

Within easy range of Selestat are a whole host of ruined castles. Since we couldn't check into our hotel in Colmar until 5 pm we decided to at least drive the windy road up to Haut-Koenigsbourg, on its 757-meter-high bluff the highest castle in Alsace and visible from great distances. The castle originally dates from the 12th C and was thoroughly restored



during the time that Alsace was part of Germany from 1871 to 1918. We didn't take the time to visit, but did take in some of the views.



Colmar, 44 miles south of Strasbourg, would be our base for the next three nights. Although much of the city was destroyed during WW I and II and therefore is modern, the heart of the town with its Renaissance houses has been restored to the last

detail and was walking distance from the vacation apartment we had rented. The first morning we awoke to a hot air balloon soaring over the multi-purpose building adjacent to our apartment.

Colmar is considered the wine capital of Alsace. Other than the architecture, the two major attractions are the Musée d'Unterlinden in a former Dominican convent which my friend visited but I did not, and the Dominican Church which was, unfortunately closed during the hours I was touring that area. Other significant structures include St Martin's Collegiate with its multi-color tile roofs reminiscent of the Dijon region of France, which is adjacent to both the oldest house in Colmar and the 1575 Corps de Garde.



Two other famous facades in old town are the Rhine Renaissance bourgeois residences Pfister House from 1537 and House of Heads from 1609. As the photos show, we were largely blessed with beautiful weather!



There were many fine shops and, although touristy restaurants abounded, we also found excellent food choices with welcoming and service-oriented owners such as Zinc, Palmyre and Caveau Saint Jean.

Perhaps Colmar's most famous resident was Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, the sculptor of the

Statue of Liberty. This statue of him was in the park across from our hotel which also contained the oldest remaining water tower in Alsace, from 1866 (no longer in use).

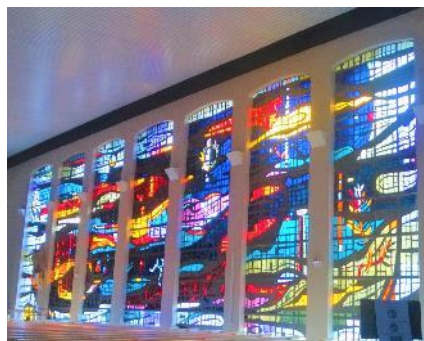
We were surrounded by the lovely Krutenau neighborhood with its ornate stately homes.



An area known as Little Venice, cut through by canals and the River Lauch, is bordered by a wonderful French Neo-Baroque covered market dating from 1865 which contains not only all the local food products but also dining opportunities.



On our wine route outing the plan was to visit Riquewihr, arguably the most-visited of the wine route towns, and classified among the most beautiful villages in France. However, we needed a break before arriving there and happened upon Bennwihr, which together with its two neighboring villages were completely destroyed in December, 1944, after the liberation of Paris. Many information panels describe the traumas that these areas endured. It was not until the late 1950's that the towns had largely rebuilt, and in 1960 the modern Catholic Church of Saints Peter and Paul was consecrated. The beauty of its stained glass truly overwhelmed us.



Riquewihr was walled beginning in the 13th C with two prominent towers remaining and the vineyards beginning immediately outside the walls.



The final stop on this part of the trip was Strasbourg where we timed our arrival to join the daily viewing of the astrological clock's chiming at 12:30. The clock's history is fascinating as it was originally created in 1574 but stopped working in 1788. As a boy, Jean-Baptiste Schwilgue visited the clock and determined to get it working again. 50 years

later, after studying mathematics, clockmaking, and mechanics he received the contract to restore it.

The result, in addition to the animated figures, is an astounding mathematical feat in an era prior to computers, with a perpetual calendar, planetary dial, display of the current position of sun and moon, prediction of planetary eclipses and the dates of future Catholic holy days, such as Pentecost, Assumption, etc. A movie at 12:15 explains this extraordinary undertaking before the action occurs at 12:30 ½, noon in Strasbourg Mean Solar Time.





