

Day 08 – The Estonian Adventure – Historic Tallinn

Today my dear friends, we cross the Baltic Sea from Majestic Sweden, and arrive in the Estonian Capital, and historic City of Tallinn.

A fascinating country of multiple contrasts, and interesting people.

First things first, pictures and movies of my wonderful new grandson, Theodore the First, can be found here, starting at file 1110:

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/Day08/>

Thanks to the miracles of cell phones, even when on the ocean, due to the ship internet I purchased, I have been able to facetime and communicate with Katie, Steve and the baby (even though he doesn't say much yet). Katie and the baby are reportedly doing beautifully, and all is well and happy in Austin, Texas.

As for AmazingHugh and Geddi Master, one never could ask for better travelling companions. Always upbeat and ready for any adventure, they are simply an absolute delight to hang around with. Dad is always easy and happy, while Bob is the source of wisdom and humor. In very small quarters, I am lucky to have such great stateroom mates.

The ship pulled into the Port of Tallinn at around 8 am. I was up at the usual 5 am followed soon thereafter by Dad and Bob. We all took breakfast up in the trough (14th deck main cafeteria).

Although the food on the ship has been less than stellar, the company has been, and each meal is always fun and interesting. There is seldom an occasion when either Dad, Bob or I don't introduce us to new friends, and carry on an interesting and friendly conversation.

After breakfast, we returned to the stateroom, packed up, and headed down to the second deck to depart the ship.

We had not booked a formal tour for Tallinn (indeed the only city for which we had not) so today we would be on our own (*explorius maximus*). Not one to want to push AmazingHugh and Geddi Master to walk to far, I had previously gone down to the ship relations desk on the third deck, and bought bus passes for the three of us into the center of Tallin from my new friend Sweety.

Sweety is a Guest Relations officer, and has helped us multiple times of the trip, including when we got locked out of our room, got locked out of the room's safe, and when we had a question on our bill. I have become somewhat Sweety's problem child. She is so nice and helpful, and because Sweety is actually her name, she doesn't mind it when an old fashioned guy like me calls her that. She has been a GodSend.

We boarded the bus around 830, and in no time at all we were deposited at the front gate of historic Tallin. We didn't know we were at its front gate, and did ask a number of people for directions, but between our very bad map (my fault) and the language issues (Estonians aren't as proficient in English as the other places we have visited), it took us a while to get our bearings. But we finally did.

Estonia, like Sweden and Finland, lies along the Baltic Sea.

To its south lies Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. To its east lies Russia, with most of its common boarder being a large lake, Peipus. To its north, across the Baltic Gulf of Finland (roughly 20 miles away) lies Finland, and to its west, across the Baltic Sea, lies Sweden.

With a geographic size of 17,505 square miles, the country is slightly smaller than the state of West Virginia, and with a population of 1,331,000, it is slightly smaller than the state of Maine.

The Estonian capital, Tallinn, is the nation's largest city, and contains 426,538 people.

The official language of the country is Estonian, and its second and third most spoken languages are Finish and Russian, respectively. Many people, although not as many as in Norway, Denmark and Sweden, do speak English.

Estonia is an ancient country, and the land of what is now modern Estonia has been inhabited since at least 9,000 BC. Its culture dates back before Roman times, and after centuries of successive rule by the Teutonic Order, Denmark, Sweden, and the Russian Empire, a distinct Estonian national identity began to emerge in the mid-19th century.

As a result, taking advantage of the Russian Revolution, on February 24, 1918, Estonia declared its independence from Russia. An Independent, Democratic nation since its independence, Estonia declared neutrality at the outbreak of World War II, but the country was invaded and occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940, and then by Nazi Germany in 1941. In 1944 it was again invaded and reoccupied by the Soviet Union, and then annexed into the USSR as an occupied state. From 1944, until 1991, the nation was thus under Soviet control and domination. With the fall of the Soviet Union, Estonia initiated a "Singing Revolution", and regained the nation's independence on August 20, 1991.

Today, Estonia is a developed country, with a high-income advanced economy. A member of the European Union and NATO, Estonia is a democratic unitary parliamentary republic.

Interestingly, Estonia has consistently ranked highly in international rankings for quality of life, education, freedom of the press, digitalisation of public services, and the prevalence of technology companies.

Estonia is especially advanced in computer technology, internet and digital acuity. But that does not mean that this nation is not connected, or not in touch, with its ancient heritage and history.

As we walked into what they call the “Old City”, passing through its historic gates, one would think you were travelling back in time to the middle ages.

The buildings, streets and demeanor are right out of a movie scene, and one would think you were transported back to the Kingdom of Vulgaria from the Movie Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.

Parts of this Old City actually date back to the 9th century, while still many more are as old as the middle ages. The architecture is breath taking and scary all at the same time.

As we walked through the streets, soon we were at the town hall square. A large square dominated by a tall, towered town hall. Built in 1530, it was built atop a predecessor from 1370. Its tower is 190 feet tall, and its base is 121 feet by 48 feet.

20 years ago, when the three jolly boys ventured to Antarctica, I took a picture of the Geddi Master, seemingly trying to break into the main door of the Cathedral in Santago, Chile. The door, a part of the church from the 1500's was solid and huge. Trying to recreate this iconic picture, Bob replayed the part at the Tallinn Town Hall Door.

