



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Cruising the Danube River
Prague, Czech Republic**

Cruising the Danube River

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Cruising the Danube River Prague, Czech Republic

October 6, 2013

This report continues the Danube River tour with a stop in Prague, Czech Republic. Holly and I left the Viking River Cruises ship at Budapest. As recounted earlier, we spent three days on-shore at Budapest. Today, we boarded a Viking River Cruises bus that took us on a seven-hour drive to Prague, as shown in Figure 1.

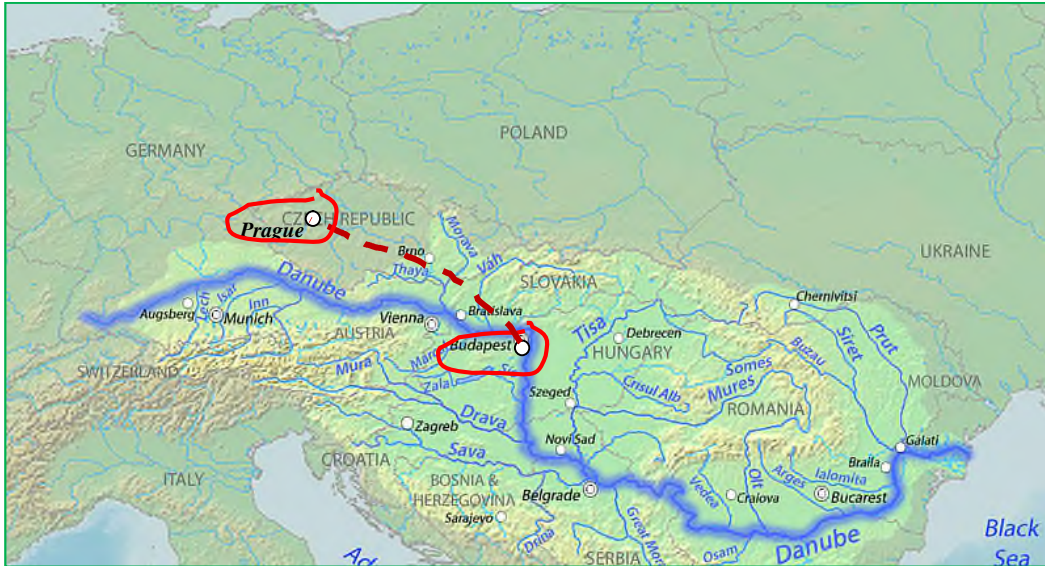


Figure 1. Bus ride to Prague.

Since my undergraduate days at the University of New Mexico, I have wanted to pay a call on Prague. My Western Civilizations professor, Dr. Benjamin Sacks, was fond of the history of the Holy Roman Empire. Prague had been the capital of this empire and the seat of two emperors. Thus, his students learned a lot about the city. In addition, I wanted to check-out why this city had been the victim of so many invasions, pillages, and lootings. But as I have grown older and a bit more well-read, I have discovered most of the cities in Eastern Europe---especially if they are on a river---have shared a common history: one of plunder.

Three days to soak-in Prague required us to cull-out many attractive venues. If your time is also limited, I recommend getting off busses and taxis, grab a map, and start walking the central town area. That was our plan, and we were glad we did not structure our days too much. Figure 2 should help you in your planning. The area noted as Old Town Square contains hundreds of stores and historical sites, as well as scores of monuments dedicated to martyrs, religious reformers, artists, and writers who played a part in the history of Prague.

We stayed at the Hilton Prague (Hilton Pobrezni). I recommend the hotel, not only for its accommodations, but for its location. It is within walking distance to Palladium Hall, a huge shopping area, Old Town Square, and Charles Bridge. The latter two sites are described below.



Figure 2. Some notable places in Prague.

Of the cities we visited these past two weeks, I would place Prague high on the list of my favorites. Its beauty is not touted enough. Budapest might be the most striking of the cities we saw, but Prague is a close second. I googled "Prague" and found the photo shown in Figure 3. The picture shows three of several bridges that span the Vltava River, the longest river in the Republic (270 miles). We walked the middle bridge (the Charles Bridge), which was closed to vehicular traffic on the Sunday of our tour.



← Charles Bridge

Figure 3. Prague and the Vltava River.

A photo of part of the city from a hill overlooking the city and the river shows the beauty of this place. It is shown in Figure 4. On this hill is situated several old buildings, including what appeared to be castles.

