads over. The border was ordered open on November 9, 1989 and the people took to the wall with hammers and chisels to bring it down without opposition. Reunification of Germany took place in October of 1990.



A Quiet Berlin
Neighborhood

From the Hauptbahnhof, we took a taxi to the Maritim Hotel, conveniently located only a block from the Tiergarten with an easy walk to all the main sights. The Tiergarten is a huge park which was formerly the hunting grounds for the Elector (a.k.a. King). In the desperate times at the end of WWII, it supplied wood to provide heat for the freezing and starving people of Berlin. We noted that autumn is in full swing here and the sun finally came out to let us see it in all its glory. We walked through the Potsdamer Platz, formerly a no man's land where the Wall divided East and West. After reunification, it became the heart of the city with global firms building skyscrapers and shopping plazas here using some of the world's most famous architects. We stopped for a bite of lunch at an outdoor café and people watched. As it turned out, there were plenty to watch since on this particular weekend, Berlin was hosting a series of marathons, not only for runners, but also for in-line skaters, wheel chair racers, and children.



The Brandenburg Gate

After lunch we walked to the Brandenburg Gate (Brandenburg Tor.) It was conceived in 1791 to celebrate a Prussian victory and interestingly enough was called the Gate of Peace, presumably since the people foolishly thought in 1791 that there would be no more wars fought. The figure at the top is the Goddess of Victory in a chariot called a quadriga pulled by 4 Horses. The Goddess holds a figure of the Prussian eagle aloft. The historic street called Unter den Linden (translation "under the linden", with linden being a type of tree) starts here at the gate and runs into the heart of Old Berlin and what became East Berlin. Unfortunately under the Communists, Old Berlin wasn't a priority so restoration really has only gotten underway since Reunification. The Brandenburg Gate was incorporated into the Berlin Wall when it went up in 1961. Chunks of the wall are now on sale in the area, but unfortunately, no certificates of authenticity are available so you may end up with a chunk of something else. The wall (*die mauer* in German) was 29 miles long and 13 feet high with barbed wire extensions atop it. In the Potsdamer Platz and in several other areas of the city large sections have been preserved as historical landmarks.



The Holocaust Memorial – Berlin

En route to the Brandenburg Gate, we walked unknowingly through the Holocaust Memorial since it is not well marked. Only later did we understand what we saw and that the lack of marking is intentional. The memorial looks like a park with a series of 2700 rectangular plinths of all different sizes, some upright, some on the ground lengthwise. There are no inscriptions and no two are exactly alike. It was not intended as a holy place and thus there are no names and no inscriptions, but it was intended as place Berliners will use daily and thus remember why its there in a very low-key sort of way. It was full of people sitting and reading, talking, smoking, cell phoning, and in some cases apparently simply reflecting. Interesting side note – the surfaces are treated with an anti-graffiti coating manufactured by the same company who made poison gas for the Nazi death camps. No word on whether they provided it for free as one would hope.



The Reichstag Today

We walked around, but did not get to go into the Reichstag,

which is the seat of Germany's federal government. It was originally built between 1884 and 1894 in the Italian Renaissance style and dedicated to the German People, "Dem Deutschen Volke", as is engraved over the entrance. The first German Republic (the Weimar Republic) was proclaimed here in 1918. However in 1933 the building was set on fire and gutted. The arson was blamed on a Dutch Communist dissident. It was further destroyed in bombing raids in 1945. Fortunately, the Reichstag was on the west side of the wall and thus was fully restored by 1970 and further updated with a glass dome in the early 1990's. Today it is home to the German Bundestag or Parliament. The New Reichstag is part of a vast complex of very modern structures –sort of in the style of the Guggenheim Museum in New York with seemingly endless stretches of marble and granite walkways, bridges, fountains and water features. In re-building the capital of Germany, there is a very obvious departure from the old styles from the bad old days.



Berlin's
Famous Linden
Trees

We also took a stroll down Unter den Linden, a beautiful boulevard with few traces of the ugly old days of Communism. Linden trees are also called lime trees, but not lime trees that bear fruit as we know them. The leaves are heart shaped and on this fall day had turned a vibrant yellow so it made for a very scenic walk. An interesting side note: We had barely set foot in the former East Berlin when we ran across a Bentley dealership, appearing to be doing a brisk business. This brash capitalism would have really irked the old comrades

who used to hang out here. And speaking of the comrades, there is little evidence, at



Staircase
Ruins from the
Bad Old Days
of Communism

least on this street that they were ever here. Today it is revitalized and the site of many foreign embassies and expensive stores. The only relic from the Communist era that we saw is a DPR (Democratic Peoples Republic which is what East Germany used to be called) government legislature building where they Communists had pretended to let people govern themselves. Only the concrete stair cases are left today and they are going to succumb soon to the wrecking ball with new public buildings to go up on the site.

