



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Cruising the Danube River
Budapest, Hungary**

Cruising the Danube River

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Cruising the Danube River Budapest, Hungary

October 5, 2013

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. This report continues the Danube River tour with a stop in Budapest, Hungary, as seen in Figure 1. With 1.74 million inhabitants, it is the capital and the largest city of Hungary. Stopping here was a fitting climax to the river cruise, which ended the next day. The city is one of the most beautiful places in Europe.



Figure 1. Budapest stopover.

Eager to see if the city's river skyline would live up to its reputation, I did not stop for breakfast, but went straight to the top deck of the ship. As seen in Figure 2, I was not disappointed. Coming up the ladder (stairs for landlubbers), my first view was a bridge that joined the towns of Buda and Obuda on one side of the river with Pest on the other side. The three cities are now called Budapest.

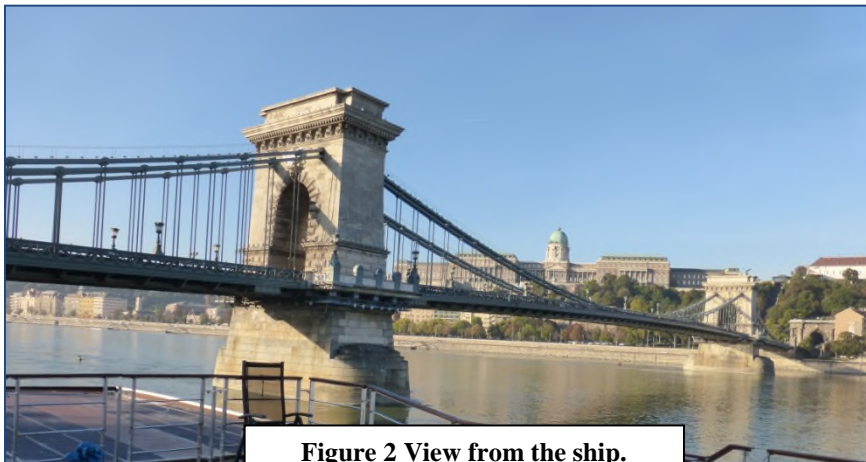


Figure 2 View from the ship.

Holly joined me for a while as we walked around the deck and planned the day. A guided tour would get us started, but I intended to spend most of the day walking through the central part of city. The VRC ship was conveniently docked in this area.

Writing a few pages about an area as notable as Budapest presents a challenge, principally in what to include or exclude. For this column, I recommend visiting Hero's Square, the House of Terror, and walking Andrassy Avenue.

Hero's Square

Hero's Square is a major landmark in Budapest. The centerpiece is the Millennium Memorial, as seen in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Hero's Square.

This monument contains statues of the seven tribal leaders who founded Hungary in the 9th century, as well as other famous people in Hungarian history. Notable historical figures are honored here, such as members of the Hapsburg dynasty. The monument is flanked on two sides by two buildings, the Museum of Fine Arts and Hall of Art.

This area also contains the embassy of former Yugoslavia, where Hungary's leader Imre Nagy found temporary sanctuary during the 1956 Hungarian revolution against the USSR. During this time, Hungary attempted to leave the Soviet controlled Warsaw Pact, which resulted in the country's invasion by Soviet armed forces. The Soviets are not high on the list of admired people in this part of the world.

Walking Part of the City

If you like to explore a city by walking, I recommend you use Hero's Square as a starting point and take a stroll on Andrassy Avenue. The street contains scores of shops and restaurants and leads to the Danube River. It is flanked by former mansions and lined with trees and plants. I walked most of it while visiting the House of Terror, which is highlighted later. Many lovely, old buildings line this avenue, one being the Budapest Opera House. Its lobby is shown in the left photo of Figure 4. During my walk, I encountered a parade for dogs and dog owners (the right photo of Figure 4), street hustlers looking for a free hand-out from the unwary (I was solicited twice, successfully the first time), and a few street people. But as a whole, this part of the city is safe, clean, and pleasant.



Figure 4. Andrassy Avenue.

House of Terror

As mentioned in an earlier report for this series, I favored this ten-day tour because it would take me to places in Europe I had never seen. As well, it was an easy, perhaps luxurious way to be introduced to cultures in several countries. Granted, the introduction was general, maybe

superficial. Nonetheless, my interests were not just ones of a day-tripper. The time in my professional life was spent on subjects other than history, social psychology, and other chronicles of human behavior. But my time “off the job” was often spent on these subjects. Taking breaks from arcane Internet documents, I spent time reading arcane international affairs documents. (My son jokes about my reading habits. We all have our quirks. I joke about his.)

