

TRAIN : The Danube Express

JOURNEY : Treasures of Eastern Europe (Venice to Budapest)

Journey Duration : More than 10 days

Day to Day Itinerary

Day 1 : Venice

Arrivals day in Venice where you will be met and transferred to the five-star Hotel Danieli (or similar) hotel for two nights.

The hotel enjoys a fantastic location beside the Grand Canal and is a short walk from St. Mark's Square. This evening we will enjoy a Welcome Dinner with your fellow passengers.

Day 2 : Venice

Venice is a truly captivating city of romance, its unrivalled beauty takes your breath away, for first time visitors and regulars alike.

We have the opportunity to take a walknig tour around the highlights of this spectacular city. Walk through the winding lanes beside the Grand Canal to St.Mark's Square, which for 1,000 years was the heart of Venetian life. We also see St.Mark's Basilica and stroll through Rialto Market.

Alternatively, you can spend the day exploring this magnificent city at your leisure, maybe taking an iconic gondola ride in the basin of St.Mark's and along the Grand Canal or a stroll through the artist district of Dorsoduro.

Day 3 : Venice to Prague

Today we join our private train, the *Golden Eagle Danube Express*, for a lunchtime departure from Venice Santa Lucia Station as we travel through the scenic countryside of Italy and Austria en-route to Prague.

Day 4 : Prague

Prague is one of the most beautifully preserved cities in Europe. It spans the Vltava River and is dominated by the 9th century Prague Castle, a stunning sight that can be seen almost anywhere in the city. Our tour takes in the Old Town Square with its many historic buildings and Astronomical Clock, the historic 14th century Charles Bridge and the Jewish Quarter.

We join a vintage tram to travel through the city and Wenceslas Square, then up the hill to Prague Castle and the gothic St. Vitus Cathedral. The castle and its surrounding architectural gems occupy a hillside overlooking the city and river. Our tour includes the delightful Golden Lane and the Changing of the Guard at the castle entrance.

We will also visit Municipal House, originally built to be an administrative and cultural centre. Located just inside the Old Town it was built on the area once occupied by the former Royal Court before it moved to Prague Castle. We'll have a Czech afternoon tea here and then visit its beautiful concert hall.

Day 5 : Prague & Zittau

This morning in Prague is at leisure for you to discover the hidden treasures of this wonderful city. Stroll the medieval cobbled streets, relax in the ancient squares and admire the many architectural treasures of this 'City of a Hundred Spires'. At lunchtime we re-board the *Golden Eagle Danube Express* as we head northwards into Germany.

Our first stop late afternoon is in the south-eastern German town of Zittau, famous for being on the Löbau–Zittau railway which was originally opened in 1848, making it one of the oldest railways in Germany. We travel on the Zittau Schmalspurbahn (narrow gauge) heritage steam railway that is used to take passengers up to the picturesque mountain spa resort towns of Kurort Oybin and Kurort Jonsdorf in the Zittau Mountains. On our return we will enjoy a barbecue dinner at Zittau locomotive depot.

Day 6 : Berlin

Whilst enjoying breakfast onboard we will arrive into Berlin for a full day's programme. After years of division, Berlin has risen once again to become one of the most glamorous capital cities in Europe, with superb museums, fine churches, wide boulevards and a thriving cultural life.

Our tour will show us the highlights of both East and West Berlin including the Reichstag, the famous Renaissance style building that once again houses Germany's parliament. We cross the former Berlin Wall at the historic Brandenburg Gate, visit Checkpoint Charlie and the Museum Haus that exhibits some of the many ways East Germans used to escape to the West, and delight at the sight of the lovely Charlottenburg Palace.

Or choose our *Freedom of Choice* 'Red Berlin' walking tour of East Berlin's communist past, taking in Husemannstrasse- the famous propaganda street, the Stasi HQ of the East German secret police, Berlin Wall Crossing points (the Palace of Tears) and the East Side Gallery - an international memorial of freedom of 105 paintings on the east side of the Berlin Wall.

Day 7 : Gdynia & Gdansk

Together with neighbouring Gdynia and Sopot, Gdansk forms a large metropolitan area called Trójmiasto (Tricity). This coastal region has an important place in Polish consciousness as the actual location of the start of World War Two on the 1st September 1939 and where the fall of Communism in Central Europe began. This is also where the famous Solidarity movement started, for protecting worker's rights which later became the symbol of resistance against the government.

We spend the day exploring these delightful old cities and include visits to the Solidarity Trade Union Museum and the 'Roads to Freedom' exhibition presenting the 20th century history of the political changes leading to the collapse of communism and Soviet Union. We also enjoy a private organ concert at Oliwa Cathedral and a visit to Dlugi Targ (Long Market), one of the most beautiful streets of old Gdansk. We leave Gdansk and sit down for dinner onboard as the *Golden Eagle Danube Express* crosses into Russia in the late evening.

