



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Cruising the Danube River
Iron Gate**

Cruising the Danube River

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October 1, 2013

Today, our ship (the *Viking Aegir*) sailed through the most impressive landscape encountered thus far in the journey on this Danube River cruise. The bold red line in Figure 1 shows the part of the river we visited today.



As the map illustrates, this part of the Danube River flows between Romania and Serbia. By the way, the Danube is the second-longest river in Europe. The Volga River is the longest. Also, the river originates in Germany and flows southeast to the Black Sea. We did not travel into Germany. We debarked in Budapest, Hungary.

Figure 1. The Iron Gate part of the Danube.



Figure 2. Typical river scenes.

Most of the Danube River this far had been a wide expanse of water, several football fields in width. Much of the scenery was made up of river banks lined by trees, sparsely populated with few buildings, as seen from our stateroom in Figure 2. The river is a commercialized viaduct, with buildings, docks, and factories situated along its banks. But so far, the landscape had surprised me. Its overall topography was representative of the scenery shown in Figure 2.

The Iron Gates part of the river was different from the southeastern part we had just traversed. This passage was narrow and flowed through stone mountains. The resulting current, fast and turbulent, had created a riverbed 130 feet deep, as well as rapids and whirlpools. This part of the Danube was not peaceful. In the past, its dangers persuaded able-bodied seamen to depend on locomotives to pull their ships upstream.

For most of the first three days of this week, we had encountered rain and fog. Today was no exception. Most of the passengers stayed inside. A handful walked on the top deck to take in, so far, the most impressive and beautiful part of the Danube River.

On this top deck, the ship's engines could not be heard. Yet they did their work. They unrelentingly propelled their passengers upstream, as if the once formidable and dangerous Iron

Gate current did not exist. During this 60-mile passage toward Belgrade, Serbia, silence was our sailing mate, as we made our way through breathtaking vistas, such as those depicted in Figure 3.

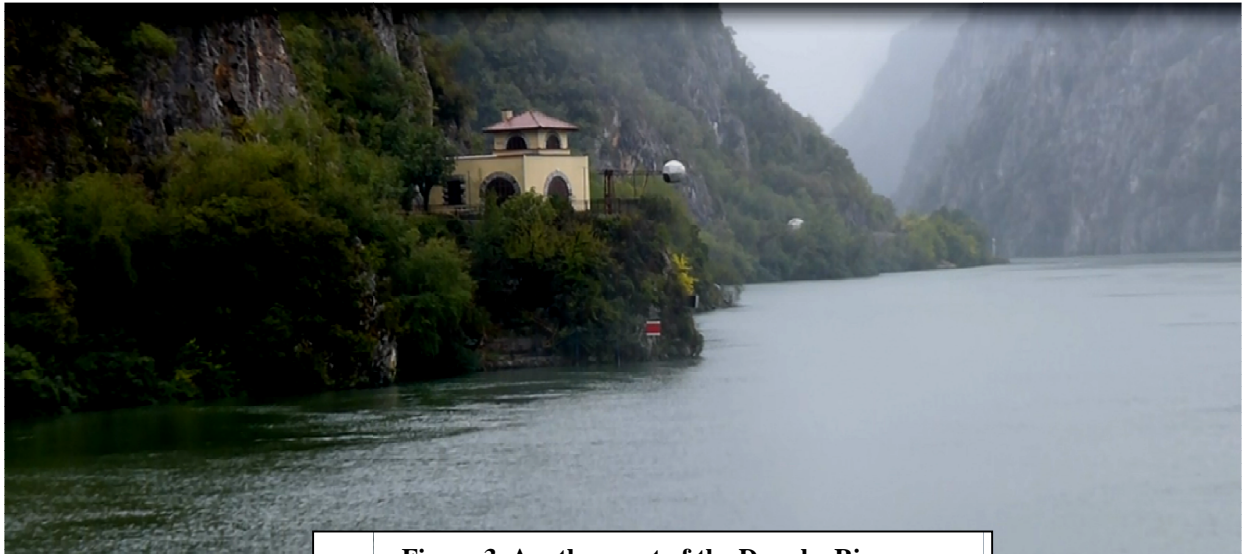


Figure 3. Another part of the Danube River.

Somewhere, as I travelled life's highways and byways, I read that silence had a voice. On my first reading of that idea, I scoffed. But on reflection, I have come to know the saying is true. Voice need not be spoken. "I have given voice," speaks to the tongue as much as it does to the gesture. For this part of our passage on the Danube River, the silence of the travelers around us, the muted compliance of the engines, the hush of the river and its mountains, reminded me of a saying: *The voice of silence is what our inner selves listen to.* This part of the world was offering its gesture to me. Its voice, its gesture, was one of silence. For this passage up the Danube River, silence was all around me, and at the same time, within me.

The Viking River Cruise Company

The Viking River Cruise (VRC) tour company---the ship and tour plan we were on---has television advertisements on several channels. You've likely seen them: A beautiful small ship making its way on a river whose banks are lined with castles and other ornate models of once exotic cultures. I was taken by the ads and signed Holly and me on to the Danube River cruise. With a few minor exceptions (and one major one), we were not disappointed.