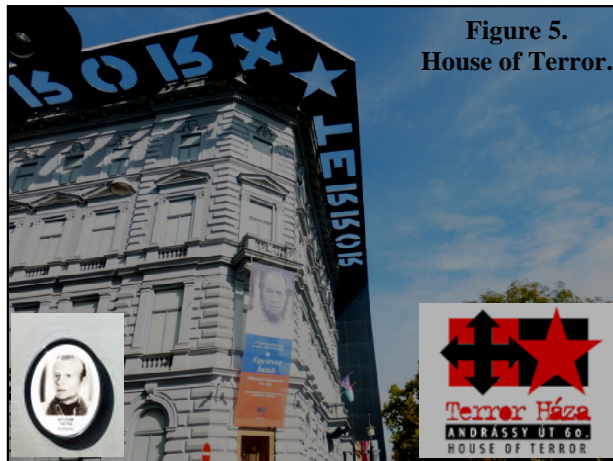


Figure 5.
House of Terror.

The museum’s exterior is shown in Figure 5, with Alexander Solzhenitsyn on the banner. It is located on Andrassy Avenue. Its exhibits pertain to the German Nazi and USSR communist regimes that held power in Hungary for slightly over forty years. These exhibits are grim, as were the tortures and killings that took place in the building. Thus, it serves as a memorial to those victims. Throughout the building, the museum logo was on display as seen in the bottom right part of Figure 5. The sides of the building, those next to sidewalks, were lined with pictures of the people who were prisoners in this building, as seen in the bottom left part of Figure 5.

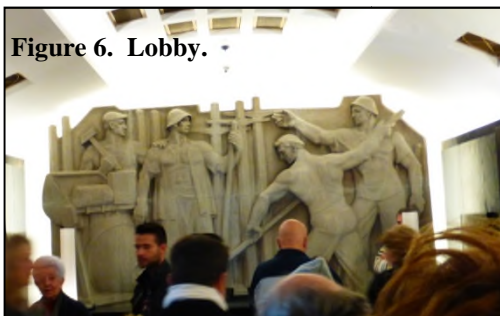


Figure 6. Lobby.

The museum opened in 2002, and has been well-received and well-attended.¹ After paying my admittance fee, I queued up and waited to be admitted into the exhibits. I also had to wait to purchase my ticket and snapped a photo of this queue, shown in Figure 6. I asked the ticket clerk about the sculpture that was placed behind his counter. I guessed it was created by the Stalin regime to glorify his five-year plans and the workers’ who died trying to meet his quotas. The clerk shrugged his shoulders. His job was selling tickets.

The museum did not allow the use of cameras. I asked one guide if I could discretely take a non-flash photo. He shrugged his shoulders. I took a few shots, some shown below. Others were copied from museum brochures, as noted in the footnote.²

The exhibits were eye-catching, some dazzling. They were a combination of displays. They conveyed the sordid realism of German and Soviet atrocities, artistic abstractions of the carnages, and images in between these two portrayals of human mayhem. Three examples of the exhibits are shown in Figure 7. I have placed quotation marks around quotes from the reference in footnote 2 and noted my comments inside brackets.

¹ Some critics have stated the museum does not focus enough on the German period. Their critics counter that one year vs. forty years is accurately and fairly reflected in the exhibits.

² *Terror Haza*, Andrassy UT 60, Budapest.

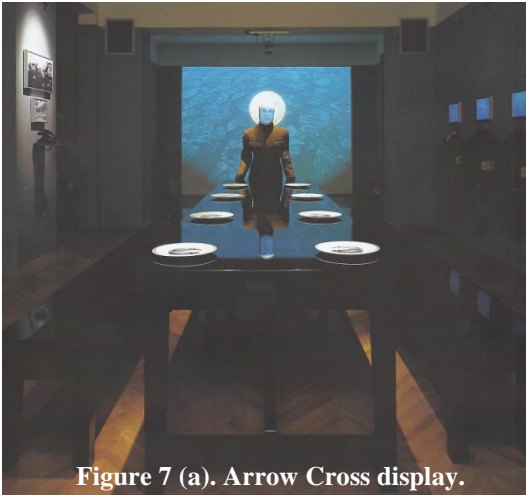


Figure 7 (a). Arrow Cross display.

“We enter the Arrow Cross assembly hall. [Arrow Cross was a pro-Nazi party.] The ghostly figure of Ferenc Szálasi [leader of Arrow Cross] stands at the end of the table. Informative photos of the Arrow Cross movement can be seen on the back wall. The monitors show...the deportation of Hungarian Jewry...the interrogations carried out in this building.” [Thousands of people were murdered by the Arrow Cross people. Tens of thousands were sent to concentration camps. The exhibit shows other aspects of this party’s operations.]