The Pillar of Angels is a beautiful 13th C early Renaissance carving of the last judgement, and nearby is a memorial to the American soldiers who gave their lives to free Alsace in WWII.

The Cathedral, constructed of a local pink granite has an almost lacy appearance. At 466 feet, its tower was the tallest structure in the world from 1647 to 1874.



Fortunately, the weather cooperated in the afternoon and we were able to take an open-air tour boat on the River Ill. The Old Town is actually an island in the river.



In addition to the architecture, I was impressed by the amount of greenery along the river and its canals. The tour took us out to the district where the various European organization buildings are clustered.



The Council of Europe is headquartered in Strasbourg. It was created in 1949 with a mission to support democracy, human rights and the rule of law and currently has 47 members representing 800 million Europeans. It is completely separate from the European Union, although they do cooperate in certain areas.

This is the 1995 Court of Human Rights building by British architect Lord Richard Rogers who also designed the Pompidou Center in Paris.



The EU Parliament is also based in Strasbourg although I learned later in this trip that its Secretariat is based in Luxembourg!



A lithograph of this view of Petite France has hung in my homes since my time as a student.



A few weeks later we began our Germany trip in Trier, most famous as Germany's oldest city (17 BC), and the only Roman imperial residence north of the Alps. Porta Nigra is the town's landmark, considered the world's best preserved Roman city gate, from 170 A.D.

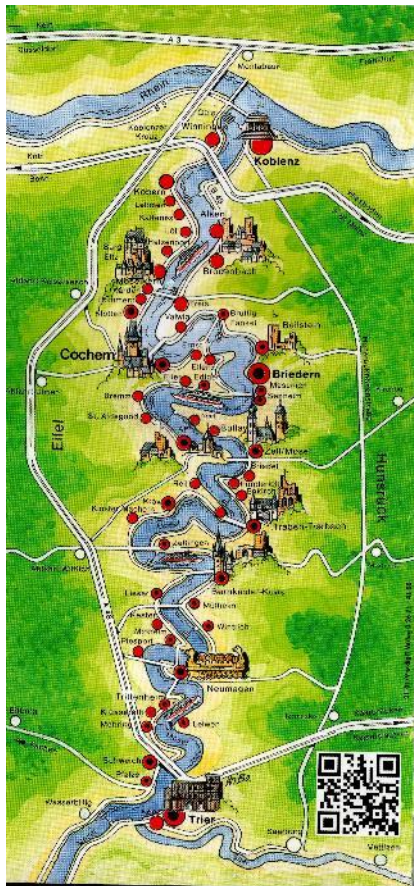
Seven UNESCO World Heritage sites are located in the city center whose market area was full of energy due to



a university, desirable shopping venues and wine tasting.

We dined at Weinstube Kesselstatt watched over by the inspiring Christ on the Church of Our Lady.

However, the main purpose of the visit was as the starting point of our travel to the largest steep slope wine growing area in the world, begun in Roman times over 2000 years ago and stretching 150 miles along the winding Mosel River. The slate soils and microclimate give Rieslings



from this region their unique mineral properties, with almost 6000 hectares of the 9000 hectares planted in this grape. These Rieslings are harvested late and so, although we were there in the middle of October, the harvest had not yet begun.

Due to the steep slopes, most of the cultivation is by hand. The lower reaches of the river before it joins the Rhine at Koblenz contain the steepest slopes. Only terracing permits cultivation.



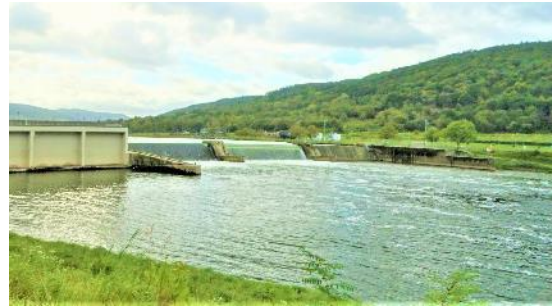
It rained the morning we started out and it was lovely watching the fog lift over the river.



There were a lot of river cruise boats, often with the travelers bicycling during the day.



