

On the Eastern Block

We started in the small town of Passau, Germany. My boyfriend and I were traveling on our own beforehand, so to get to Passau we took the regional train from the Munich train station. First class tickets were only \$30 USD each, providing reserved seating, luggage compartments and power outlets. This proved helpful as the train journey was a little over two hours in total.

Once we arrived, cabs were waiting outside the station. Most locals don't speak English, but I knew enough German to get around. Our cab ride was only about 7 minutes from the docking location. As soon as our car pulled up, the Program Director Lubo Krupa met us outside and escorted us to reception while crew members assisted us with our bags. Once we checked in, another crew member, Michaela, led us to our room on the same deck – once we arrived, our bags were already in the room waiting for us to unpack! We enjoyed a light buffet lunch on the terrace while an announcement was made – anyone interested in joining a walking tour free of charge was welcome. As we had been traveling the past few days, we decided to stay on the ship but were able to take in the views for a few hours.

During the welcome reception, the staff introduced themselves to the passengers and let us know that they were here for us should we need anything at all during our time onboard. Lubo then went into a "Port Talk," a 15-minute presentation on the city we would be enjoying the following day. There was one of these daily before dinner, and I enjoyed getting a brief glance into our upcoming ports of call each night.

MEALS

All meals onboard come included. Breakfast is an extensive buffet, complete with omelet station, fresh fruit, pastries, local delicacies, and a selection of made-to-order menu items daily. Coffee and juices are included as well. The serving staff was so friendly and by the second day, they already knew my order of a latte and orange juice. Their cheery faces got me ready for a day of exploring or cruising.

Lunch was a combination of a select few menu items and a buffet. They had a fresh pasta station that never disappointed (and for me, I take pasta VERY seriously). For both lunch and dinner, there was a set menu of a few choices that were always available, as well as a few daily menu items based on the region we were in. My absolute favorite item from the entire ship came recommended by our server – Roast Red Pepper and Garlic Soup – and it was one of the most incredible starters I had on the journey!

DINNERS

Each day there was a "tasting" menu of 3 courses specifically tailored to the region. They also had a few other menu items, ranging from Tom Yum soup (one of my favorites) to bread dumplings and white wine butter sauce. Each day was something new and it never left me hungry.

One night, during our stay in Krems, the galley hosted a theme night called "Taste of Austria." This was a buffet-style dinner, with all the servers dressed in traditional Austrian gear while a Polka band played folk songs. Each table was set with fresh pretzels and an assortment of cheese and dried meats. The buffet also included local potato pasta, an entire section for sausages of all sorts, a variety of mustards, many dessert options and so much more. I went back for seconds because all the food was so incredible.

ONBOARD ACTIVITIES

After dinner service, Viking had evening entertainment that varied based on where we were docked. In Austria, local singers serenaded us with folk songs, and we all sang along to The Sound Of Music. Another night, we had a game night playing a family-feud style game. We came in second place, but being the competitive person I am I had a lot of fun playing with others.

Twice during our journey we had “Scenic Cruising” through the Wachau Valley and Budapest. During this time, Lubo explained what we were seeing and gave brief history lessons while we gathered in the lounge. The best part was sailing into Budapest at 11pm and being able to see the Parliament building lit up from our stateroom, then waking up to the Chain Bridge right outside our window. Truly indescribable – you’re going to have to trust me on that.

FINAL IMPRESSIONS

Going into this adventure, I thought we would feel like fish out of water because we were so much younger than the rest of the guests. I’m pleased to say that I was wrong. All the guests onboard were welcoming and friendly like the staff. While often we were the same ages as their children (in a few cases, their grandchildren), I would go again in a heartbeat. All elements of our trip were impeccable, from the food to our stateroom to the shore excursions and the cities we visited.

My Viking Journey was one to remember and I eagerly await the day I am onboard again.