

Two Thousand Leagues over Land and Sea

By
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Foreword

This narration is about a trip that Quang and Dick took from Beijing China across Manchuria, Siberia, Russia via a Monkey Business Train excursion, then a Tailink Cruise Ship from Saint Petersburg across the Gulf of Finland to Helsinki, then the train to Rovaniemi and bus and taxi to Kirkenes Norway to board the Hurtigruten Ship "Polarlys" of 11,343 Tons to the North Western Norway City of Bodo and then the Norwegian train to Trondheim and Oslo, where we caught the train to Berlin and on to eventually Vienna Austria. The trip started on the 13 of May and we returned home on the 25 of June.

Chapter 1 – Trans Manchurian-Siberian Railway

The trip had an ominous start in that we were 30 minutes too late to catch our evening flight from Da Nang to Ha Noi. We were able to recover this delay by the courteous Viet Nam Airlines Ticket Agent putting us on the first flight to Ha Noi the following morning. We were able to still pick up Quang's Schengen Visa at the Finnish Embassy in time to catch our flight to Beijing the same morning.

In our excitement to get to our hotel from the Beijing Airport, we fell for a taxi scam that cost us about 4 times the going rate.

Nevertheless, we had a good day of going to the Monkey Business Office, Beijing, and finding it above the "Hidden Tree Bar and Garden" along which by the way has a great variety of Belgium Beer and Pizza. We picked up our vouchers and other pertinent information from Chris at the Monkey Business Office and boarded the #9 Train to Lake Baikal after finally finding the correct platform at the Beijing Main Railway Station on the 15th of May. We had been misdirected up a set of stairs, with all of our bags and baggage, by a Chinese Train Station Official.

Manchuria from the train was not much to see. From what we could see the buildings were not modern and were poorly maintained. I'm sure that many tourist attractions could be found once one got off of the train.

We shared the 4 – passenger compartment with a Siberian Artist Lady on her way home from her first and a business trip to Beijing. She had an encounter with a car while riding a bicycle in Beijing and obviously lost. She had not been attended to by a doctor so we did what we could with our little first aid kit. She looked pretty rough and like she had been in a hell of a fight. She did enlighten us about what we may see for the next 5000 miles of train travel across Siberia and Russia. She was correct it was depressing. The other occupant was part of a small group of importers bringing Chinese goods to Siberia. He and his associates were busy trying to hide various amounts of goods throughout the train's obscure compartments. Our man was very courteous and friendly even though he could not speak a language that the Siberian lady could understand. He was found to be in non-violation, but his friends had to pay something as we could observe from the train window. I think that they expect to get caught for something and this fine is just to appease the Customs Officials to look the

other way. I also think that the Customs Official was reluctant to search our compartment because of our presence there. What a tough way to make a living. .

The scenery adjacent to the China Russian border for a hundred miles each way was quite flat without any sign of animal or human habitats. The border was easily distinguishable by the barbed wired no-mans land and the sentry towers on the horizon.

Once we were inside of Siberia, the train carriages had to have the wheels changed to the proper Russian Gauge. This meant getting off the train for about 4 hours. We found the money changer and converted our Yang to Rubles. We went to the border station variety shop to replenish our supply of instant soups and bottled water. When we finally got back on the train, I being the gentlemen that I am, twisted the plastic top off of the liter of water and gave it to my overly thirsty wife. She took a big swig and promptly expelled it from her mouth. It was Russian Vodka. It appeared to be water and at about 40 cents a liter one would presume that it was good clear water. Sorry Quang. How about a beer?

Our merchants were gone and our Siberian Lady got off at the next stop. I decided to indulge in an authentic Russian Beef Stroganoff Dinner in the train dining car. My mother's Beef Stroganoff dinners, as I remember them, were far superior. Mile after mile swept by the train window without any evidence of wildlife or human existence to be seen. The land was flat in all directions and covered with wild grass. Eventually some trees appeared and then forests of pine trees as thick as the hair on the back of a dog appeared. Some deciduous trees were intermixed and were beginning to bud. Railcars loaded with what we referred to as pecker poles in America were in abundance. After coming to the summit of some pass we could see the beginning of 20 million year old Lake Baikal. As we skirted above the south shore of the lake we could see chunks of ice washed up on the shore like an invading army. The chunks were as big as cars both in the water and on the very edge of the beach. Apparently, the lake ice had just broken up the week before.

We disembarked from the train at Irkutsk and were greeted with a warm smile by Lena holding a Monkey Business sign. She was our guide for the next three days and directed us to the waiting van. The first stop was a successful stop at the local ATM. We were then off to our homestay 110 km away on Lake Baikal. There we were greeted by Misha & Faya Mahgaskin. Their humble but ample home and hospitality was a splendid experience. The food was Siberian and delicious. I convinced Quang that she would probably find that the Siberian sauna would not cause any adverse affects like the one in Nepal. Fortunately, I was correct and we looked forward to that little bit of peace and tranquility during our stay there. Of course we had to celebrate our first use of a Siberian sauna with a shot of the local vodka.

Quang & I got up early and went for a walk just at sun up. We found a newly constructed Russian Orthodox Church on the beach. It was a quaint setting to say the least. A neighbors dog decided to escort us on our little morning jaunt that included a small boat harbor. A huge rusty and dilapidated derrick had been constructed to lift heavy marine equipment onto small ships that may have frequented the harbor at one time and probably had not been used for at least ten years. Could this be a symbol of how the economy of Siberia and Russia has become?

Mr. Mahgaskin now raises, maybe, 20 head of sheep and has a milk cow. He does not have any other source of income anymore. Mrs. Mahgaskin has a part-time music teaching job at the village school along with her homestay work. They definitely have a garden for further subsistence. They no longer can collect unemployment,

medical benefits or social security. We were told that this is the way of life throughout this region of Siberia.

Later that morning we had a very adequate breakfast and Lena took us on a hike up into the mountain pasture where the sheep were grazing. The view of the new church on the beach plateau below and the snow capped mountains across Lake Baikal 22 mile away was appreciated. We then went on an 8 km round trip trek to a fishing/retreat along the gravel laden shore line. We were greeted by the sound of hunting dogs as we approached the pine cabins. We had a lunch of local Baikal fish and a venison stew. The return leg was tiring and apparently we were behind on somebody's schedule. We were pleasantly surprised to see Mr. Mahgaskin in his Minsk sidecar motorcycle coming towards us. Quang did not hesitate to get in. We have a classic picture of Quang in this beat up Old Czech sidecar motorcycle.

Lena & I arrived home shortly after that and we all enjoyed another great Siberian meal and separate saunas.

In the morning we were off to Irkutsk to visit the significant sites of the city. Many fires through the ages had destroyed the town and a century ago a decree went out that the public building had to be constructed of masonry. We were not able to see very much due to the short time before boarding our train. We went to the local market and stocked up on local sausage, cheese, bread and salami. We found some more packaged soups and bottled water too.

We decided to go first class to Moscow which basically meant that we were the only ones in the compartment. OK! The sound of the non-welded tracks was definitely the same. The view from the train was more forested landscape with small cities passing by in a blur at 120 km per hour. Sometimes the train got up to 140km/hr. Pretty soon these cities were marked with empty factories at an alarming frequency. The factories had been empty for quite some time due to the degree of deterioration.