Many of the towns have resort hotels, there were thousands of camper vans along the route, and periodic locks.



We happened upon the St Nikolaus Chapel in Reinsport. Dating from 1616, it has often been flooded by the adjacent river, the most recent having been July 15 of this past summer. It is noted for its Pieta.



We followed the river as far as Bernkastel-Kues where we spent the night. It is a charming pair of towns on both banks of the river, very touristic and typical. I loved the signs, and we had one of our best meals of the trip at Rotisserie Royale that was next to the apartment we rented.



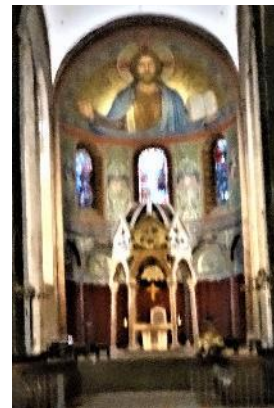
One of our trip's objectives was to visit significant architectural landmarks. So, the next day we headed away from the river through farmland and the Eifel forests to Maria Laach Monastery and Abbey Church.



The Laacher See was formed by one of the



largest volcanic eruptions in Europe, 13,000 years ago, larger than Vesuvius in 79 AD or Mt Saint Helens in 1980. This beautiful complex is considered the primary example of German Romanesque architecture and is constructed from the rock formed from the ash of the volcano.



We spent that night in Mayen, a town significantly destroyed by Allied bombing in December 1944 and subsequently rebuilt. Its history included being a pottery center as well as the source of millstones made from the nearby basalt.



We then cut back to the river at Cochem, with its 11th C chateau, in order to have the chance for a 1 ½ hour boat trip up the river to the next lock at Treis.



On the way to Dusseldorf on the Rhine in the Ruhr Valley, we stopped in Bruhl, near Cologne (Köln), home town of surrealist artist Max Ernst.



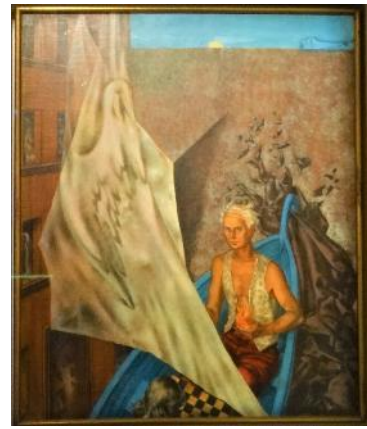
We visited his museum and saw the adjacent 18th C German Rococo Schloss Augustusburg.



I had not known of his friendship with American Artist Dorothy Tanning, begun during his WWII years exiled in the US. For the next decades he sent her a painting every year, mostly small format, which formed a history of his evolving styles.



In addition to his sculptures, I particularly liked the 1947 Max in a Blue Boat.



We then proceeded to the Cologne Cathedral. It was a special day as the scaffolding that has been at the top of one of the spires was being removed after 10 years of restoration. There was





a crowd watching and journalists reporting. The scaffoldings were enormous, which added to an understanding of the scale of the Cathedral.

impressed with the massiveness of the structure, but didn't find it spiritual.

An area that had been cleaned gives an idea of how gleaming it must have originally been. Once inside, we were



When leaving town, we noticed the beautiful contemporary Cologne Central Mosque designed in an Ottoman style and inaugurated by Turkish President Erdogan in 2018.



Traveling in the Ruhr Valley we saw both wind turbines and nuclear power facilities. The Rhine-Ruhr region is still Germany's industrial heartland and with a population of 10 million people constitutes the third largest European population area after London and Paris.

We found Dusseldorf to be a lovely city, with lots of contemporary as well as traditional architecture, very livable neighborhoods, and an excellent tramway system. A few memories of former times still exist and there are lively nightlife areas.



Our architectural attractions here were the Frank Gehry buildings, along with industrial buildings in re-use, best seen from the Rhine River boat tour. The three Gehry office buildings with different façade materials are unified by their window design. Due to poor light for my photos, I have used a stock photo. It seemed as if every German city we visited had a “Space Needle” type of communications tower building.



