

# "A TASTE OF EASTERN EUROPE: BUDAPEST, VIENNA & PRAGUE"

*Friday, March 12, 2010*

**DAY 1 DEPARTURE FROM PHILADELPHIA**

Enjoy full meal service on your scheduled wide-bodied flight to Budapest.

*Saturday, March 13, 2010*

**DAY 2 ARRIVE BUDAPEST (2 NIGHTS)**

We will be met at the airport by our tour manager/guide and transfer into the historic capital city of Budapest. On the way to our hotel, we will enjoy a short Budapest City Tour, highlighting some of the city's most important and beautiful monuments and landmarks. We will also stop for a panoramic view of Budapest from **Gellert Hill**, a vantage point rising steeply beside the Danube in one of the city's most beautiful areas. Once called simply Old Hill, the hill is named for Bishop Gellert who climbed its slopes in 1046 AD, only to be tossed back down to his death by some very unwilling converts to Christianity. The Danube narrows at the base of the hill and this has always made it an ideal crossing place. Some of the first inhabitants of the hill are known to be the Celtic Eravi who settled on its northern slope around 50 BC, one hundred years before the Romans' arrival. We then transfer to our Budapest hotel.

*Sunday, March 14, 2010*

**DAY 3 BUDAPEST**

This morning we explore the hill town of Buda and its Castle district. Topped by monuments including the castle, or Royal Palace, this is the very heart of medieval Budapest with its cobbled streets, narrow alleys and lovely squares, where homes are painted in pastel colors, each marking the trade of its owner. Starting with a **Funicular Ride** up to the hill's summit, we will then enjoy a **Walking Tour through the Old Town**. Highlights will include the State Archives, Lord's Street, Mihaly Tancsics Street, and Holy Trinity Square. During our walk we will stop for a visit to the famous **Fishermen's Bastion**, a neo-Romanesque series of arches and towers overlooking the Danube, so-named because the fishermen of the city had to protect this northern side of the Royal Castle against siege in medieval times. We will view the Grand Equestrian Monument of King Stephen there and ascend the **Tower** for a magnificent view over the city, including the Houses of Parliament located on the opposing bank of the Danube. We will also visit the nearby **Matthias Church** where generations of Hungarian Kings were crowned and King Matthias was married twice. With its Gothic spires and colored tile roof, this church has one of Europe's most memorable silhouettes. This afternoon we will explore the Pest side of the Danube, beginning with a brief visit to the largest church in the country, **St. Stephen's Basilica**, dedicated to Hungary's first Christian king and the bust above the main entrance is that of King Stephen (or St. Istvan). Inside the church, in the Chapel of the Holy Right, you can see Hungarian Catholicism's most cherished and bizarre holy relic, Stephen's preserved right hand. We conclude our sightseeing today with a visit to the opulent **State Opera House**, built to rival those of Paris and Vienna and which opened in 1884. The building and its interiors are the design of Miklos Ybl, a great Hungarian architect, yet many important Hungarian artists contributed to the ornamentation inside, including a magnificent fresco by Karoly Lotz illuminated by a bronze chandelier weighing 3 tons. Just a few steps away is the famous **Vaci Street**, the pedestrianized boulevard lined with shops, cafes, hotels and banks, where we will enjoy time to walk, shop, and relax. This evening we will enjoy a **Goulash Dinner**, a traditional Hungarian meal.

*Monday, March 15, 2010*

**DAY 4 BUDAPEST - BRATISLAVA - VIENNA (3 NIGHTS)**

This morning we will begin our journey to Vienna, Austria. We will stop outside the city center of Budapest for a visit to the **Budapest Memento Park** (Statue Park), where we will get a fairly good impression of what life was like in Hungary during the communist regime. The future of the statues created during the communist regime caused heated debate after the political changes of 1989-1990. Many people reacted with hatred and wanted to destroy the symbols of dictatorship. Instead of demolishing the stone and bronze reminders of the past 40 years, leaders of the new, democratic political system decided to remove and then assemble the statues in a place where everybody could view them. We will also visit the accompanying **Budapest Memento Park Museum**, which will shed some light on what was going on behind the Iron Curtain.