More modern equipped large farms were now becoming prevalent since spring was definitely in the air. The trees were showing more leaf and flower buds. The outskirts of oncoming cities were abundant with household gardens being prepared for planting. You could see whole families busy with the tasks of preparing (subsistent?) gardens.

Chapter 2 – Moscow

After 8 days on the railroad we arrived in Moscow. We were met by a big strong Russian man who was out of breath, but relieved me of the some of the burden of wrestling with our bags and baggage. My back had been objecting to my lack of consideration. We took a speedy trip from the train station thru Moscow, past the White House and we could see the Stalin Scrapers off in the distance.

We checked into the hotel and quickly dove into the bathtub for a good soak. The next day we checked out of the hotel and transferred into our homestay on the Moskva River about 4 km from the Kremlin and directly across from Gorky Park. It was a large 4 room older (60 years) apartment on the third floor with a great view. We washed out our socks and underwear and hung them up in the window to dry. The Landlady charged us the equivalent of US \$7.00 for a single washing.

We were there for three nights and in that time visited the Kremlin (including the Armoury Museum with the Faberge Masterpieces, a room full of ornate Gold Carriages and many other rooms full of many grandiose articles), Cathedrals of the Annunciation/Dormition and the Archangel Michael, Ivan the Great Bell Tower, the

Palace of Facets that basically surround the Cathedral Square. Of course we could only give a quick look at the Tsar Cannon with a bore of over 70 cm and an immense 70 ton damaged Tsar Bell resting in state on its marble mount due to the sudden downpour. There are both huge. Red Square, the Cathedral of St. Vasily the Blessed, the Chocolate Candy Factory. Fortunately we purchased some books to help remind us of our whirlwind tours.

The changing of the Kremlin Guards at the memorial for the unknown soldier of "The Great Patriotic War" with the Nazis, is a must to see. Their military precision is impressive to the intricate details. As the two guards stand shoulder to shoulder for a brief second at the instant of the change, the guards give each other a quick glance by snapping their heads, maybe 45 degrees. to obtain eye contact. In an instant the change is made and they are own their own to carry out their duties

We did notice a statue of General Suckoff, the Famous Russian General that drove the Nazis out of his country and entered Berlin to mark the collapse of Hitler's dream. He is also the general that "Patton" took a sincere disliking to. I have misspelled his name, I'm sure, but it is not in disrespect to the great General. It is because of my lack of recall.

Another fascinating building was the once "Upper Trading Arcades" that has been transformed on the interior to shops for the people of deep pockets. It is a huge building 200 meters long by 40 meters high at the main roof and covers over 25,000 square meters. The exterior is still the same but refurbished as it was in 1893. It is called the "GUM".

A chocolate factory half way between the Kremlin and our homestay had a unique way of advertising. We frequently made the walk to and from the Kremlin area and our homestay and finally became overwhelmed by the chocolate aroma that drifted with the prevailing breeze along the river, so we ventured inside. We wanted to take a tour, but nobody could understand us so we just bought some chocolate. It was OK, but not worth the effort to go out of our way to buy it again.

Adjacent to the chocolate factory on its own island is a grotesque sculpture of the Santa Maria ship of Christopher Columbus fame. The ship has to be maybe 50 meters to the top of the main mast. It is of a dark metal. It appeared to be bronze but most probably a thin copper-cladded material. It stands there dark and ominous on the river. An oversized Ivan the Terrible or Great is standing amid ship in the rigging looking down river. The story behind this ship is that it was to be a gift to the U.S. The Soviets tried to dictate where this grotesque statue was to be placed in the U.S. and we refused to accept it on these principles.

There another park on the other side of the river had many statues. One section of the park was dedicated to the memory of the atrocities of Stalin. Very surprising that throughout Russia and Germany we could see statues of Lenin, but Statues of Stalin are gone. For the most part the populace seems to want to forget about Stalin.

We did use the Metro Subway, which has the most finely decorated subterranean boarding platforms that we saw on our entire trip. After learning the hard way on how to avoid the spring loaded gates that get you if you forget to retract your subway card and I suppose if you do not pay. Wow! The first two times I left the card in the slot for Quang to use and tried to walk through. Gotcha!

Spring had really arrived in Moscow and the flowers were in abundance in the parks around the Kremlin. The most colorful was Alexander's Garden. The grounds keepers were busy replacing them as new varieties came into bloom. Water features were also abundant. Kids were wading in the pools to collect souvenir money. Yes, we

had to have a big Mac at the huge 300 seat McDonalds adjacent to the Kremlin. We found the ATM machines and Internet Cafes without much trouble also. After seeing the replica souvenir Faberge Eggs inside the Armoury we decided on our last day to go back and buy one. Fortunately, it was closed.

On our last day it was high school graduation day. Thousands of students were on the streets and most of them were in large groups dressed up. Surprisingly though, many of both genders were drinking and smoking openly in public. That night we decided to take a river cruise. It was a bit rainy and a lot of the popular tour boats had their tops closed so sightseeing was not at its optimum. We were alerted to the fact that a fight had started just behind us as the loser came crashing to the deck just behind our seat, and we quickly got out of harms way. The loser ran below and came back with big friends. The victor and his entourage had disappeared somewhere, fortunately. Eventually all of the students got off the boat and minor yelling and gesturing prevailed, but no more physical harm done. Peace and tranquility prevailed over the ship. We could see several of the Stalin scappers in the skyline. The cruise took us up and down the river passing the Kremlin. Most of the tallest of the eighteen towers of the Kremlin Walls had lights inside of the red lenses with brass framed stars. These even rotated.

We saw many historical buildings and were too tired to go on the tours offered. We thought that we were in pretty good physical shape before we started this trip. Maybe it was a mental exhaustion that we were experiencing. There was so much to see and absorb for memory that our brains said that is enough.

One of the last things that we did was to go for a long walk along the river to a heated enclosed foot bridge high above the river for pedestrians only. The center section happened to be closed to a catered party. We bypassed the party and entered Gorky Park from the backside. We took a spin on the 50 meter Ferris wheel. It was kind of a good bye to a wonderful experience in Moscow. At the top we could see our apartment, the Kremlin and many of the colorful and brass onion domes, the Santa Maria and Stalin Scrapers.

I would recommend that one of the very first things to do in visiting a foreign city is to go on a guided bus tour. That helps one to become familiar with the city and its land marks and then you can go back and visit the ones of your own choosing. Another must is to have somebody take and physically show you how to use the subway. The signs are almost meaningless and impossible to pronounce. We ended up counting the number of stops to determine where to get off. It is a very economical and fast way to get around a large city. Street names and their signs were almost impossible for me to remember, but a familiar onion dome, Kremlin or the roof on the Pushkin Library were good reference points that I could remember. I guess that comes from being in construction for some 50 years.

Chapter 3 - Saint Petersburg

The Scenery from the train to Saint Petersburg was more appealing. We noticed a bit more prosperity in the rural dwellings. Families were busy planting their gardens. Many had constructed plastic covered green house in order to get their starts ready. The fruit trees, and I think they were apple, were well in bloom.

