

A diary of a river cruise

Following our visit to the River Cruise Convention last year, my wife and I decided to try a holiday of this type. We travelled with Riviera Travel on their 8 days Rhine Cruise to Switzerland, which departed from Cologne in Germany and ended in Basel, Switzerland. Our ship was MS Charles Dickens where we had a cabin on the 3rd floor "Oliver Twist" deck with a Juliette style balcony. For those of you, like us, who have never tried river cruising, we have prepared a diary to give an overview of our experience.

Saturday 11th July

Today we set sail for a leisurely voyage along the Rhine. Lying on a sunbed on deck in the beautiful sunshine as we watched the sights along the river banks was very relaxing. Upon arrival in Koblenz we took the short walk into the town and followed it with a cable car ride up to the fort from which we had spectacular views. The 5 course "Welcome Dinner" back on board was impressively presented and a complimentary glass of Champagne was given to toast the Charles Dickens. As we were moored overnight in Koblenz we took the opportunity to take a night cap in one of the traditional bars in Koblenz.



Friday 10th July

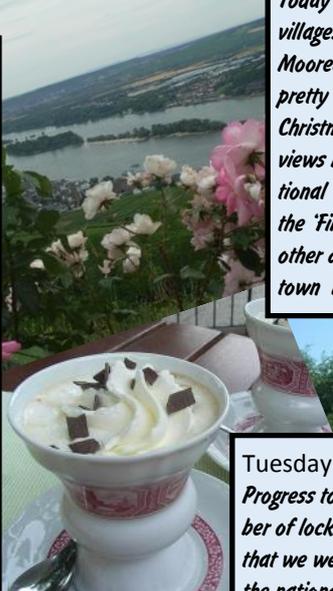
After a relaxing night overnight at the Etrop Grange Hotel at Manchester Airport we flew to Dusseldorf then transferred by coach to our ship, the MS Charles Dickens which was moored in Cologne. All of the passengers were surprised to discover that this is the Maiden Voyage of this ship so everything is brand new. First impressions are very good with a comfortable, well-appointed cabin and a tasty meal in the restaurant. A post dinner drink in the lounge bar listening to the on board pianist set us up well for a comfortable night's sleep.

Sunday 12th July

Today's journey was stunning with castles, pretty towns and villages all along the way making way for extensive vineyards. Moored once again in the centre, we wandered around the very pretty town of Rudesheim which must be great at the time of Christmas markets. Another cable car ride meant more scenic views before partaking of the Rudesheim coffee served in traditional cups with the local Asbach brandy. This evening we took the 'Fine Dining' option at the back of the ship along with 22 other diners and had a 7 course meal before going back into town to sample the local Riesling wine.

Monday 13th July

This afternoon's stop was in Speyer which is so famous for its pretzels that it has an annual BretzElfest which luckily was today! Though the downside (according to my wife!) was that most of the shops were closed, the upside was being able to be part of the evening's festivities. Live singing acts performed as people drank the local beers and wines and we were made to feel very welcome. There were fairground stalls and stalls with a diverse range of food on offer including giant pretzels. Some passengers visited the Technology Museum and said it was "amazing!".



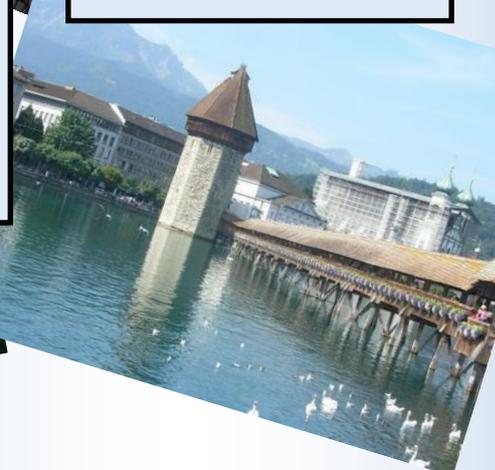
Tuesday 14th July

Progress today was slow due to the number of locks on this stretch and the fact that we were now in France and it was the national holiday "Bastille Day". As a result we arrived slightly later than planned in Strasbourg where coaches took us to our guides for a tour of the town and the Cathedral. What a beautiful place this is with its timber framed buildings and fascinating history. The cathedral was ornate both inside and out with an array of stained glass windows- this is a place for a return visit. Leaving Strasbourg at night we sat up on the sundeck to watch the firework displays in the city.



Wednesday 15th July

After a leisurely breakfast we strolled around the sleepy German town of Breisach, dominated by the church on top of the hill from which, again, we took in the stunning views across the valley. This afternoon another included excursion took us to the Black Forest and to Lake Titisee. We sat by the edge of the lake and of course sampled the famous "Gateau" with just about every other tourist! Cuckoo clocks galore chimed from shops; these being the most popular purchase apart from bottles of Kirsch made from local cherries. This evening the Captain's dinner was a delicious 5 course delight.



Thursday 16th July

At 8.30a.m. we boarded the coach in Basel clutching our packed lunch in hand. Our first stop was the lakeside resort of Lucerne, very upmarket and the place to buy an expensive watch! From here we travelled to Wilderswil and went on the mountain train -the "Schynige Platte" - up into the mountains of the Bernese Oberland. This was the crowning glory of the whole cruise as we marvelled at the views of the Eiger and Jungfrau in beautiful weather; even at such a height we were warm. We returned to pack ready for our return flight the next day from Zurich after a lovely cruising experience.