You can find the picture here:

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/Day08/1043.jpg>

While we were on the steps of the town hall, a very small, very elderly lady, with jet black hair, approached us, shouting a word in Estonian that none of us understood. I turned to her and smiled, and said, “I am sorry maam, but I don't speak Estonian, and I don't understand what you are saying, is there anything I can do to help you”

She obviously didn't speak English, or if she did, didn't let on that she did, and next moved on to my Dad, and did the same thing, saying the exact same word, this time louder, whereby he just smiled, and shook his head politely.

Geddis then turned to us, and suggested she was trying to curse us. As she approached him, he just smiled and shook her hand, which she kind of slapped back.

We don't know if she was asking for money, or something else, but as none of us had any Euros, we sadly had nothing to give her.

She walked away, seemingly frustrated, and somewhat angry.

We hope she didn't place a curse on us, especially since we were all very nice, and didn't understand what she was asking.

Next we went walking around the square, trying to find if any of the restaurants were featuring the Estonian specialty, Pea Soup, which both my Dad and I love.

We soon found out that today being a Monday, nearly all the museums and restaurants were actually closed, and most that were open, offered limited menus, and no Pea Soup for us!

So we ventured around some of the side streets, and soon hit embassy row.

There we saw the Swedish Embassy, the French Embassy and the Russian Embassy.

The Russian Embassy was a large block long, Pink Building with a barrier fence along its sidewalk, covered with protest signs about the Ukraine war. You can see the fence here:

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/Day08/1056.jpg>

While in Scandinavia, we have learned two things. First, the climate and sea, and Viking Heritage, has created friendly, hearty, determined, remarkable people. And second, no where in this region, do they hold the Russians in high regard.

And in Estonia, a former satellite state of the Soviet Union, where KGB tortured and terrorized its citizens, and the government oppressed its people, this is the case on steroids.

Dad, Bob and I were really kind of moved by this protest fence. In this former communist – forced country, they haven't yet forgotten the value of freedom, and they are eager and willing to stand up to the Russians.

We next went down to the other gate of the City. Huge and impressive, you can see it here:

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/Day08/1074.jpg>

Next to the gate is the Estonian Maritime Museum. We walked inside, but as it was only three small rooms, sadly there wasn't much to see at that venue. The museum of resistance for World War Two and the Russians, and the Submarine Museum, which tells the story of all the Soviet Submarines that were built in Tallinn's port docks, were sadly closed on Monday.

Next we ventured back up the street to St. Olaf's Church. Built originally in 930 as a Catholic Church, the current building was renovated in 1217. It is now a Baptist Church, but we went inside and none the less said a prayer (for the second time in the hour after the lady yelled at us). The church was incredible, and clearly kept to its medieval roots. You can see it here:

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/Day08/1078.jpg>

After touring the church, we continued to walk around the Old City for a half hour more, and then decided to head back, before our cruise ship departed the port. Tallinn is lovely, but none of us really wanted to be stranded there. (There is a small black haired lady looking for us).

Rather than walk back to the bus (which was reported to be a 20 minute walk), we decided to skip the bus and walk directly back to the ship (which was reportedly a 6 minute walk).

Well as I led the way, I truly embarrassed my reported ancestor Daniel Boone, because as a trail blazer I really feel down on the job. After 6 minutes and no ship, both AmazingHugh and Geddi Master began to mutiny, complaining that I was going the wrong way (this despite the fact that we could see the enormous ship in the distance the whole time).

Sadly, the security measures that have been taken to separate the cruise ships (there were multiple ones in port at this time) were unknown to me. So, the 6 minute walk, turned into about 20, as we had to meander around the port to find the correct slip. All completely my fault, and yes, as I was repeatedly told, we should have taken the bus back.

We did finally get there, however, and boarded the Silhouette without a problem (except a little delay).

After dinner, Dad and Bob watched a magic show in the theater.

I chose instead to finish some emails and then go up to the 14th deck and walk my miles on the track. It was a beautiful evening with a beautiful sunset.

You can see the sunset here:

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/Day08/1101.jpg>

While walking I was also able to call Katie and Steve and facetime with my wonderful grandson.

I was also to facetime with my magnificent NYIA Vice President, Cassandra Anderson. She looked wonderful, and as usual, here upbeat personality, incredible knowledge, and wealth of information, always lifts my heart.

I next tried to reach out to my truly wonderful boss and dear friend, Ellen Melchionni, the President of NYIA. Sadly, however, Ellen was at a fundraiser (she's always working and making us all look good), and I was unable to get through. I was able to connect with her the next day, and as usual, she was so kind and complimentary and helpful. She wished Dad and Bob and I a great rest of the trip, and filled me in on all things I needed to know.

I really miss my team at NYIA. I've never had the chance to work with such awesome people. Led by Ellen and Cassandra, they embody what a fantastic workplace really is.

As I continued walking around the deck, hoping to see the northern lights, which I didn't, I was however, treated to another breath taking sight as an enormous orange moon began rising on the port side of the ship. (The sun had just set on the starboard side).

Here in Scandinavia, the sun doesn't set until around 1030pm. Days are long and nights are short.

Our weather hasn't been the best, but this particular night I was treated to a beautiful sunset and moon rise. Could anyone really ever ask for more?

This has been a simply fabulous trip. Getting the time to spend with Dad and Bob have made it better than I really deserve. Hard to believe, that this adventure of a lifetime will actually be over in just a few days. I am so, so lucky.

Tomorrow we venture the 20 distance, across the Gulf of Finland to Helsinki.

We are all looking forward to it.

Thanks so much for reading.

Please be well, and know you are in our thoughts each day.

My Warmest Personal Regards,

Bob

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