Our next stop will be in Bratislava, the capital city of Slovakia. We will enjoy a **Walking Tour of the Old Town (Staré Mesto)**, the most attractive and charming area of the capital city. We will begin at the main entrance to the Old Town, **St. Michael's Tower**, followed by a stroll along the main pedestrian streets of Michalská and then Ventúrska, pausing to admire the detailing on the lovingly restored baroque and Renaissance housing stock. The focal point of the Old Town is **Hlavné nám** (Main Square), lined on one side by the Old Town hall and the other by a mix of restaurants and cafes. We will conclude our walk with a visit to the city's cathedral, **St. Martin's (Dóm Sv. Martina)**, situated just outside of the Old Town. We continue to our hotel in Vienna, Austria's capital city.

*Tuesday, March 16, 2010*

**DAY 5 VIENNA**

Our morning begins with a visit to the former winter palace of the Habsburgs, the vast and impressive **Hofburg**, which sits in the heart of Vienna. This complex of imperial edifices, the first of which was constructed in 1279, grew with the empire, so that today the palace is virtually a city within a city. Our first stop within the Hofburg complex will be the

**Kaiserappartements**, where the emperors and their wives and children lived. The apartments are richly decorated with tapestries, many from Aubusson in France. The court tableware and silver are outrageously ornate, reflecting the pomp and splendor of a bygone era. Next we will explore the **Schatzkammer**, the greatest treasury in the world. It's divided into two sections: the Imperial Profane and the Sacerdotal Treasuries. The first displays the crown jewels and an assortment of imperial riches, and the other, of course, contains ecclesiastical treasures. The most outstanding exhibit in the Schatzkammer is the imperial crown of the Holy Roman Empire, which dates from 962, which is studded with emeralds, sapphires, diamonds, and rubies. We will continue with a visit to the **Spanish Riding School**, a reminder that horses were an important part of everyday Vienna life for many centuries, particularly during the imperial heyday. The school is housed in a white, crystal-chandeliered ballroom in an 18th-century building. We will marvel at the skill and beauty of the sleek Lippizaner stallions as their adept trainers put them through their paces in a show that hasn't changed for 4 centuries. (*Performance or training session will be subject to availability and performance schedule*) This afternoon we visit **St. Stephen's Cathedral**, a basilica built on the site of a Romanesque sanctuary, which was founded in the 12th century. The cathedral has been fully restored since World War II, and today is one of the greatest Gothic structures in Europe, rich in woodcarvings, altars, sculptures, and paintings. The 352-foot-long cathedral is inextricably entwined with Viennese and Austrian history. It was here that mourners attended Mozart's "pauper's funeral" in 1791, and it was on the cathedral door that Napoléon posted his farewell edict in 1805. The remainder of the afternoon can be spent exploring Vienna's charming old quarter around the cathedral. After dinner we will explore **Prater Park**, the city's classic amusement park, complete with wonderful foods and the world-famous Ferris wheel.

**Wednesday, March 17, 2010**

**DAY 6 VIENNA**

Our morning begins with a visit to the **Kunsthistorisches Museum** (Fine Arts Museum), housing one of Europe's finest art collections compiled by the Hapsburgs. The collection includes great works from some of Europe's greatest artists, including Bruegel, Rubens, Durer, Hals, Rembrandt, Raphael, Caravaggio, Titian and Velasquez, just to name a few. Next we will visit the **Haus Der Musik**, where we will be invited to hear, see and feel music. Unexpected experiences of sound inside larger than life instruments await, and we will even have an opportunity to take hold of the baton and conduct the Vienna Philharmonic, or to compose our own melody. After lunch today we will have an opportunity (cost included) to sit down and **enjoy a Sachertorte**. In a city famed for its desserts, the Sachertorte has emerged as the most famous. At a party thrown for Prince Klemens von Metternich in 1832, Franz Sacher first concocted and served the confection. It was an instant success, and news of the torte spread throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1876, Sacher's son, Eduard, launched the Hotel Sacher, which became a favorite haunt of Austrian aristocrats, who drank wine and devoured Sachertortes into the wee hours. Our day concludes in the **Stadtpark**, a lovely park that lies on the slope where the Danube used to overflow into the Inner City before the construction of the Danube Canal. Many memorial statues stand in the park; the best known depicts Johann Strauss Jr., composer of operettas and waltzes like *The Blue Danube Waltz*. We will also view monuments to Franz Schubert and Hans Makart, all of which are surrounded by verdant squares of grass, well-manicured flower gardens, and plenty of benches.