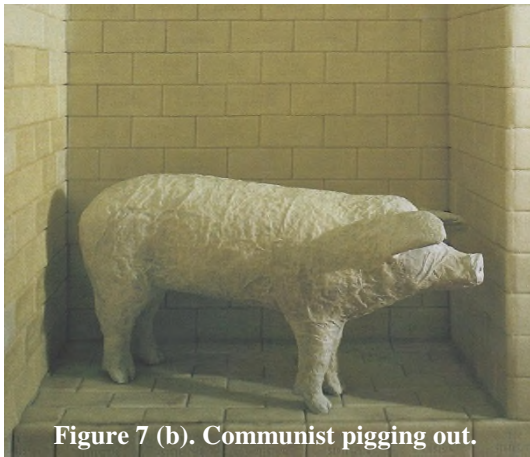


Figure 7 (b). Communist pigging out.

“Compulsory Deliveries: The hall shows the period when the peasantry was forced to hand over a fixed quota of its surplus agricultural produce and livestock to state organs at fixed prices. ...The Party did not spare any efforts in its aim to destroy the countryside’s traditional lifestyle and to force the peasants to abandon their lands.” [The most successful farmers were targeted more than others, part of the communist goal of eliminating classes. The result in Hungary was over 300,000 farmers abandoning their land, with resultant acute food shortages. Communism in action...]



Figure 7 (c). Torture chamber.

“The Torture Chamber: This is the only room [of the original Soviet setup] that was preserved in its original form. At the time, it was referred to as the gym. On the wall, see special instruments of torture: a knout with nails, a lead-headed bamboo stick, a Cross Arrow truncheon, a club covered in leather with a lead spring. ... ‘I was taken to 60 Andrassy Road. My first interrogation lasted 18 hours. I never imagined that a man of 56 could be so severely beaten, kicked, tortured with all sorts of instruments, drugged by injections so that he would be deprived of his will-power.’ “

Upon leaving this part of the museum, I was reminded of this thought: “They tortured him--- seeking in him their thoughts.”³ My thought at that moment was to take a break from touring two



Figure 8. Café condiment.

hours of examples of human behavior at its worst. On the main floor, I found refuge in a small café, part of which is shown in Figure 8. My recent experience had not whetted my appetite, so I settled for a cup of coffee. As I sat at a table, a decoration caught my eye. What should one expect to decorate a wall in a museum about human torture? And the locale was an eatery. So, a model of a rifle, as opposed to a maimed body, seemed to be an appropriate compromise.



Figure 9. A reminder.

The café was next to a gift/souvenir shop. I stopped by and purchased a tin cup, which was a replica of the cups issued to the prisoners at 60 Andrassy Blvd. The cup rests on a file cabinet next to my office desk (Figure 9.) I see it each time I sit down there. I purposely keep the cup close to me. It serves as a reminder. When I read the daily news about the corruption of so many politicians in Washington, D.C., the warrantless

spying by NSA, the prevalence of rape in our armed forces, the photographs of the degrading behavior of the military guards at Guantanamo Bay, the cup reminds me that America has (or is) attempting to address these problems and right their wrongs. Not so with so many other nations.

The cup also reminds me of an old saying I came across many years ago, “Democracy is like a raft. You never sink, but your feet are always wet.” Nazi Germany sank. Communist USSR sank. America, for all its faults, stays wet but afloat. That tin cup helps me keep my perspective.

Comments on Viking River Cruises

We were given several options for extending the stay in Europe, both before and after the river cruise. We chose two extensions: two more days ashore in a Budapest hotel and a motor trip to Prague, where we stayed for three days in a downtown hotel. We liked these options. The airfare had been paid, so a few more days tacked-on to the cruise made sense.

Another aspect of the VRC package that we found attractive: the seamless melding and merging tours ashore, along with taking care (without hitches) of our luggage from: the Bucharest airport to the Bucharest Hotel; to the ship; to the Budapest hotel; to the Prague hotel; to the Prague airport. These operations are easier said than done, and VRC did them very well.

³ J. Lec Stanislaw, *More Unkempt Thoughts*, in Leonard Roy Frank, *Quotationary* (New York: Random House, 2001), 871.

Leaving the ship, VRC transported us to the hotel Le Meridien Budapest. If you happen to end up in Budapest someday, you will find this hotel a pleasant place to stay. It's old---including chandelier and tables---well maintained, refined, with fine service. Figure 10 shows from left to right: the room looking to the outside wall, the restaurant, and an evening view from the room.



Figure 10. Le Meridien Budapest.

It was time to move on. Our stay in Europe was winding down: A day-long motor trip from Budapest to Prague, three days in Prague, then back to the USA and Northern Idaho.