Day 8 : Kaliningrad

Capital of East Prussia, Königsburg, as it was then known, was a wealthy German port and university town. After the Second World War the European boundaries were re-drawn and the city became part of the Soviet Union, which changed its name to Kaliningrad after Bolshevik revolutionary Mikhail Kalinin who was one of Stalin's inner circle. Once the Soviet Union collapsed the enclave became completely isolated from Mother Russia by the newly independent Lithuania and Belarus. It is home to the Russian Baltic Fleet. Amid the austere Soviet architecture that replaced most of the city centre after it had been all but destroyed by bombing, there are still suggestions of a more creative German past with picturesque Königsberg buildings, such as the gothic cathedral. Today is a fascinating visit to this unique enclave which is part of Russia but surrounded by the EU.

Day 9 : Malbork

Leaving Kaliningrad during breakfast, we travel back across the border from Russia into Poland for an early afternoon arrival into Malbork whose castle, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was the seat of the Teutonic State from 1280. Teutonic Knights originally built a fortified monastery here, later known as the Upper Castle. In the 13th century a huge brick fortress was completed and stands overlooking the River Nogat. The museum houses valuable collections of artistic amber wares, old weapons and military equipment.

Day 10 : Krakow

Once a royal capital with an extraordinary history, and now a lively university town with fashionable bars and restaurants, Kraków is a fascinating city with beautiful monuments and an exuberant atmosphere. Highlights of the city include Wawel Hill, home to the Wawel Castle, an impressive blend of Gothic original architecture and a Renaissance Palace and Rynek Główny, known as the Main Market Square, it is the largest medieval square in Europe. You can explore the city at your leisure in the afternoon and perhaps make the trip across the River Vistula to Podgórze, site of the Jewish Ghetto in Krakow and home to the Schindler factory - much of the film *Schindlers List* was filmed here.

On our day in Krakow we also offer a number of touring options as part of our *Freedom of Choice* programme outside of the city environs. Close to Kraków is Auschwitz-Birkenau, now a poignant museum, was the largest of the Nazi concentration camps during World War Two where an estimated one million people perished.

Alternatively, you can choose to visit the Wieliczka Salt Mines, a unique venue full of chambers excavated and sculpted in rock salt. Descend the 360 steps in to the mines and be amazed at the

devotion of the miners who carved the incredible Chapel of Salt, a well-deserved place on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Day 11 : Bratislava & Vienna

Wake this morning in Bratislava, the capital city of Slovakia where our tour includes the medieval Old Town (Starý Mesto) where we stroll through the cobbled streets of 18th century pastel buildings and the stunning Bratislava Castle perched high above the city on a hill overlooking the Danube. Close to the castle set amongst the many hillside luxury villas is the imposing Soviet War Memorial at Slavín as we learn about the city's strategic position situated just behind the Iron Curtain.

We then have a light lunch onboard as we travel the short distance onto Vienna for an afternoon touring programme. Inspiring the greats from Mozart to Freud, this beautiful city enthralled visitors with its rich heritage. A seductive metropolis of elaborate palaces, renowned coffee houses, classical music and enchanting opera. With our Freedom of Choice touring option guests can choose a city tour with scheduled visits to the former Imperial Palace of Hofburg, the impressive St. Stephen's Cathedral and a stroll along the main shopping street of Graben with its Holy Trinity Column. Alternatively visit the spectacular Schonbrunn Palace and Gardens, the former summer residence of the Habsburg Family.

This evening there will be a superb private concert at the House of Mozart featuring the Mozart Ensemble followed by a traditional Viennese meal in a local restaurant.

Day 12 : Keszthely & Lake Balaton

A morning arrival into Keszthely, which is located at the western end of Lake Balaton. Here there is a visit to the baroque Festetics Palace built on castle ruins in 1745 and expanded 150 years later. We'll also take a relaxing boat cruise on the calm waters of Lake Balaton. Back onboard, the train skirts the southern shore of Lake Balaton and lunch is served during the journey to our final destination, Budapest.

There is a welcome reception in the Royal Waiting Room at Budapest Nyugati station before transferring for a two-night stay at the five-star Four Seasons Gresham Palace, located centrally, opposite the renowned Chain Bridge.

Day 13 : Budapest

Budapest is a melting pot of European cultures and history, with stunning architecture and fascinating sites. The old city of Buda and the imposing Royal Palace, dominates the city with stunning views across the Danube to the commercial heart of Pest.

Our city tour includes the Royal Palace, St. Mathias Church and a panoramic view of the city from Gellert Hill. We will also see the Citadel, the Opera House, St Stephen's Cathedral, Heroes Square and the City Park.

The rest of the day is at leisure so you can stroll along the banks of the Danube, visit the historic Great Market Hall with its endless variety of delicious foods and wines or head to one of the city's famous thermal baths for a rejuvenating dip. Alternatively you can relax at the hotel and indulge in the hotel's luxurious spa with infinity-edge pool or make use of the state-of-the-art fitness centre.

Day 14 : Budapest

Following breakfast you will be transferred to the airport for onward departure transfers. There is also an option to extend your stay in Budapest for additional nights to explore more of this fascinating city.