From this base we went to Essen to visit the Zollverein UNESCO World Heritage Site. This 100-hectare site was once the largest coal mine/washery in Europe and today houses museums, art, culture, sport and dining complexes. Begun in 1847, by 1932 the complex, designed by Bauhaus architects Fritz Schupp and Martin Kremmer, was the largest coal mining facility in the world. The head of shaft XII became the symbol of the Ruhr Valley.



Mining operations ceased in 1986 and in 1993 the coking plant was decommissioned. The boiler house was converted into the Red Dot Design Museum in 1997, and with its 2000 exhibits of contemporary design of all sort of products, we found it fascinating. The washery building houses various museums.



I noticed a current photographic exhibit, We’re From Here Turkish-German life in 1990, which prompted me to look up the history of Turkish workers. Following WW II Germany was very short of workers. This was first relieved by repatriation of Germans from Eastern Europe and the Soviet occupied zone plus 2 million German

women who entered the workforce. By the mid-1950's agreements were signed with Italy, Spain and Greece to import "Guest Workers". The results were insufficient, resulting in similar agreements with Turkey in 1961, Morocco '63, Portugal '64, Tunisia '65 and Yugoslavia '68. Today about 3 million Germans have Turkish roots.

When talking with staff about Bauhaus industrial architecture they suggested that we continue along the Ruhr Valley Industrial Heritage Trail to Duisburg. Here we found an old industrial mill converted to the Kuppfermuhle Museum of contemporary art that anchors a vibrant



redevelopment of the inner harbor portion of this largest inland port in the world, with its 25 miles of wharves. At the confluence of the



Ruhr and Rhine Rivers, this was formerly a major base of chemical, steel and iron industries. The museum has a fine restaurant

and we were ready for lunch!



Our final stop in Germany was Aachen, a capital of Charlemagne's Empire and the site of his final resting place in 814 AD. The area, Aix-la-Chapelle, was known historically for its curative hot springs and from 936 to 1531, the place where 31 Holy Roman Emperors were crowned Kings of the Germans. The small Palatine Chapel, the Byzantine heart of today's Aachen Cathedral, was a central feature of his palace, and we found it perhaps the most beautiful of our Cathedral visits.





Due to the large number of pilgrims, the surrounding Gothic remainder of the Cathedral was constructed beginning in the 15th C. The Treasury contains a plethora of gold and relics, including this arm containing a relic of a portion of Charlemagne’s right arm.



The compact town is lovely and our hotel was near the five-star Hotel Quellenhof and a lovely park.

I liked this “historic” sign.



After dropping the car in Trier, we took the TGV back to Paris via Luxembourg. The city,

the capital of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, is a combination of beautiful old stone



buildings, divided by a deep gorge carved by the Alzette River, and modern high-rise office and European Union buildings. As a major financial center, we saw global banks and consultancies represented and the women were very chic. The free tramway had only opened six months earlier and connected the three main sectors of the Gare (train station), Old Town, and Kirchberg Plateau where the EU buildings -European Investment Bank, Court of Justice, and the Secretariat of the European Parliament - are located.

The primary language we heard spoken was French, although most people seemed tri-lingual with German and English the other two. I rode the tram to the Expo at the end and captured the EU Secretariat building, and a large shopping

The primary language we heard spoken was French,





center. However, I had to use a stock photo of the stunning Luxembourg Philharmonie concert hall by architect Christian de Portzamparc which opened in 2005.



The city was founded in 963 and by the 16th C was the most fortified city in Europe with caverns in which whole armies and their horses and artillery could be housed. Some of those can still be visited today. My friend spent time on the path above and descended into the lower city to capture these views.



The monument on Constitution Place honors Luxembourgis who voluntarily served in wars from WW I to the Vietnam War, as well as in the Foreign Legion, in the cause of freedom. The statue on top represents Nike, the Goddess of Freedom.

In retrospect, it might have been nice to include some countryside in our visit, but I suspect it would feel very similar to the nearby regions in which we had just traveled!