**Thursday, March 18, 2010**

**DAY 7 VIENNA - TELC - PRAGUE (2 NIGHTS)**

This morning we begin with a visit to the 1,441-room **Schönbrunn Palace**, which was designed for the Habsburgs before being remodeled to its current form by Maria Theresa. Schönbrunn was the imperial summer palace during Maria Theresa's 40-year reign, and it was the scene of great ceremonial balls, lavish banquets, and fabulous receptions held during the Congress of Vienna, including a performance by a 6 year-old Mozart. Our tour will include the **State Apartments**, featuring magnificent ornamentation in the rococo style, with red, white, and gold predominating, and a stroll through the **Imperial Gardens**. Our day continues with a stop in **Telc**, which lies at the midpoint of the old King's route from Vienna to Prague. Telc is the best-preserved Renaissance town north of the Alps, and was added to the UNESCO list of international heritage sights in 1993. The town center will be a perfect place for lunch, followed by a bit of free time to shop or explore. We continue to Prague, one of Europe's most beautiful and unique capital cities.

**Friday, March 19, 2010**

**DAY 8 PRAGUE**

Our morning begins as we explore the huge hilltop complex known collectively as **Prague Castle**; which encompasses dozens of houses, towers, churches, courtyards, and monuments. We begin with a visit to **St. Vitus Cathedral**, the dominant and the most historically important section of the castle complex. The massive Gothic cathedral features 21 chapels, with **St. Wenceslas Chapel** being the most important. During our walk through the complex, we will stroll along the **Golden Lane**, a picturesque street of tiny 16th-century houses built into the castle fortifications, and view Powder Tower, White Tower, Lobkowitz Palace, St. George's Convent, before visiting the **Royal Palace**, where for more than 700 years, beginning in the 9th century, Bohemian kings and princes resided. Our visit will include the Vaulted **Vladislav Hall**, where coronations were hosted and Václav Havel was inaugurated president. The adjacent **Diet** was where kings and queens met with their advisers and where the supreme court was held. From a window in the Ludwig Wing, where the Bohemia Chancellery met, the Second Defenestration took place. This afternoon we will walk down to **Old Town Square**, we will congregate in front of Old Town Hall's **Astronomical Clock** to watch the glockenspiel spectacle. Our walk continues as we view more of Prague's magnificent monuments and architectural treasures, including the Jan Hus Monument, the Church of St. Nicholas and the Tyn Church. We will also enjoy a stroll across the spectacular **Charles Bridge** on our way to the winding alleys of Old Town. Charles Bridge, Prague's most familiar monument, is a haven for crafts and trinket stalls and features spectacular statues of the Saints lining each side. On our final evening we will enjoy dinner at **The Medieval Tavern**, a large historic restaurant in the heart of the Old Town, featuring an entertaining medieval feast. We will enjoy a terrific evening of medieval entertainment,

with hearty food and drinks. As we enter, the sights and smells will transport us to a world hundreds of years past, as we are seated at dark wooden tables, on chairs draped in rugs. Above, ropes hang down from thick, gnarled beams. The hustle and bustle of entertainers and scrumptious serving wenches pervade the air and the rooms are lit by candlelight. The atmosphere is rough and romantic. The meal, features several courses with plenty of choices and is laid out on hot platters along the middle of the table. In true medieval style, you eat with your hands. The food is first-class, comprising a variety of medieval and traditional Czech dishes, from roast boar, pork roasted in bock beer and other grilled meats, to goulash, duck and fresh trout. The entertainment is a three hour historical show and has performances from swordsmen, jugglers and beautiful dancers dressed in costumes from the Middle Ages. Medieval musicians stroll around, and a fortune-teller may reveal your destiny.

*Saturday, March 20, 2010*

**DAY 9 DEPARTURE FROM PRAGUE**

Our enjoyable and rewarding trip will come to an end as our guide accompanies us to the airport for the return flight home.