Our Monkey Business guide went to the wrong platform to meet us and after an hour we made the connection. We were quickly transferred to the homestay of Irina Podolinaja. She turned out to be a wonderful host. The accommodations were on the

third floor of a 50 year old apartment house. After our Moscow visit we were now at one large suitcase, a brown leather carry on bag, a small suitcase, a black athletic bag, a camera bag, Quang's purse and my black brief case. The suitcases had rollers. They were by no means full, but we were accumulating books and small souvenirs.

Our first duty was to locate an ATM and then have our Monkey Business guide take us to the Tailink Cruise Line Office to confirm our booking to Helsinki. She initiated us on the use of the St. Petersburg Subway. It was more user friendly than the one in Moscow. After locating the pier our guide departed for other duties. We were booked on the Fantasia for a 17 hour boat ride departing for Helsinki on the 1st of June.

The first unguided trip on the St. Petersburg subway was successful although we did go to the incorrect, but first apartment building. "Ah yes, there is the apartment house number and that must be ours on the next block".

Saint Petersburg is an easier going city than Moscow. It is certainly a busy city, but it just seemed that we were more able to fit in with the crowds including the subway. The subway goes down underground at least 60 meters and we did not notice any leaks. One has to be quick and aggressive when getting on or off the subway though. The stations are well marked and are easily identified by the stream of people going in and out. Again we counted stations to determine where we wanted to get off.

The Nevsky Prospekt is about 5 or 6km long with shops of all kinds on both sides. We found a 2 story building full of shops and it took us at least an hour and a half just to walk through it. We were looking for the Faberge Egg Replicas.

The decorated bridges and squares with statues were in abundance. The Anichkov Bridge built in 1715 has horse and handler statues in various forms of interaction confrontations at each corner. The fountain and statue of Field Marshal Mikhail Barclay de Tolly (whom ever he was) both placed in the courtyard in front of the Kazan Cathedral simply makes you expect to see it to start moving. The builders, architects and artisans created remarkable achievements that are one of a kind and can still be enjoyed centuries after completion.

Adjacent to Decembrist Square (1825 uprising that was eliminated) is a bronze statue of Peter the Great on a rearing horse. The entire weight is supported by the two hind legs and the tail of the horse. It has been on that piece of white granite since 1782.

We walked past St. Isaac's Cathedral. Auguste Montferrand took 40 years to build it. Across the St. Isaac's Square is a sculpture of a mounted Nicholas 1.

I had always thought that Saint James Cathedral in Seattle had to be the ultimate in interior décor, especially for a place of worship. Maybe it could have been if the masters of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries were still around to apply their artistic abilities as they did in St. Petersburg. The artistic details included the statues on the parapets, walls, columns, beams and facades inside and outside of the buildings. They do not do that anymore. One must see as much of this as they physical can to appreciate this level of achievement, because America does not have it.

In the center of the Palace Square, adjacent to the Hermitage Museum, is a one piece, perfectly balanced 704 ton granite column, 47.5 meters tall to commemorate the victory over Napoleon by Alexander the 1st. I suspect some sort of steel spine that is anchored in the base, was used, but I was informed that one does not exist.

Our guide took us on a walking tour which we found to be very interesting. She knew a lot and could answer questions as trivial as they may have been. I needed to find a restroom during our walk and she paused and said this way. She took me into a Russian souvenir shop where I was greeted by a young and beautiful young lady who

offered me a shot of Russian Vodka. I quickly forgot about my call to nature and my guide took me out of my stupor by calling my name and directed me to the free facility.

We crossed the Neva River by the two bridges connected to Vasillievsky Island on our way to the Peter and Paul Fortress. This turned out to be a garrison that survived without any military involvement for over two hundred years. It was essentially a prison. The Forts Sts Peter and Paul Cathedral with its significant steeple of 122.5 meters and its interior is the most appealing tourist attraction today. A bronze "hand rubbed seated statue of the 6'3" Peter the great is obviously another popular attraction.

I word of advise be sure to have some extra coins from the country that you are visiting with you at all times. We had to pay as much as 2 Euros in Germany to use the pissiere (sp?).

We took a couple hour scenic boat tour through the waterways of Saint Petersburg. Actually, it was quite a feat of engineering several hundred years ago. The water way connects to the sea and of course the water way fluctuates with the tide. Old and antiquated mooring rings are still embedded in the masonry walls. We were shown many very important buildings along the waterway that still wore the significant details of the architecture of the day it was built.

The boat tour down the Griboedov Canal took us passed the very colorful "Church of the Spilled Blood, where Emperor Alexander II was assassinated in 1881. The main dome (highest) has a twisted blue and white stripped dome. The Mathew, Mark, Luke and John domes are multicolored and checkered. The little taller bell tower is a brass clad smooth dome. Multicolored frescoes and small roof sections at lower levels provide a very colorful church façade. The interior was more subdued with religious decorations throughout.

Adjacent to this church were many little souvenir stands. We had fun bargaining for specialty souvenirs. I must bring up the fact again that a bus tour at the start is highly recommended and a boat tour if available. We realize now that there were many more things to see. We would have had to stay for another week however.

Chapter 4 – The Hermitage Museum

We left early in the morning for the Hermitage Museum and already found a crowd anxious for the doors to open 30 minutes early. What a facility or one might describe it as many huge building connected with hallways and bridges. They claim that there are over 3 million items on display and that they can not all be displayed at one time. The author of this original facility, the "Winter Palace" was the Empress Elizabeth Petrovna in 1752. In 1762 Catherine, the Great, started expanding the facilities and some say she spent too much of the countries treasury on art objects and furnishing within the newly named Hermitage Museum. The permanent exhibit occupiees over 300 hundred rooms and covers about 80 acres. We were exhausted after 6 hours of looking and admiring art objects of world renown.

Just to wet your appetite a little, and believe me when I say seeing is believing and beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, I will list some of the main attractions: the Rembrandt room, the Leonardo da Vinci room, the Malachite Room, the Main Staircase, the Carl Faberge Display, the Great Throne Room (and I missed an opportunity to waltz with Quang in this one), paintings by Rubens, Anthony van Dyck, Renoir, Monet, Vincent van Gogh, Gauguin, Picasso, Raphael, the French made gold covered carriage that carried Catherine the Great to her Coronation at the Cathedral of Assumption, the clock built by James Cox of England in 1792 that has a full size brass peacock, a cock

that waves its brass wings and crows, on the hour, when the mushroom clock shows the correct roman numeral hour and minutes in Arabic, while a music box plays a little tune every hour and the owl blinks its starring eyes, the Golden Drawing Room, a 19 ton vase carved out of a single stone of Malachite 5 meters in diameter with the top of the bowl 2.5 meters above the floor, the pantings of dogs and wild animal fights (5) by Paul De Voos (205cm x 345cm), the four armor clad mounted knights on full sized stuffed horses, the small dining room where the soviets captured the Czars Ministers in 1917 on the that fateful day. I only listed a few of the artists. Some of the paintings would cover a wall as big as the side of your house. Other art objects such as sculptures, jewelry, pottery, personal possessions, crowns, clothing, firearms, swords, thrones, gifts, religious memorabilia, more carriages, complete libraries, living quarters dating as far back as 15 B.C. were on display.

The interior decorations in which the masterpieces were displayed deserve some mention as well. Every little detail in the rooms was highlighted by a work of art, whether it was stone, gold or an elaborate wood inlay design. A picture deserves a wall worthy of displaying its piece and the architects made sure of that.

