

October 2013

Dear Friends and Family,

Again a Europe-based trip, this time beginning in southeastern Sweden and Norway and ending in



Lisbon. Miraculously for a trip that included Norway, Scotland, and Ireland in August the weather was outstanding with the only rain occurring during the night! I started with an overnight in Malmo, Sweden where friends were celebrating a 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Malmo with a population of 300,000 representing 170 nationalities has a compact, architecturally interesting city center. It is a city in transition from its

industrial past to a knowledge-based economy. It is easily accessible in 20 minutes from Copenhagen's

Kastrup  
Ore sound  
shops



airport across the bridge. Coffee abound.

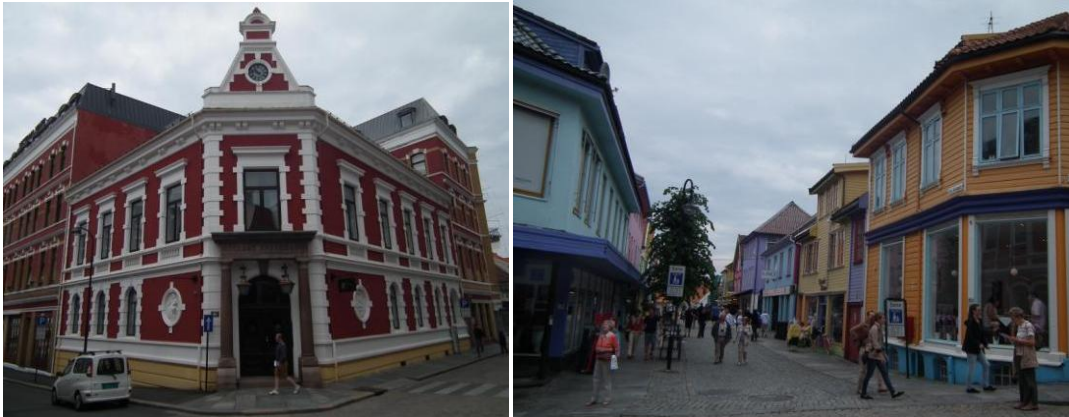


I then went to visit a friend from Seattle in the 1960's/70's who returned with her family to her native Norway. We have had only a couple of reunions since then – one in the 80's in Chicago and another last year in Copenhagen. Her home, Porsgrunn, is a smaller town about 3 hours south of Oslo by train, not far from Skien, birthplace of Henrik Ibsen, and which anchors the south end of the Telemark chain of lakes. Porsgrunn itself is on a river which used to support the shipping of logs to paper mills, fortunately no longer there. It is also close to the saltwater inlets for which Norway is famous – more generally called fjords on the west coast. The week was spent primarily enjoying reunions with her family and picnicking on the rocky islands. They swam in the 18 degree C water, but not yours truly. We then took the train westerly to Stavanger, the departure point for my cruise on board Club Med 2. Lots of forests and lakes as well as agriculture en route.



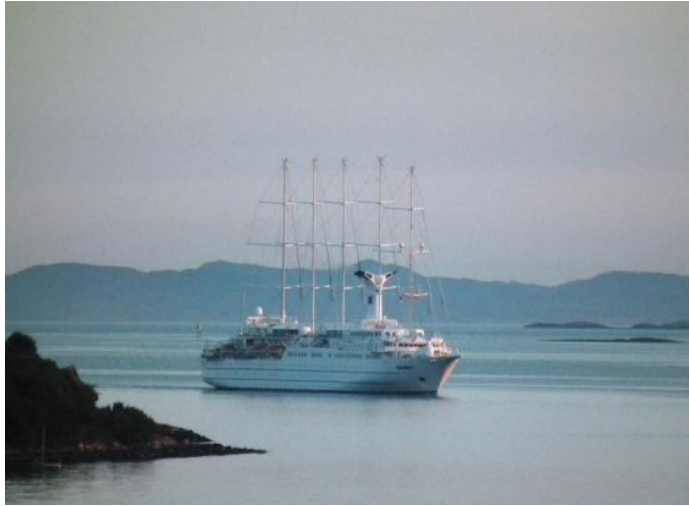


My friend was born there and so we had more family reunions with her cousins. Stavanger is the business base for the Norwegian oil industry and is a thriving international city. It has preserved the historic center while tastefully accommodating the growth with contemporary office and residential structures.