First, the major disappointment: The dinners were, at best, average. For the price paid, it was not a good deal. Luckily for me, I do not have a big appetite, so I was not fazed. But other passengers were not so indifferent. That said, the breakfasts and lunches were quite good. The ship was new and in excellent shape. The public areas were a delight to use. Figure 4 provides several views of its layout. (Holly and I had stateroom 235.)

If you sail with VRC, I advise you to insist on a stateroom that is not underneath the sun deck. (Ours was not.) Although jogging was not permitted on this deck in the evenings or nights, our tour friends told us they could hear the steps of the day-time joggers from their staterooms. Plus, our cabin on the 200 level was closer to the water, which gave us a keener sense of the river. We

often left the veranda door open at night. The ship's hull, gently plowing through the water, provided pleasant background noise. We enjoyed the voice of the river.

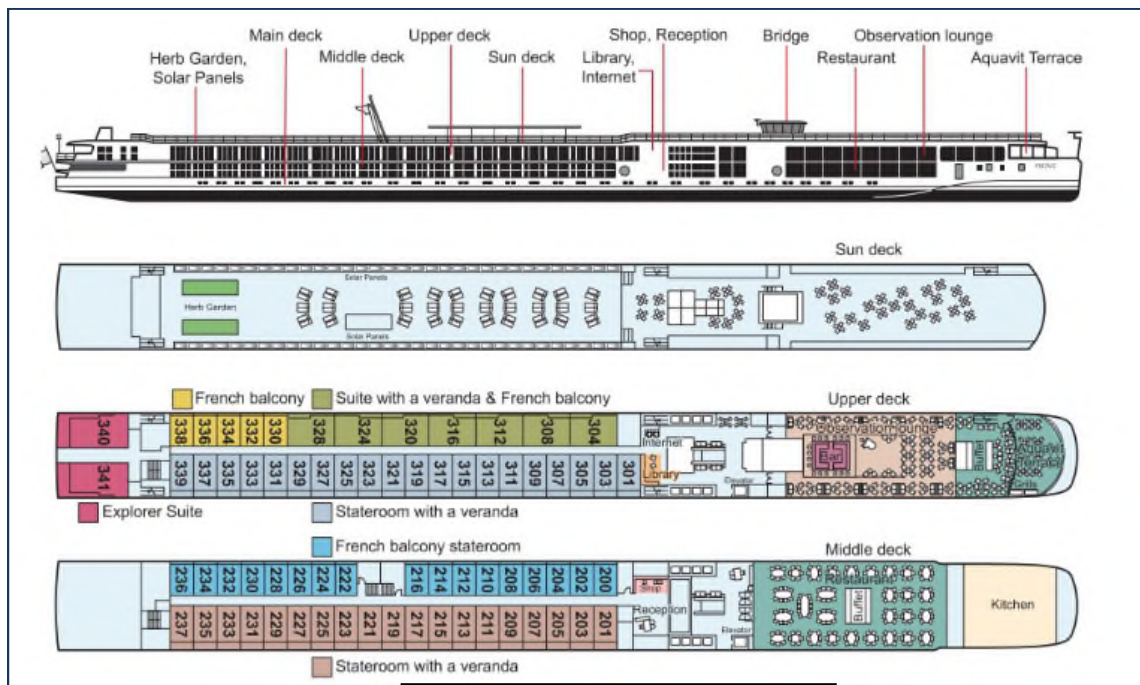


Figure 4. Layout of Viking Aegir.

Some observations about the cruise and VRC: First, our booking agent (employed by VRC) was one of the best I have come across. Our stateroom was very comfortable. The ship's common areas were also impressive. The tours were outstanding. Some of our tour friends thought they were too crowded. We did not. The moving of a couple hundred people in and out of towns, tours, villages, etc. was done almost transparently. The transport of our luggage out-of and into the ship and into and out-of three hotels was flawless. The staff was well-trained; a delight for the entire trip.

Figure 5 provides some pictures of the interior of the ship. The left photo shows part of our stateroom. The other two photos show some of the common areas.



Figure 5. Interior of ship.

VRC made it a point to keep passengers occupied and entertained. While the crew prepared the ship for our arrival, it kept us occupied (Figure 6) with a tour of Bucharest and a festive lunch on

land ---even though they were lethargic dancers. During the cruise, when we might have had idle time on board, VRC brought aboard entertainment (Figure 7) to give us a choice of sleeping or singing. The musician on the right, with his tiny instrument, was especially entertaining. During the tours on land, we had the pleasure of dining to real-life---and for these actors, spirited and full of life---dancers (Figure 8).



Figure 6. A lunch break ashore.



Figure 7. A concert, aboard ship.



Figure 8. Another lunch break ashore.

I have more to tell, but I suspect many of my readers may be ready for a voice of silence. I will close this report and thank you for sharing with me a small part of this part of the world. Next, we visit Belgrade, Serbia.