Think of the loss that would have occurred if Hitler and his thieves had been able to get into St. Petersburg and the Hermitage. It was damaged due to shelling and bombing, but you would never know it by now. There was evidence of war damage in Saint Petersburg, though, as a grime reminder to that 872 day siege.

You must put this on your list to do or do it again if you already have visited. I would recommend a pricey tour guide for just your audience. That way you can go slowly and have somebody point out that the owl is blinking or did you notice that arrow hole in the armor of one of the knights or George slept here. A group tour guide is always in a hurry and quite often you are too far away to hear what she or he is saying. St. Petersburg greeted us with the 301 birthday parade as we departed the museum. Another fact worth mentioning and originated by Quang was, "Dick, have you noticed all the tall beautiful blond women in this part of Russia"?

Chapter 5 - Helsinki

The trip across the Gulf of Finland on the Fantaasia of the Tallink Line was a welcome change from the train travel. The toilet facilities were in our private cabin and we need not have to have a pocket full of coins to use them. The smorgasbord breakfast and dinner were complete in quantity, quality and selection. We had to try the caviar, but the pickled herring and kippered salmon was still our repeated choices. The potatoes and meat balls were good also. They reminded me of my brother-in-laws meat balls. After about 17 hours we arrived at Helsinki Harbor. The last time I was aboard the ship from Stockholm and we had been breaking 12" ice for the last 2 hours, some 20+ years ago. No ice this time and the waterfront had been changed dramatically.

The taxi driver found our Hospice within a few minutes. Our room was in a new adjacent building and on one of the upper floors so we had somewhat of a view. It was new, clean and in a non-smoking section. It had a small kitchen so we had a few meals while we stayed there.

We found our place on the map and proceed to explore by foot as we headed for downtown. The people that we met on the street were wearing smiles and were very friendly. Never were we refused help when we asked for it. Helsinki looks prosperous. There was a huge construction project underway that involve several existing city blocks. My guess is that it is going to be a convention center or something of that

magnitude. All of the workers were wearing safety goggles, hard hats and red fluorescent vests. No, I did not see any body wearing flip-flops or barefoot.

We found our way to the Esplanade and to Helsinki Expert where we obtained the Helsinki 3 day pass. From there we ventured to the ferry landing for our ride to the fort. The fort was designed to protect the harbor of Helsinki and fortunately was never under fire until the WW II era. The vast grounds are used for outdoor events and relaxation. We found a commercial glass blower and his little shop in operation within one of the old buildings. Quang got to try her hand at operating the periscope of the Vesikko WW II submarine on display, while I got a little shut eye in one of the bunks in the forward torpedo room.

We took our first bus tour and we then began to thoroughly appreciate all the parks and green space that the city has developed in blending it in with the overall urban plan for Helsinki. The city has so many places for one to go to seek peace and tranquility. Of course a visit to Jean Sibelius Park with the pipe sculpture in commemoration of his great works and achievements is a must.

After feeling confident enough to venture out of the city on the public transportation system we found our way to the Iittala Factory. We were quite satisfied with the crystal that was on display, but disappointed in the selection available of the Arabia dinnerware. We received a lot of help from a young Japanese saleslady. A few days later we returned and added to our choices. The Japanese Lady was very patient with us even after we changed our selection somewhat and then she carefully packed our selections for travel. The Iittala people have a great policy of being very thorough in packing to avoid breakage (we had the same number of pieces in Da Nang as we started with in Helsinki). Then we all took on the task of filling out the tax refund forms and we must have done it correctly because we got all of our tax money at the airport in Vienna upon our departure on the 24 of June.

On one of our walking excursions along the Esplanade we were treated to an outside fashion show of Women's summer wear. The dresses looked great and we (I) was disappointed that we missed the first part of it. From there we went to the ferry landing to catch another ferry to the zoo. I thought that it was a well organized zoo and it seemed that the animals were placed in as natural an environment as they would be in the wild. They even had a small herd of (American) Wapiti Elk. In the Scandinavian countries they refer to Moose as Elk.

. . . The variety of International cuisine seemed endless, but I think we both liked the availability of all the great sausage/salami, cheese, whole grain breads, herring and kippered salmon and imported fruit and vegetables. The fresh strawberries were from Finland however.

In sharp contrast between Russia and Finland was the number of young smokers and drinkers in public versus the number of mobile phones and Volvos in use in Finland.

Chapter 6 – Finland

We went to the train station/platform a little early to catch our train to Rovaniemi. We got all settled in our seats until two other passengers looked at us and said that they too were assigned to those seats. We compared tickets and we were on a train intended for the Russian border. We were fortunate that they happened to be assigned to those seats and not to some other empty seat. We got our baggage off the train in time to get on the next train.

We had a reindeer dinner in Rovaniemi and visited the Museum of Natural History. Their exhibits were indicative to Finland with natural settings including the wild life of that region of the world. It had a great geological display showing the formation of that part of Europe and the Polar area. There were several exhibits showing the various costumes of the different ethnic civilizations in Northern Scandinavian cultures.

We took the local city bus to and physically jumped over the Arctic Circle. Quang had a chat with Santa Claus and we purchased a couple of traditional wool sweaters to cut the chilling wind. I took a picture of a large clock that showed 23:58 with the sun shining on it. We passed the famous Rovaniemi Ski Resort with its magnificent ski jump in the sky line.

From Rovaniemi we took to the first bus to Ivanlo. Then a bus transfer and on to a Reindeer Farm near the Norwegian border. Along the way, it reminded me of Northern Alaska with the birch trees and when we got into, I presume, permafrost areas, the canted black spruce trees. In open areas we could see reindeer grazing and had to stop the bus a couple of times to let the herds cross the road. The bus driver delivered the mail as we made this 80 kilometer trip and that included a scheduled stop at Souli's Reindeer Farm.

At the reindeer farm, we enjoyed a rare and bare moment in and out of a real Finnish Sauna there. We think that only the reindeer saw us. We had more good food for dinner and breakfast at this farm. They offered cloud berry, lingo berry and blue berry jam and cured reindeer. We asked the owners daughter of the farm where were most of the reindeer and the young girl replied, "out in the woods making babies".

From the train we noticed many cultivated farms in the southern part of Finland. The farther North that we traveled more and more Birch and mixed evergreen forests became prevalent. And still farther North we traveled we could see evidence of permafrost and many lakes. Some people say that Finland is the land of ten thousand lakes. The actual count is over 200,000 lakes. So when the spring warm weather arrives, the mosquitoes must be quite bothersome. Fortunately, we were too early.

A taxi came and picked us up and we headed for the Finnish Norwegian border, stopping a few times to let the reindeer herds cross the road. More and bigger patches of snow were becoming more common now as we headed North.

Chapter 7 – Norway

We arrived at the designated pier in Kirkenes only to find no ship insight. We went into the harbor masters office and he indicated that it would be here in about forty minutes. It was raining and we took cover with all of our bags and baggage in a little room that acted as a staging area. Sure enough off in the distance we could see a ship heading our way. In a short time, the ship, Polarlys was maneuvering along side of the pier with the aid of his bow thrusters. While we were waiting to board we got to talking to a Norwegian bike rider. He had been traveling by bike for the last 18 hours from Trondheim on his 1200 cc BMW (I think). He had his Helly Hansen rain gear on so was quite dry, I presume. He had just gotten leave from two weeks on an oil platform. He was anxious to get to his room, shower and take a nap. The main freight door opened on the side of the ship and vehicles and cargo were offloaded and other loaded back on. The cargo that was loaded on was mostly processed fish (cod & salmon).