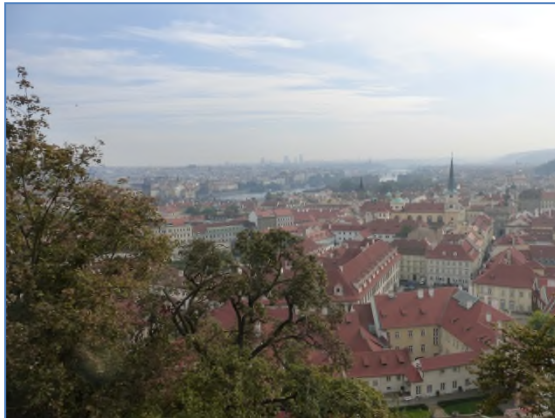


Figure 4. Overlooking part of the city.



Figure 5. A pleasant diversion.

Lobkowitz Palace. Viking River Cruises includes almost all tours as part of the fee package. This practice does not hold for some tour companies. Of course, the VRC package has the tours factored into its price. One exception to this practice was a tour (and lunch) of the Lobkowitz Palace. The tour fee for two people was \$258.00. Besides visiting the palace and eating, a trio entertained the group with several classical pieces, including abbreviated versions of Mozart piano concertos. The trio is shown in Figure 5.



Figure 6. The Lobkowitz Palace.

I enjoy going to regal places such as the Lobkowitz Palace (Figure 6) that are privately owned by former nobility. In addition, my financial contributions help keep a part of history alive.¹ I recognize I am subsidizing so-called princes and princesses who own these grand castles and estates. Their lineage goes back many generations to times when their ancestors lived lives of opulence.

Seen through today's lens, the luxury of the life style those long-ago people is staggering---especially considering they thrived at the expense of their half-clothed, semi-starved subjects. Had I lived in Russia during the early part of the 20th century, I would likely have been part of the mobs that took to the streets against the Romanoff dynasty. Still, I am thankful these modern "majesties" keep their places open to the public. Many must depend on the tourist trade to keep their estates from foreclosure.

Prague and Famous People

As we walked around Old Town Square, it became evident that Prague was considered an attractive place by many famous people. Mozart performed his Symphony in D Major as a premier concert in Prague on January 11, 1787. It is also called the Prague Symphony. He

¹ We did not have the panoramic view of the palace shown in Figure 6. So, I borrowed from Wikipedia a better picture than my limited photos.

returned in October of that same year to oversee the production of the first performance of *Don Giovanni*. He made three more visits to Prague.



Figure 7. Café Kafka.

It was nearing lunchtime when we walked by the Café Kafka. (See Figure 7.) We learned it was located on the site where Franz Kafka was born. I recall reading only one of Kafka's works, perhaps his most famous one, "*The Metamorphosis*." I mentioned to Holly that I recalled the main character in the story was changed into a very large

insect while he was sleeping. I had images of the character resembling a huge cockroach, as have many other readers of this tale. The story, never an uplifting one to begin with, ends with the cockroach/ person dying in its/his bedroom, much to the relief of its/his family. After this brief discussion about giant cockroaches, we decided to forego lunch at this place.



Figure 8. Plaque in front of Einstein's former residence.

Albert Einstein was also fond of Prague. We walked by the house where Einstein and his family lived for 16 months in the years spanning 1911-1912. During this time, he lectured at Prague University while working on his general theory of relativity. He

and Franz Kafka were friends and often met at cafes to exchange views about their work and life. The plaque shown in Figure 8 is placed at his former residence.



Figure 9. Honoring Johannes Kepler.

The list goes on to include several other illustrious people. One more: Johannes Kepler, an astronomer, who lived in Prague in the early 1600s. (Figure 9) While residing in this city, he worked on his laws of planetary motion and optics, including refracting telescopes.

The influence of this man on our race is hard to overstate. It was he who offered: "I demonstrate by means of philosophy that the earth is round, and is inhabited on all sides; that it is insignificantly small, and is borne through the stars."

We could discuss other famous people of Prague, but I have promised short discourses. So, let's move on to famous places, highlighted with the Charles Bridge.

Charles Bridge

Like much of Prague, this bridge (shown in Figure 9), has a rich history. Construction on the bridge began in 1357. Just imagine. In the year of 1357, the earth was considered by many people to be flat. Columbus did not sail to “discover America” until the late 1490s. To the end of my time on this earth, I will remain amazed by the intelligence and ingenuity of my forbearers.