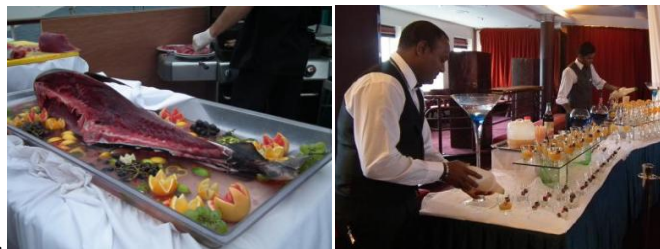
Historically this was a center for canning of Brisling sardines and many of the former canneries have been converted to new uses. It is also a major stop on the cruise circuit. The day my cruise was to depart there were three other ships in port, for a total visitor count of probably 5000 people. The larger ships actually





dwarf

the 18<sup>th</sup> C buildings! I had a view of Club Med 2 from her cousin's window as she arrived the morning of our departure.



On board we eat (and drink) very well.

On the cruise we headed south to the Orkney islands, the most northerly part of Scotland. These 70 islands were part of Norway from the 13<sup>th</sup> C until 1471 when Marguerite, daughter of King Christian I of Norway married the king of Scotland and the islands were given as a wedding present to Scotland. Kirkwall is the capital (coming from the Norwegian meaning bay of the church) with about 8500 population. In the Cathedral St Magnus (today a parish church of the Church of Scotland), constructed beginning in 1137, the Norwegian flag still hangs. It is considered one of the most beautiful Romanesque sanctuaries in Scotland. The choir was practicing and it was moving to listen to the hymns



of my childhood (I grew up in the Presbyterian church).



It was fun being escorted into and out of the harbors by the pilot boats.



Next stop was Portree (population 2491) on the island of Skye in the New Hebrides. In 1995 a bridge was built connecting the islands to continental Scotland and, particularly since 2004 when the toll was removed, tourism has flourished. As with the Orkneys the islands benefit from a mild climate due to the Gulf Stream and Gaelic language is widely spoken. Skye is most famous historically for harboring Charles Edward Stuart (nicknamed Bonnie Prince Charlie), pretender to the throne of England, when after returning from exile in France he fled British troops in 1746 disguised as the maid-servant of Flora McDonald. Clan wars were also historically important here. A very pretty town, Portree (Port of the King) was so named following a visit of James V, father of Mary Stuart, in 1540. I took a nice walk on

the headlands which is owned by the Nicolson clan and its members worldwide.



The final stop in Scotland was Oban which is actually on mainland Scotland. This is a thriving commercial center with many ferries, a cathedral and an imposing coliseum type structure on top of the hill known as McCaig's Tower (or folly) built in 1895. We actually had a bit of rain here and the leader of a youth band which was being filmed kept saying to them smile and pretend it is sunny!



My first time ever in Ireland was on this cruise. Our two stops were Dublin and Cobh (pronounced Cove). I am very fortunate to have good friends in Dublin who agreed to share their city with me for the day. Since I hope to return in the future for more in depth visits I asked that we spend the day walking and to focus on the various neighborhoods, not spending time in lines to see the touristic sites. A high priority



also was to drink a glass of Guinness in its home city! Some of the places that impressed me the most and to which I hope to return were the Chester Beatty Library collections from Africa and Asia, Parnell Square including the Municipal Gallery and Dublin Writers Museum, and Temple Bar, especially the Photographic Archive. Meeting House Square with its retractable umbrella roofs and stage was quite ingenious.