The passenger gang plank was lowered, passengers got off and Quang & I proceeded to get our gear aboard. The purser did not have a record of our email

reservation nor our confirmation number, but fortunately he had a room that we desired. Our room had a window and through some rigging of the lifeboats we did have a good view of the outside. We figured out how the beds worked and got all of our stuff stowed. It also had a private bath with lots of hot water for a shower.

The ship was huge and the passenger area was very nice. Good visibility from almost every area of the upper decks. The bow and stern lines were cast off and we were underway. The gentle but subtle vibrations of the bow thrusters soon quit and we were headed for the Fort City of Vardo. The ship made its docking and we were greeted by a marching band as we headed up the streets amongst the snow showers to the fort. It seems that we were about to salute the crossing of Venus in front of the sun. The last time this event occurred was 209 years ago. Were you aware of it and saw it? We did not either since it was snowing. They rolled out the cannons and proceeded to fire about 19 volleys. I watched the small crowd of people gather around the cannons as I covered up my ears waiting for zero hour. They were surprised and momentarily deafened by the first volley. The fort did have some significance during WW II. The Nazi's took control of it and harassed Allied shipping to Murmansk from there. The Russian's bombed it constantly in a successful attempt to drive the Nazis out. During the Cold War it was an early warning radar site similar to the ones I frequented in Alaska.

From there we headed into the Sea of Barents where we soon were being greeted by 7 or 8 Beaufort Force winds. We were in an orientation meeting and the ship started its rock and roll bit. Quang had taken her little magic pills, so she was OK. Others suddenly were quickly departing from the Conference Room. Oh, those poor landlubbers.

We went to the forward observation room and found that not only was it windy but it was snowing. To live up here one would have to like codfish, herring, salmon and reindeer. We could see racks and racks of drying codfish almost everywhere we saw villages and where people were living, now. I remember seeing birds feeding in great numbers on maybe herring balls in the sea. Reminiscent of Neah Bay, years ago.

The next stop was for those of us who wanted to go to Northkapp. Quang stayed aboard ship and would see Honningsvag a fishing port which is supported by a successful fishing Industry. She and the ship then picked us up at Hammerfest, I think.

Northkapp is considered to be the most Northern point of the European continent. Geographically it is close. My goal was to compare it to my X-C ski trek to Point Barrow (71 degrees 17 minutes North) the most Northern point connected to the American Continent. Point barrow was a snow covered gravel bar where I found a section of a walrus jaw. We departed the ship and climbed into the English speaking bus. Northkapp was a limited hotel/restaurant/museum/souvenir modern facility situated on top of a 300 meter high cliff at 71 degrees 10 minutes 21 seconds North. Some 100,000 tourist visit the Kapp every year. To get to Northkapp we traveled on a good road with bigger snow fields and bigger herds of Reindeer on both sides of the road. The bus went into a tunnel whose invert was -230 meters or under an arm of the sea.

We were awed by the fjords and how maneuverable the ship was in navigating through them and even turning around in what seemed like its own length. The walls of the fjords were blessed with cascading waterfalls and crowned with snow fields. We experienced many spectacular sights to say the least! Maybe the most spectacular sights were in the Troll Fjord and the narrow passage called Raftsundet through the Loften Islands, with a variety of waterfalls cascading down the almost vertical slopes.

I was too slow to catch a pair of puffins on a rock ledge with my zoo lens and camera and to capture the moment when a fisherman held up about a 10 kilo cod fish that he had just landed. We saw many picturesque concrete arched bridges the farther south that we traveled. The ship went under several of them.

On the third day we disembarked from the Polarlys at Bodo. We were going to stay at a small motel close to the train station but were rudely treated by the Iraqis who were operating it. I felt that their verbal room price was grossly inflated and they did not care whether I was 67 or not. We went next door to a very nice hotel that had a great breakfast at about 70% of the price. The young receptionist directed us to the "Best Restaurant in Town, Fernando's" where we enjoyed the beer, food, wine, and service. I ordered whale and it was acceptable. We even found an ATM in the city. For a Sunday it was a good day.

The next morning we caught the Norwegian Train south to Trondheim, after recrossing the Arctic Circle. Even though we were farther south we were at a higher altitude and still right at tree line.

Chapter 8 – Trondheim

Trondheim offered the famous flight museum that included a Military section. It displayed the related military equipment that was used by both sides during the Nazi invasion and eventually to their defeat.

One small credit to the Nazis was that they were responsible for the development of the Norwegian railroad. Of course, the Nazis used captured Norwegians to perform the forced labor to build it. The railroad is a vital commercial link for that country. In fact, Norway's transportation system was impressive. The money spent on bridges and tunnels may have come from the oil industry. Money well spent.

The Nidaros Church of Trondheim is the largest Christian Church in Norway. The church was started sometime after King Olav Haroldson was killed in the Battle of Sticklestad and became the Nidaros Cathedral, as it is known today, around 1320. The cathedral is 102 m. by 50 m. and the top of the nave is 21 m. The top of the main tower is 97.9 m. So the church can be easily seen from most of the city. Many stained glass windows have been included in this Gothic Style Structure. One of the most eye-catching is the round Rose Window, on the west Face and it appeared to be over 7 meters in diameter. In the center of the Cathedral is a larger than life-size silver crucifix donated by U.S.A. Norwegians. Just walking into the place takes your breath away. Quang & I were taking pictures of each other when a young couple came up and identified themselves as being with the local newspaper. They wanted to interview us. We were both wearing our newly acquired Scandinavian wool sweaters so I guess we looked like tourist. Not only did they ask us some routine questions but took about 10 pictures from different spots around the exterior of the Cathedral. Many tomb stones bearing the years in the 13 and 14 hundreds could still be identified in the surrounding grave yards

The much publicized whirlpools or maelstrom south of Trondheim were not of much significance in my judgment. Deception Pass is more turbulent. I have fished for salmon near Stewart Island in B.C. where the holes were a least 1.5 meters deep. We even caught salmon at the very edge of these holes. It could be that the tide change was not very significant at the time we were there.

Chapter 9 - Oslo

We had planned to spend more time in Trondheim and then go onto to Bergen, but we had to be in Berlin on the 16th of June. So our next stop was Oslo.

Oslo was an exciting town to venture into. We got off of the train and took what seemed to be an expensive taxi ride to our Homestay. We found that the driver was very courteous and offered a quick description of what we were passing and other points of interest that we should see while we were in Oslo. She explained that the best way to get around Oslo was by Metro. She pointed out that we could catch it just a short walk from our homestay.

The homestay was in a very nice older home that was well cared for. The bed was very comfortable, maybe the best of our entire trip. No meals were included in this homestay.

Once we got the fundamentals under control as far as the subway, it was a snap as long as we counted the stations.