Figure 9. The Charles Bridge.

Many of my fellow humans do not share this view. Many fail to give credit to those who built the foundations on which we thrive. Not only the foundations of bridges, but the foundations of medicine, the science of astronomy, the realizations of Darwin's observations, and many other revelations.

Of utmost importance during the building of our institutions was the rule of law. It slowly yet surely began to safeguard more of our race who just a few decades ago, were considered little more than human fodder to a few despots and dictators.

We have a long way to go to the time when the rule of law protects all of us. Most humans are without its shield. But our steps are toward becoming a more benign species in relation to our past wonton behavior toward one another. Our senseless predation seems to be ebbing...with this caveat: As long as our food and water holdout.

I walked this bridge thinking of its historical underpinnings. History tells us it took several centuries to complete its construction. It took me a couple hours to walk across it. I could have done it in a few minutes, but I paused to take in the scenes shown in Figure 10.

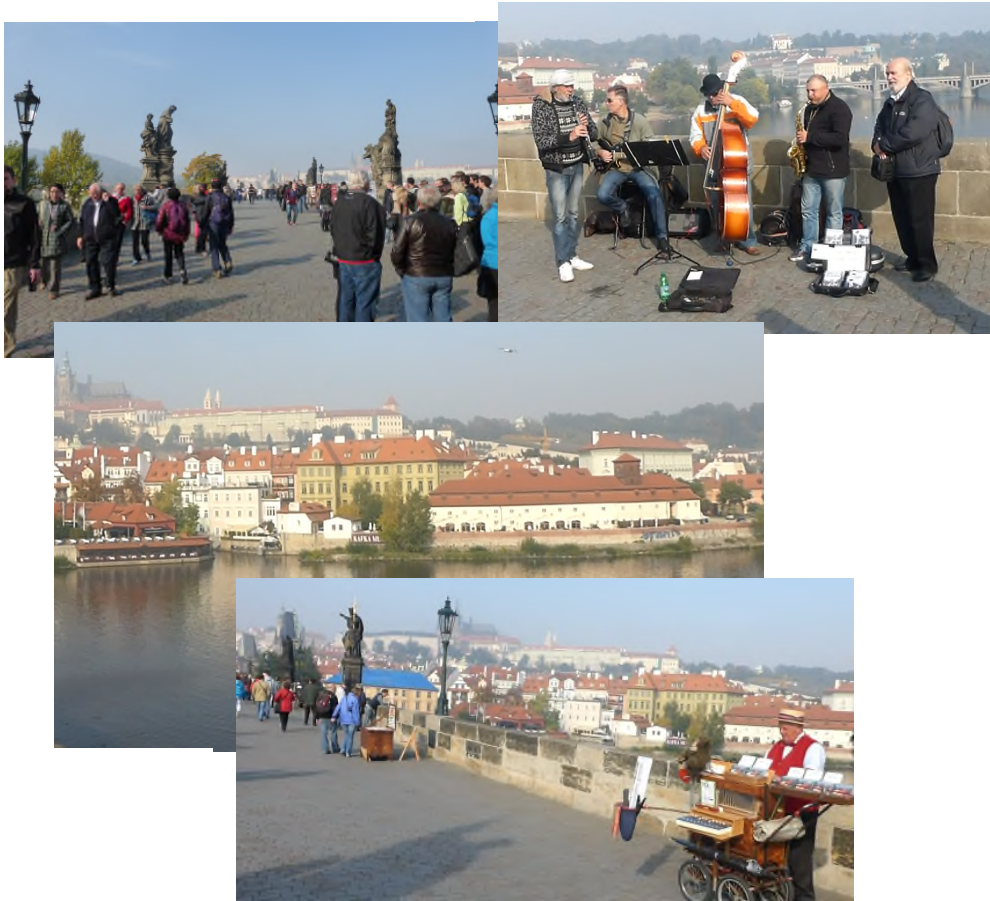


Figure 10. Scenes from the Charles Bridge.

Prague: So many facets. So many fibers. So many filaments that tie its past to its present.

I left this bridge, this city, and this newly formed country with reluctance. Our journey was coming to an end. Soon, it was back to America, the melting pot of so many of this city's facets, fibers, and filaments.