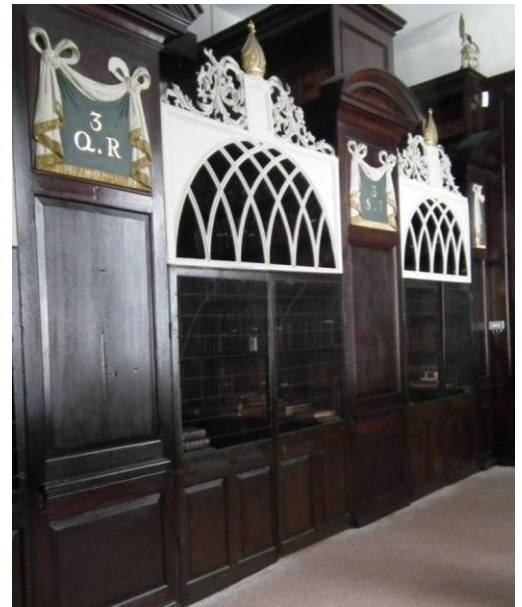


There was a very interesting sand sculpture exhibition in the Upper Yard of Dublin Castle. At Trinity College the newly restored Geology Department building has a beautiful blue mosaic and gold star ceiling, incredible and gargantuan skeletons of an 11,000 year old Irish elk and an Irish wolfhound preserved in and recovered from bogs, and a wall that is a veritable dictionary of Irish marbles. I was able to photograph the colorful sculpture of Oscar Wilde in the park at Merrion Square opposite his



childhood home. Marsh's Library near St Patrick's Cathedral houses important collections of European books and manuscripts from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> C and when it opened in 1707 it was the first public library in Ireland. No photos allowed but I did sneak a photo of the cages where readers of small valuable books were locked to

avoid theft. We visited the lovely St Augustan & St John Church with its pink Cork sandstone where my friends worship. Most signs were in both Gaelic and English. And, yes, the glass of Guinness





was excellent!

Cobh is the port for County Cork in the southwest of Ireland. It is a principal port for transatlantic departures and notably was the last port of call for the Titanic in 1912 and the port of departure for 2.5 million Irish who emigrated to North America between 1848 and 1850. The survivors of the Lusitania, torpedoed by a German submarine in 1915, were rescued by Cobh fisherman and brought to the town. Cobh was known as Queenstown from the visit in 1849 of Queen Victoria until Ireland's independence in 1922. The heritage center has excellent exhibits regarding Ireland's history and there is a statue to Annie Moore and her two brothers who were supposedly the first immigrants to pass through Ellis Island in 1892. The cathedral St Colman sits impressively high above the town, has a carillon of 49 bells, the largest in Ireland, and a floor patterned of Celtic knots.







Our next stop was at the privately owned Tresco island in the Scilly Islands off the far southwest corner of England. The island is especially known for its Abbey Garden, begun in 1840 by the seafaring family of Augustus Smith. Due

to the Gulf Stream, the mild climate supports exotic plants from South Africa, Australia, South America and California. Successive generations continued to improve the island with windbreaks of Monterey Pines and Cypress. The terrain is covered by a mosaic of heather, grasses and gorse creating a wonderful springy turf in waves of heath. There is also an extensive collection of figureheads from ships that sank in these treacherous waters.





Following a day at sea we arrived at La Coruna, Spain, a major port on the Gulf of Gascone approximately 55 km north of Santiago de Compostele, which I have long wanted to visit. We were there on Sunday, Sept 1 and as we were arriving into the center of Santiago there were marchers carrying statues of the Virgin Mary and cannons going off. This added to the excitement of watching pilgrims arrive. More than 50,000 pilgrims arrive in the month of August alone and can spend the night in the cathedral. We had an elegant lunch in the Hostal dos Reis Catolicos, now a Paradores, which until 1960 was a hospital for the pilgrims and townspeople. The town is made up of a maze of small streets. Mass was impressive and the church so packed that there was barely any standing room. Also impressive when we sailed from La Coruna is the Tower of Hercules. This lighthouse dates from the 2nd century AD. Take a close look because it is supposedly the oldest functioning lighthouse in the world and legend goes that it was built by Hercules himself and that he also buried a giant there.

Although the cruise stopped for a short day in Porto Portugal, I decided to stay on board and enjoy the last day of Club Med 2 luxury before being on my own for a week in Lisbon. This was my first time ever in Portugal and I was so convinced in advance that I was going to love the country that I assumed I will be back. And, I was right. I have friends who say that I will love Porto even more! Why Lisbon? The people are friendly but low key. The steep hills provide for great variety and spectacular views across the river. The river is very active, the parks are beautiful, and the tiled building facades make for great color and variety.