We proceeded to get on a tour bus and enjoyed many of the touristy sites. Quang tried to get a picture of me at the top of Hollemkollen Ski Jump, but the glass windows of the enclosure at the top made it difficult for her to get a picture even with the zoom lens. By the way we had taken about 150 pictures by now with our new Nikon 5700. We are still learning how to use all of the bells and whistles. The pictures taken, overall, are of much better quality than any significant number of pictures that I have ever taken before. The camera knows a good picture when it sees it, better than I can. The tour guide said that we had just a limited amount of time so I had to hurry up many steps (over 90) to the top. I missed the elevator, but decided to use it coming down. They say that their famous and likeable King Olav used to jump at Hollemkollen. On a winter Sunday, they say as many as 30,000 people may come to watch the jumpers.

Our next stop was Vigelandsparken. This is a park that has 212 sculptures that Gustav Vigeland started in 1924 and finished about 1943. These nude sculptures depict human moods and behaviors that he originally cast in clay. Others carved them from stone or cast them in bronze. Yes, you think of a situation in life and undoubtedly you will see it at this outdoor museum. From the creation of life to the various forms depicting the bitter end, can be seen here. There is a monolith 17 m high with 121 human bodies all seemingly struggling to get to the top. There is a statue of a little boy showing intense anger. Other art forms such as the "Wheel of life, The Triangle, The Clan and the 36 groups of granite figures depicting the cycle of life are to be seen.

Another stop was the Vikingskipshuset. Inside were the remains of three Viking ships with the oldest dated back to around 1100. Similar ships of the era are supposed to have traveled as far as Newfoundland. The story goes that Lief Eiriksson discovered America while navigating one of these Viking Ships powered by sail and oar.

We visited another interesting maritime exhibit and that was the balsa-wood Kontiki that made Thor Heyerdahl famous, when he sailed it from Peru to Polynesia. His reenactment of the possibility that the South Americans did the same, maybe 2000 years ago, was quite a remarkable achievement. If you are skeptical, take a look at his craft.

After this exhibit we were on our own and could catch the little ferry back to Oslo. We happen to notice another tall museum on the way to the ferry. We peered in the window and saw a large sailing vessel. Upon going inside we were able to explore the "Fram" in the Frammuseet. The Fram was actually a diesel powered schooner with auxiliary sails. This vessel has been both farther North and farther South than any

known vessel in the world. It was locked in the ice at 78 degrees 50 ' N for over one year while under the command of Arctic Explorer Nansen 1893 to 1896. Roald Amundsen used it to go to his successful trek to the South Pole in 1910 to 1912. We ventured through the well preserved ship from stem to stern. Quang even inspected the chain locker. She did not like the Captains Quarters, the galley or the heads after I had to explain the proper procedure on how to use them and what the fair weather option was all about. I think the she is ready for a sail on a modern sailboat however.

We spent a lot of time visiting the little shops along Karl Johans Gate. We found more reindeer hides for sale and even though it has been a bit of a drag to carry ours all the way from Finland, we saved about \$80.00 and its from a Finnish reindeer for sure.

We stopped at an Italian Restaurant, Terra, (a down to earth place!) one evening and had a great bottle of wine with our dinner. I don't remember what we had for dinner, but the wine was Muscato D'Asti. Try it sometime, you may like it so much you to will forget what you had for dinner.

Now here is the real gem of Oslo. We were walking on KJG and glanced over at the little delicatessen that we had had lunch at and then we both noticed a touch of Viet Nam. I saw an overhead sign that said Vietnameseet, or something, and about the same time Quang shouted out, "there's a Xich Lo". Sure enough it was a Vietnamese 3-wheeled people mover. We went inside and at long last Quang was able to speak her native tongue for about two hours. The food was excellent and quite authentic. The owner was from Duetchland and this was one of three that he owned. It made us a bit homesick and after all it had been over a month since we flew out of Da Nang.

Oslo was a fun place for the two of us to enjoy are lives together. The people are happy and helpful. The city is clean and business's looked prosperous. We want to go back there someday and take in Bergen as well. Kris Kristopherson held a concert in Bergen on the night of the 15th. I knew this fact weeks in advance, but could not work it in. On the 15th we boarded the overnight train to Berlin

Chapter 10 – Berlin

We said goodbye to Oslo and Norway and within a few hours we were traveling in Sweden. Leaving Oslo meant leaving the sea behind us, as well. So when we were traveling through the rural part of Norway and into Sweden we saw only a slight change in scenery and quality of life. We had another of Quang's classic dinners which was a wholegrain sandwich with cheese and salami. We had a short nap and were awakened by a lack of movement by the train. We were entering the ferry to Denmark. The entire train was taken on board the ferry. We found our way out of the train and made it topside. The lights of Sweden were slowly fading away and we noticed something that we had not seen for along time. It was dark. The sun had gone down and there was no sun light in the sky.

The on-board duty free store was opening and we ventured inside along with the many other bargain hunters. We did not need anything, especially when they were offering a bag of M&M's for about \$7.00 US. So we took to the dining room for a snack and were some what disappointed. I think the thought of the Viet Nameese food in Oslo and of home took away much enthusiasm for ship board meals.

We must have fallen asleep because I don't remember too much of Denmark (midnight or so). We did see a few deer in wooded areas along the tracks in Northern Deutschland in the early morning. We also saw well cultivated farmland as we headed south towards Berlin.

A quick taxi ride from the train station and we checked into the IBIS Mitte a little early. A quick shower and a little nap were on the immediate agenda. Looking out of our window we could see a tall TV tower in the distance about a kilometer away. We were directed to go past the TV tower and another kilometer would be the venue for my two day DRBF Conference. After receiving some revised directions we located the modern building and Conference Room. The TV tower became a very useful landmark over the next 4 days.

Near the tower was the Metro train station and a large shopping complex. In the outdoor courtyard there were quite a few young people who were dressed in leathers, chains, colorful spike hairdos. Many had dogs with them. Quite a few of them were openly drinking beer even in the morning. On my short walk from the hotel to the DRBF Conference Hall, I would pass by them and wonder what kind of trouble they would be getting into today. From the distance I would hear the dogs fighting. Another time, I saw a couple of them taunting a couple of policemen. The economy in Deutschland is down and there is supposedly wide-spread unemployment. This small group of rebellious people may be a partial result of the financial strain on the people. The economy in Germany is a major topic of conversation in that Deutschland. I think that Deutschland is feeling the effect of being a large financial partner in the European Union.

The International DRBF conference was worthwhile. Since there were people from all over the world and many from Deutschland we had wired translation consisting of English and Deutsch. When ever something profound was said the Deutsch would gently pound their fists on the table. This acknowledgement was startling at first and reminded me of when Nikita Khrushchev took his shoe off at the U.N. and pounded it on the table. Well, almost. During the evening of the first day we went on a 3 hour dinner cruise that took us along the canals of Berlin and were able to see many of the state of the art works of architecture as well as some of the very old. This conference was quite memorable and including the dinner cruise.

On our last day we went on a city bus tour. Check Point Charlie was still there as were bullet pock marks left over from WW II on various other structures in the city. Surprisingly, the tour bus bypassed the U.S. Embassy even though it was in adjacent block amongst other Embassies. We were taken to the Brandenburg Gate and saw the remains of the "Berlin Wall" still embedded in the street pavement. As seen from the cruise boat we were impressed with the new architecture mixed with the historic buildings of the recent passed history.