We stopped in Adlon Hotel for a peek at Berlin's most famous hotel. It was destroyed by the Soviets in 1945, although the original grand staircase survived. The hotel was finally rebuilt in a free East Berlin in 1997. The setting for the 1932 movie, *Grand Hotel*, was modeled after the Adlon and the place where Garbo uttered her famous line from the movie "I want to be alone."

We took a brief stroll through the Bebelplatz, originally called Opera Square. On May 10, 1933, this was the scene of the infamous book burning by the Nazis. 25,000 books by authors considered to be enemies of the Third Reich were burned. A monument in the square marks the event with a plaque

bearing a quote by the Jewish German poet and essayist, Heinrich Heine, written in 1820 that quite prophetically says, "Where they have burned books, they will in the end burn human beings."



Lowering the
Smokestack to
fit under a
Bridge on the
River Spree

In the late afternoon we took a boat tour on the Spree River which really gave us a different perspective on all the sights we had been seeing. Pronunciation of the name of this river involves a lot more "Sch" sounds than it looks like, and you have to be careful not to get sparyed with errant saliva if anyone pronounces this word in close proximity to your face. A boat is a *Schiff* in German, very similar to our word "skiff". So many German and English words are similar, I think you could get the hang of this language fairly quickly.

For example, we had to buy a Schiffkarte (a boat ticket or card) in order to board. This Schiff had to have it's smokestack lowered to go under each of several low bridges. This was done manually which, in this technology rich environment, surprised us. We decided in East Germany they are a little slow in getting that famous German engineering cranked up.

We walked back to our hotel just before dusk through the huge park that is the Tiergarten and enjoyed the autumn colors and meandering pathways, however we did ask for directions since

it was almost dark and we hadn't managed to meander out of the park after close to an hour of walking.



The German
Historical
Museum

We will leave Berlin tomorrow with much unseen. There are many, many museums here – in fact there is a whole island of them in the middle of the Spree. There is also much to see surrounding the city – palaces such as Charlottenburg and Sans Souci, and historic Potsdam. We are voicing a familiar refrain from the other cities we have visited on this trip: “Next Time”.

September 28, 2008

Dateline: Frankfurt, Germany

Latitude at Frankfurt 50.07 degrees North, Longitude 8.40 degrees East



The Kurfurstendamm

Before leaving, we decided to take a morning walk on the famous street called the Kurfurstendamm, (the locals call it the "KuDamm" for short). It is a wide boulevard of shops and restaurants, (sort of the Champs Elysees or 5th Avenue of Berlin). Today, it was filled with wheelchair marathoners rolling down the streets. We also wanted to see the nearby Kaiser Wilhelm Gedachtniskirche (Kaiser Wilhelm Church) built in 1895 by Kaiser Wilhelm II (the guy at the helm of Germany during the WWI debacle). It was heavily damaged by Allied bombs in 1943, but it was not restored. Instead it was left as a memorial to victims



The Kaiser
Wilhelm Church

of WWII. A new modern bell tower and sanctuary in blue glass was added adjacent to the ruins. It sounds as if it might be an architectural nightmare, but strangely enough, it works and its message about war and peace is readily understood.

From Berlin, we had a six hour train ride back into the former West Germany and the city of Frankfurt and the state of Hesse. We had lunch on board the ICE Train dining car, accompanied by some good German wine, and then a snooze and some reading and some travelogue writing ensued. Upon arrival we



Modern Frankfurt

checked into a Hilton, just a short walk from Frankfurt's Old Town. The newer part of Frankfurt sits just across the Main (pronounced "mine") River and looks like a smaller version of the Manhattan skyline, and it serves the same purpose – it is the financial center of Germany and home to their stock exchange, the Borse. Our hotel was just down the street from the Turm (tower) which is a relic left over from medieval days when it was part of the city's fortifications. We walked there and then to the Romerberg which is the center of Frankfurt's Old Town. (Romer translates as Roman, and yep they were here too). Today the



The Romerburg – Old town Frankfurt

Romerburg is lined with a series of half-timbered restored houses called the Ostzelle, which originally dated back to the 1400's and which were part of post WWII reconstruction to restore the area. We did manage to work in a final boat tour on the Main and again were treated to a great sunset, this time with the silhouettes of skyscrapers, versus the old

church spires of Dresden. We had a final dinner at a great pizza place we visited 5 years ago – brick pizza oven, thin crust hand tossed pizza crust with different wursts on top and cold German beer. Life is good. Tomorrow we catch our flights back to Atlanta after 4 weeks of traveling and we'll be home for a while. Life is good there too.