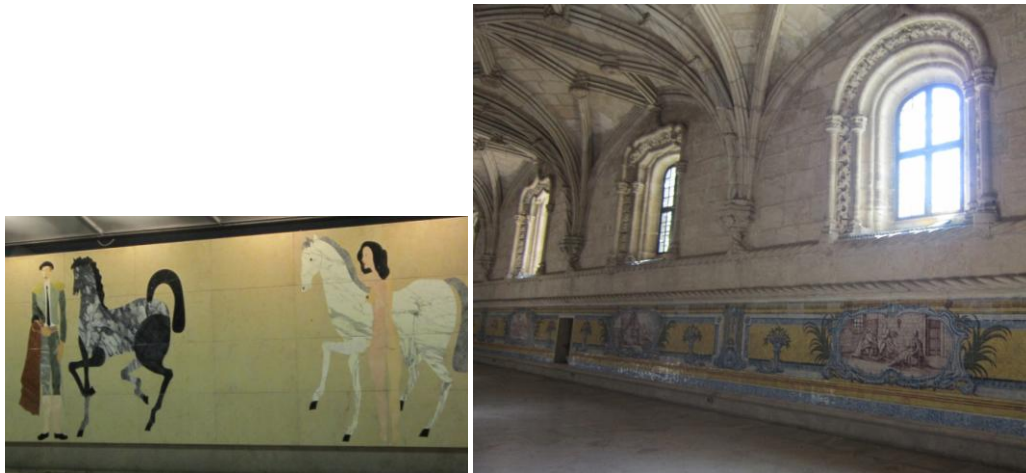
While proud of its history the city also has spectacular modern architecture in the Park of Nations neighborhood built on the site of the Expo 1998 world exposition. The central part of town was destroyed by an earthquake in 1755. The King at the time set his Prime Minister in motion to design a new downtown with design guidelines for heights and facades to create a harmonious feeling and plenty of plazas for open space. The PM, who became the Marquis de Pombal, was essentially the Baron Haussmann of Lisbon. Finally implemented 100 years later, I actually think Avenue Liberdade is more beautiful than the Champs Elysees but without the drama of the Arc de Triomphe and Place de la Concorde anchoring the two



ends. One negative for me, however, was the sidewalks which are made from pieces of tile. While beautiful, they are very slippery and uneven, even when not wet, and I found walking quite difficult. Lisbon's neighborhoods are quite varied and perhaps a little too quiet for my taste (every day seemed like Sunday is in Paris). There are wonderful small restaurants tucked everywhere and food is less expensive than Paris (hotel rooms also). I bought a two day Yellow Bus hop on hop off pass which allowed me to get an overview of the



city and also ride the public transportation (not metro, just buses, trams and funiculars). The public transportation is excellent and, other than the #28 tram, which all the guidebooks say every visitor must take, things are not too crowded (I was there after the Rentree in early September). There is very nice artwork in the subway stations as well. One building that personifies Lisbon is the Jeronimo Monastery with its distinctive Manueline architecture style. In the refectory you can see the combination of the detail of the style with the fabulous vaulting and tile panels depicting biblical stories.



The coast is not very far away and you can easily get to the ocean beaches and interesting small towns by local train. I did only one day trip outside of town to Sintra, a UNESCO world heritage site that was the summer retreat of Portugese kings from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Surrounded by beautiful forests the many museums and gardens are capped by the Palace of Pena on top of the hill, a toyland palace built in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> C by Dom Fernando II, Dona Maria II's German-born king consort. It remains preserved as when the royal family lived there. The views to the coast are stunning and his eclectic tastes are evident. Despite the completely different architecture and furnishings it somewhat reminded me of the hilltop forts/palaces in Rajasthan, India.



And to share one final view of Lisbon, the Castelo de Sao Jorge at sunset, taken from the opposite hill, Bairro Alto at the top of the Gloria Funicular.