Berlin has a distinct ambiance that we found interesting and enjoyable. I recall the vivid pictures from Hitler's era, the Cold War and to see that Berlin has recovered significantly was in deed an inspiration to avoid such blights on humanity now and in the future. The people of Deutschland deserve a lot of credit in maintaining their dignity and drive to be a prosperous and recognized society in the world.

When I purchased our tickets to Vienna I asked the train ticket lady if Quang needed a visa, since we were going through Czech Republic, and she said no. Quang had a Schengen Visa.

I was corrected by a train conductor to use the word Deutschland instead of Germany. He was quite emphatic about that we were in Deutschland and not Germany. That is easy to say, but I keep forgetting how to spell it. Thank goodness for auto spell on the computer.

After about 10 minutes into Czech Republic the immigration officers came into our compartment and looked at our passports. He said, "Where is her visa"? "Uhh, she has a Schengen Visa". "Well, she must get off of the train". My excuse of false

information did not work. My explanation that we were on our way to Vienna to make our confirmed hotel commit that night and that we were very happy with the CZ soccer team in beating Deutschland in the Euro Cup did not work. The I.O., with a little grin, said that we must get off the train at the next stop and return to Dresden where we could apply for a visa at the Consulate Office in the morning. We got off at the next stop and went back to Dresden and obtained train tickets to bypass CZ.

Chapter 11 – Wien

We had another train problem in trying to get to Wien (Vienna). The train from Dresden, bypassing the Czech Republic, was to arrive in Wien at 6:07 AM. At 06:00 we pulled into what appeared to be a secondary station. Very few people got off and we did not see any body get on. We sat back in our seats and in a few minutes, what seemed like long, the train pulled away from the unmarked station. After about 5 minutes from clearing this station, what appeared to be a secondary station, I inquired at the next compartment as to where be Wien. The occupants pointed back towards the direction that we had just departed from. “Oh! Oh! Quang. We must get off at the next stop and go back”. We methodically got all of our worldly possessions near the door and waited for the next stop. After what seemed like about 30 minutes, the train stopped and we got all of our possessions off the train and looked for the platform to catch the return train to Wien. To get there we had to take all of our bags and baggage under the tracks and up to the other side near the station. Having done this we waited about 5 minutes and climbed aboard the first available carriage. We stacked our goods near the door so that we could get off with a minimal amount of delay. The conductor looked at our tickets and smiled. He nodded his head in reassurance that we were proceeding with his approval. Soon he can back and motioned for us to sit down. He proceeded to talk to me in broken English that I could understand only about 40%. His conversation was basically in support of America and all of its worldly efforts. Too say the least; it had a much needed calming effect on me. As the train came to a stop he was most helpful in fulfilling our task of getting our things off of the train.

Vienna was probably the highpoint of our trip. The history and culture of that city is unmatched even by St. Petersburg. Our hotel room looked across the boulevard at the Church, Mary of Victory. With the early morning sun shinning on the ornate dome and bringing out all of its splendid colors and detailed sculptures made one feel like it was a fantasy world. The attention to the minute details by the artisans building it is something to behold. Fortunately, we got some pictures to prove what we saw. From our 9th floor room at the Ibis Hotel we could also see the wooded hills off in the distant, maybe 5 miles away, with what appeared to be palaces with green carpet-like lawns bordering the forests.

Our tour bus, turned into a track meet, but we did see a lot. The golden statue of Johan Straus was tucked away in Stadtpark along with those of Schubert and Beethoven. This park deserves a full day since they have Waltz concerts, dancing performances and public dancing, weather permitting in the Vienna Kursalon

We had about thirty minutes to enjoy the immense grounds of Schonbrunn (beautiful fountain) Palace. The 1.76 sq. km grounds included Neptune’s Fountain, a Zoo, the Maze, Nymph’s fountain and many other time consuming attractions. The grassed areas had embedded flower beds in the shape of musical notes. The Schonbrunn Palace (constructed 1694 – 1765) was lavishly decorated and fitted with artisan’s masterpieces. The Hapsburg Empire lasted until the end of WWI, some 600

years, and cost the populace of the Empire a considerable amount of time, money (New World Gold) and I suspect 1,000's of lives. The Golden Carriage from the 18th Century was even more immaculate than the carriage of Catherine the Great of Saint Petersburg.

Our walks to the nearby shops, from our hotel, were fun to browse through. We could see items for sale that could be anywhere in the world like Seattle, like great ice cream. Other shops specialized in items indicative of just this part of the world like sausages and salami. Their varieties and names are too numerous and difficult to remember. That which is worthy of remembering is the aroma and flavors. We brought back about a dozen different ones and fortunately the VN Customs people did not notice and claim that we were bringing too many in to VN.

We found a Fine China Shop about 1 km from our hotel. Wow! I had been informing Quang for about a year that we need a good set of China. My original goal was to find some China in Finland. I was not impressed with what we saw there. The Crystal yes, so we bought some Iittala Crystal there. The first dinner set we looked at was quite elegant with all of its gold. It was priced accordingly. After a minimal amount of discussion we decided against the hand painted patterns because of not being able to put them in a dishwasher. After our initial realistic selection we decided to let the saleslady see if she had all of the desired pieces and we would come back.

Chapter 12 – Saint Stephan's Cathedral

We continued to look for more china shops in the downtown part of Wien. During this quest we visited Saint Stephan's Cathedral at the center of Wien. Magnificent! The original Romanesque style basilica was rebuilt in Gothic style after a fire in 1258. About 50% remained after WWII. Today it is referred to as the "Steffl" by the Viennese and serves as a city landmark with its 137 meter high steeple. Above an altar are the initials AEIOU which stand for "Austria erit in orbe ultima" or "Austria will exist until the end of the world". The organ, considered as one of the largest in Europe has 10,000 pipes.

The structure is based upon selected arithmetic numbers 1, 3, 4 and combinations of the same. 3×37 equals the breadth of 111 meters, its length is 333 meters and 111 meters was supposed to be the height of the South Tower. Actually, it is 136.4 meters high by today's measurement. St. Peter's Basilica, in Rome, and St. Paul's, in London, are both of Romanesque design featuring a dome at the top and are both shorter in height. It is my understanding that these two are #1 & #2 in the size of the footprint. Additional facts to consider about the numbers involving the construction of St. Stephen's Cathedral, is that 343 is the number of steps to the North tower chamber. The main nave roof is 59.9 meters high. After the cathedral in Strassburg, St. Stephan's is the second tallest church tower in Europe. I guess, Quang & I must go to Strassburg to find out for sure.

The Cathedral has bells in all of its three towers. In the North Tower hangs the second largest bell in Europe. It is known as the "Pummerin". It was originally cast in 1711 from the Turkish cannonballs after their defeat. In 1945, sparks from a nearby fire, caused by Allied bombing, caught the cathedral on fire. The original bell fell and broke into "smithereens". From the pieces of the original bell "Pummerin II" was cast. It weighed 21,383 kg or 23 tons. This was cast in Northern Austria in 1951 with a note of C +4/16 and finally hoisted in 1957. "Its voice can be heard only on days of major events, 10 -12 times a year. The "Half Pummerin" weighs a mere 5700 kg and has a tone of G. It is rung every day at the call for evening prayer.

The interior has been aptly referred to as “the most hallowed church interior on earth”. I am no one to judge since I have only been in a few. Saint Peters Basilica may have more huge works of masterpieces in the likes of detailed walls, structures and sculptures. In St. Stephen’s detailed works of art are tastefully orchestrated to provide a unique harmony to the viewer. One must see it to believe and understand this unique experience. The view down the entire length of the central naïve takes your breath away two times. Remember my description of the Nidaros in Trondheim? Enough can not be said about the interior.

The exterior of St. Stephens Cathedral is just as fascinating as the interior. Knowing a little about the history of Austria and the outside influences surrounding the development of Saint Stephens helps one to understand why improvements, over the centuries, were done to produce the exterior appearance. The details of the stone flowerettes, called crabs, which act as waterspouts on the steeples were part of providing a self cleaning roof system. These crabs or little rainwater spouts are located on the edges of the steeples in a vertical sequence.

The multi colored 2.2 kg glazed tiles (230,000) required a substantial roof structure (605 tons) and accurate manufacturing to be concise with color uniformity and dimensional integrity in 1950.

I noticed the double headed eagle on the south tiled roof of west end (Albertine Choir Roof) of the Cathedral. The symbol represents the Coat of Arms of Austria. This symbol is dated at least as far back as 1831. In Russia they also use the symbol of a double headed eagle both facing outward as the Austrian version. It is not clear as to which country the coat of arms can claim the origin. One can imagine the debate that must have occurred at the end of WWII and the subsequent occupation of the Russians over this issue.

Chapter 13 – Walled Cities

As mentioned before, Saint Stephen’s is situated at the center of Wien. Many classic works of architecture are prevalent in this part of Wien. When one walks the streets with strange, but historical, names you have to stop and contemplate the history of this region of the world. Today it looks complete and peaceful, but you know that many people over the past centuries have given up their lives to defend their ideals and their material possessions such as these buildings (works of art).

For many centuries Wien was considered the most formidable fortress in Europe. The real beginning of this fortress city can be dated back to the Turkish invasions that lasted from 1529 to 1638. As we mentioned earlier that the Pummerin was cast from over one thousand Turkish cannonballs that hit St. Stephens Cathedral. Out of frustration the Hapsburg’s decided to build a walled and well fortified city. This controlled the unwanted intrusion of many warring armies and the overtaking of the city until the years of the unwanted Napoleon at the turn of the 19th Century. His rape and plunder will never be forgotten or forgiven. In 1858, the fortress walls were torn down as well as the buildings along Ring Avenue. Today, all that remains of this fortification are magnificent parks that provide the back drop for a peace loving society.

History has shown us that walled cities are useful and needed at times, during their development. The purported intent is to keep the groups of people or societies with the intent to destroy or take what does not belong to them out. Maybe, that is a partial solution to a crisis in today’s troubled times.

Conclusion

Another day had past and we ventured back to our China Shop. To our pleasant surprise our saleslady, Claudia, had found our entire request for a service of 6. We did up to a larger serving platter. She carefully wrapped and packaged each item with tender loving care and in such a manner that exuded an expertise in such a task. We carried our two large boxes that were well marked fragile along with the tax refund forms back to our hotel. We did some last minute shopping, including the salami's and sausages and went about packing our things for "check-in" and "carry-on". Now we had 8 significant parcels to look after during our trip home. We tried to maximize the weight bearing items like books into "carry-on" along with the Reindeer Hide. Another great breakfast and we were on our way to the airport after the original taxi driver refused to take us due to the size of our cargo.

Quang organized the items for "check-in", while I stood back and somewhat concealed the "carry-on" items. We had to have the customs man approve our check-in items and then take the awkward baggage/china boxes over to another check-in along with the big heavy suitcase. More fragile labels were posted on the china boxes and soon they disappeared down the conveyor belt. We hoped that we would see only 43 whole pieces when we got to Da Nang. This event was somewhat of a relief since we did not have to wrestle with them any more for awhile any way. My back said it's "beer:30".

Our tasks were 1/3 finished by now. We needed to clear customs with our carry-ons, including the crystal from Finland and this turned out to be a "No problem".

We then proceeded to three more windows and finally received all of our tax refund that we had filed for. It was worth the effort to maintain the documents and present them. We were also able to collect the tax we paid for items from Finland at the airport in Vienna.

When we arrived in Ho Chi Minh Airport we collected all of our bags and baggage. We were surprised that our checked baggage was still in tact and we could not notice any excess rattling. The Security Guard let us in to check in about 4 hours early so that we could go to the Business Class lounge and wait for our afternoon flight.

The crystal and replica of a Faberge Egg from Russia arrived OK. The crystal, cloudberry preserve and Reindeer hide from Finland arrived OK; the china, bottle of Mozart Chocolate Liqueur, the many sausages (Rohwurst etc.) and preserved meats (Sudtiroler Schinkenspeck) arrived OK, but maybe not enough.

This trip/experience was priceless. I recommend it to those who have a fascination on how other people lived and how people are living today in the countries that we visited and tried to visit (C.Z.). It made me feel proud to be an American. After seeing Siberia and the Eastern portions of Russian, I am glad that I live in Viet Nam.

Going to Finland with Quang and showing her some of my roots made me feel proud to be of Finnish Ancestry and I wonder about the part about maybe being a reindeer herder though.

Quang made the trip possible and a success. She was with me mentally and physically as we shared the good and bad moments throughout the trip. She was thinking about us almost all of the time. She was another pair of eyes, ears and

intelligence that we needed to get safely from one place to another. At times, she knew I was hurting and she was right there to assist or offer advice. An example would be to put baggage in the overhead of a train. Her presence reassured me that I was loved. She is not available for your trip unless I come along.

Many thanks to those who also made this trip great

We owe a great bit of gratitude to Virva Sanomat from the Finnish Embassy in Ha Noi; Chris at Monkey Business in Beijing who got us started on this adventure; our tour guide, Lena Rubashkina, from Irkutsk; the homestay family, Misha & Faya Mahgaskin at Lake Baikal; Irina Podlinaja our homestay lady in Saint Petersburg; Keiko Helama of Iittala Oy ab for her resourcing of our requests and packing our newly acquired family possessions; the helpful ladies at Helsinki Expert who promptly answered my many questions via email; Santa Claus at the Arctic Circle in Finland; the staff and crew on the Polarlys of the Hurtigruden Line; Odd-Arne Braute for having the Xich Lo Restaurant in Oslo; the three young Japanese Girls who helped us get settled into our common sleeping compartment on the train from Oslo to Northern Deutschland; Dr. Helmut Koentges for putting on a great DRBF Conference and Dinner Cruise in Berlin; Michael Abadie for suggesting the Ibis Hotel in Mitte Berlin; Yin Yin Tseng of EVA Air who arranged for our return trip from Wien to HCMC in the most comfortable and cost effective way; Claudia Knobl of Eisner (Spezialgeschäft für Tischkultur = fine china shop) in Wien; the many people from all of the countries visited who could or could not speak English and that did help us with directions.

Another thanks to the people of Nikon for making the 5700 that takes better pictures (over 200) without much help from me.

Another thanks to all the ATM machines throughout the countries that we visited, which include instructions in English.

The end